WASHINGTON- Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN) released the following statement in anticipation of the United Nations General Assembly vote to upgrade the status of the Palestinian Authority at the United Nations to non-member observer state:

"This vote should be seen as an opportunity, not an obstacle, for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. We have seen in just the last few weeks how the absence of a serious peace process continues to harm both sides. President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party has renounced violence, recognized Israel, and is pursuing statehood diplomatically. Opposing Fatah's non-violent efforts to achieve statehood sends the wrong message to the Palestinian people.

"It would be a mistake for the United States to punish the Palestinian Authority. Punitive measures against the Palestinian Authority will strengthen extremists and diminish U.S. influence in the region. As former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, 'The Palestinian request from the United Nations is congruent with the basic concept of the two-state solution. Therefore, I see no reason to oppose it...It is time to give a hand to, and encourage, the moderate forces amongst the Palestinians.' This view is bolstered by people like former Israeli deputy foreign minister Yossi Beilin.

"The United States should use this opportunity to begin a new negotiations process toward a two-state solution. Only good-faith negotiations with both Palestinians and Israelis at the table will stop the violence and finally end this decades-old conflict. I hope all parties will use this opportunity to renew a quest for peace."