February 18th, 2015

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We write to urge you to postpone your invitation to Prime Minister Netanyahu to address a joint session of Congress in March. Israel is a valued ally and Israeli Prime Ministers have a long history of addressing Congress. As members of Congress who support Israel, we share concern that it appears that you are using a foreign leader as a political tool against the President. We very much appreciate that Prime Minister Netanyahu has twice had the honor of speaking before a joint session.

However, at this time your invitation is contrary to the standards by which our Congress operates and has the potential to harm U.S. Foreign policy.

The timing of this invitation and lack of coordination with the White House indicate that this is not an ordinary diplomatic visit. Rather this appears to be an attempt to promote new sanctions legislation against Iran that could undermine critical negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran. At the State of the Union President Obama made it clear that he will veto new Iran sanctions legislation. The invitation to Prime Minister Netanyahu enlists a foreign leader to influence a Presidential policy initiative. We should be able to disagree on foreign policy within our American political system and without undermining the presidency.

Aside from being improper, this places Israel, a close and valued ally, in the middle of a policy debate between Congress and the White House. We should not turn our diplomatic friendship into a partisan issue. Beyond threatening our diplomatic priorities, the timing of this invitation offers the Congressional platform to elevate a candidate in a foreign election.

A visit from Israel’s Prime Minister would normally be an occasion for bipartisan cooperation and support. Our relationship with Israel is too important to use as a pawn
in political gamesmanship. We strongly urge you to postpone this invitation until
Israelis have cast their ballots and the deadline for diplomatic negotiations with Iran has
passed. When the Israeli Prime Minister visits us outside the specter of partisan politics,
we will be delighted and honored to greet him or her on the Floor of the House.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress

Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress