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RAHALL SAYS REFLAGGING MAKES U.S. SOLDIERS 'SITTING DUCKS' IN GULF

Barboursville, W. Va. -- The President's plan to reflag and escort Kuwaiti tankers is unnecessarily endangering U.S. lives, Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) said today. Rahall feels the Administration's inability to define a policy and a plan of action for the Persian Gulf controversy could cost many American lives.

In a speech here to the West Virginia American Legion, Rahall denounced the President's ever-changing rationale for his plan to reflag and escort Kuwaiti tankers through the Persian Gulf. "The President says if we don't reflag the Soviets will. Originally, we were reflagging to protect the flow of Western oil and assure freedom of navigation," Rahall pointed out. "However, those very allies whose interests the Administration calimed to be protecting, failed to give even token support to that plan."

Rahall also dismissed the idea that the Soviets would increase their stature in the region through a reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers. "The Soviets have called for a withdrawal of all foreign ships in the Gulf," Rahall said. "Besides, the Iranians hate the Soviets just as much as they hate the Americans. And the President's assertion to an increased Soviet influence in the region simply does not make sense to me."

The President's changing reasons for reflagging are beginning to confuse the people, according to Rahall. "I am not sure any more who our enemy is in the region -- Iran or the Soviet Union?" he noted.

Rahall gloomily agreed with an Iranian assessment that the danger faced by American military personnel in the Gulf would worse than that experienced in Lebanon or Vietnam. "We are puttin gourselves in another no-win situation -- and we have yet to be presented with a clear rationale for doing so," he remarked.

Rahall also noted the nature of the Iranian threat and the danger it posed to Americans. "They have no hesitancy about shedding innocent blood in pursuit of their goals," he stated. "They play a different game, by different rules, and until I am convinced that we have an active military role to play in this conflicy I will continue to oppose placing Americans as sitting ducks in the Persian Gulf."

"The memories are much too fresh, the pain all too recent," Rahall remarked of other Administration actions with regard to our servicemen. "None of us wants to go through that again."