

**FEW U.S. LAWMAKERS VOTE FOR PEACE** Copyright 2002 Madison Newspapers, Inc.

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by John Nichols

In most western democracies, peace is treated seriously as a political issue, and substantial numbers of elected officials are willing to stand and be counted for anti-war positions. In Great Britain, for instance, almost one-third of the members of Parliament -- including 120 members of Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labor Party -- have expressed open opposition to Blair's plan to support a U.S.-led attack on Iraq.

In the United States, peace is less well established as a political issue; and, for the most part, elected officials are unwilling to stand tough even for necessary anti-war positions. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the Bush administration is misguided in its approach to Iraq, Israel, limitless "axis of evil" warfare, the Star Wars national missile defense boondoggle and military spending as it relates to budget priorities, most members of Congress have been satisfied to serve as little more than rubber stamps for wrongheaded presidential policies. But a handful of members of Congress have been willing to distance themselves from the administration's course. Their courage is documented in the recently released analysis by the Peace Action Education Fund ([www.peace-action.org](http://www.peace-action.org) <<http://www.peace-action.org>>) of congressional voting during the tumultuous year of 2001. The Peace Action team established a high standard. To gain a 100 percent rating, a member of the House had to vote right on eight issues, a member of the Senate had to do so on seven. In both the House and Senate, one of those votes had to be against Sept. 14 resolutions authorizing the Bush administration to mount what has turned out to be an open-ended military response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Only one member of Congress, California Democrat Barbara Lee, had the courage to cast that vote. And she alone got a 100 percent rating. Lee is quick to argue that a number of other members came close to joining her, and Peace Action Education Fund executive director Kevin Martin accepts the point. "Perhaps others would have considered alternatives to rushing into an open-ended war had the vote not been scheduled just three days after Sept. 11, when most of the nation was still in shock," explains Martin. "That path was not taken, and the consequences will be with us for years to come."

The "use-of-force" vote was just one of those analyzed. The others involved military spending authorizations, a proposal to shift \$593 million from military spending to fighting AIDS in Africa and legislation that allowed law enforcement authorities to investigate threats using approaches civil libertarians identified as unconstitutional.

\* S en. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., who cast a lonely vote against Attorney General John Ashcroft's

assault on civil liberties, was the only senator to get a "six-out-of-seven-right" rating of 86 percent. The second best Senate rating was that of Minnesota Democrat Paul Wellstone, who voted right 71 percent of the time. No other member got a passing grade.

In the House, 22 Democratic members received a "seven-out-of-eight-right" rating of 88 percent: Californians Lynn Woolsey, Pete Stark, Mike Honda and Bob Filner; Colorado's Diana DeGette; Georgia's Cynthia McKinney; Illinoisans Jesse Jackson Jr., Danny Davis and Jan Schakowsky; Massachusetts' Jim McGovern, John Tierney and Ed Markey; Minnesota's Jim Oberstar; New Jersey's Donald Payne; New Yorkers Jerry Nadler, Nadia Velazquez and Maurice Hinchey; Ohio's Dennis Kucinich; Oregon's Mike Wu, Earl Blumenauer and Pete DeFazio; and Washington's Jim McDermott. They were joined by Vermont Independent Bernie Sanders.

The best Republican record was that of Texan Ron Paul, a libertarian who has been a leader in opposing launching a war on Iraq. He got a 75 percent rating, the same as Wisconsin Democrat Tammy Baldwin of Madison. The next best Wisconsin rating was that of Rep. Tom Barrett of Milwaukee, a Democratic gubernatorial candidate who got a 63 percent rating. No other Wisconsinite was rated better than 50 percent.

\* Among the worst records posted by Democrats in the Senate and House were those of several prospective presidential candidates. House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt mustered only a 38 percent rating, while Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry and Delaware Sen. Joe Biden earned 43 percent ratings. Connecticut's Joe Lieberman and North Carolina's John Edwards scored just 14 percent. And New York's Hillary Clinton registered 0 -- a worse rating than Arizona Republican John McCain, another 14 percenter.