

This week as we wrapped up the last hours of the 111th Congress, many folks went about their holiday shopping, planned last minute details for holiday gatherings, and prepared for time with their families. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Earlier this month, those in the Jewish faith celebrated Hanukkah to commemorate the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. However you celebrate, I hope you are able to step back and appreciate the freedoms we enjoy and give thanks for all the blessings our nation enjoys.

Here at home in America's First District, many Virginians selflessly spend their time in support of others through various service organizations in our communities. It is so important to be involved with your community and I thank the folks who support these organizations especially in tough economic times.

But especially during this holiday season, I would like to thank the families – the husbands and wives, the children, parents, and grandparents of those men and women of our military who have served or are currently serving across the world in the name of freedom. Here in our area we are blessed with many individuals and families who honorably choose to serve their country. When a soldier is deployed away from their families during the holiday season, it is especially tough for the families who have an empty chair as they enjoy a holiday meal. I was fortunate to visit many of our service men and women serving in Afghanistan just before the Thanksgiving holiday in November. It is truly uplifting to visit these service men and women as they perform the work each day to both protect this nation from those who wish us harm, but also to train those Afghans who wish for peace in their country. They serve with a selfless, humble attitude and are doing a great job. It was amazing to witness the progress made from my last visit in the spring. The credit for progress goes to each and every one of those service men and women and diplomats.

This week, we especially thank these families for their sacrifices. We hope and pray for a happy reunion with your soldier following their deployment. Today we say thank you, and Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to each one of these families, and may God continue to bless America.

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*Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his second full term in November 2010 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee.*