

## **Is it Acceptable to Question Government Policies in a Time of National Emergency?**

It can be very difficult and politically risky to challenge government policies during a time of national emergency. The following elected representatives spoke out against war at different times in United States history. Examine each statement carefully and use your textbook or other sources to learn more about the situation the United States was facing at the time.

1. What is the main point raised by the speaker?
2. In your opinion, were they wrong to dissent in this way? Explain why or why not.
3. If you were a constituent, would you have voted for them for reelection? Explain why or why not.

### **Resolution introduced by Congressman Abraham Lincoln (1847)**

“Whereas the President of the United States has declared that ‘the Mexican Government. . . has at last invaded our territory and shed the blood of our fellow-citizens on our own soil.’ And whereas, This House is desirous to obtain a full knowlegde of all the facts which go to establish whether the particular spot on which the blood of our citizens was so shed was or was not at that time our own soil; there, Resolved by the House of Representatives, that the President of the United States, be respectfully requested to inform the House . . . (w)hether the people of that settlement, or a majority of them, or any of them, has ever, previous to the bloodshed mentioned in his message, submitted themselves to the government or laws of Texas, or of the United States, by consent, or by compulsion, either by accepting office, or voting at elections, or paying taxes, or serving on juries, or having process served upon them, or in any way.”

### **Representative Jeannette Rankin Opposes U.S. Entry into World War I (1917)**

“I knew that we were asked to vote for a commercial war, that one of the idealistic hopes would be carried out, and I was aware of the falseness of much of the propaganda. It was easy to stand against the pressure of the militarists, but very difficult to go against the friends and dear ones who felt that I was making a needless sacrifice by voting against the war, since my vote would not be a decisive one. . . . I said I would listen to those who wanted war and would not vote until the last opportunity and if I could see any reason for going to war I would change it.”

### **Senator Wayne Morse votes “NO!” on the the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (1965)**

“I believe that history will record that we have made a grave mistake in subverting and circumventing the Constitution of the United States. . . . I believe that within the next century, future generations will look with dismay and great disappointment upon a Congress which is now about to make such a historic mistake.”

### **Statement by Representative Barbara Lee (September 14, 2001)**

“I rise today with a heavy heart, one that is filled with sorrow for the families and loved ones who were killed and injured in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Only the most foolish or the most callous would not understand the grief that has gripped the American people and millions across the world. This unspeakable attack on the United States has forced me to rely on my moral compass, my conscience, and my God for direction. . . .

There must be some of us who say, let’s step back for a moment and think through the implications of our actions today -- let us more fully understand its consequences. We are not dealing with a conventional war. We cannot respond in a conventional manner. I do not want to see this spiral out of control. This crisis involves issues of national security, foreign policy, public safety, intelligence gathering, economics, and murder. Our response must be equally multi-faceted.

We must not rush to judgment. Far too many innocent people have already died. Our country is in mourning. If we rush to launch a counter-attack, we run too great a risk that women, children, and other non- combatants will be caught in the crossfire. Nor can we let our justified anger over these outrageous acts by vicious murderers inflame prejudice against all Arab Americans, Muslims, Southeast Asians, or any other people because of their race, religion, or ethnicity.”