

On Monday, I returned from a five-day trip to the Middle East, with visits to Pakistan and Afghanistan. There are I visited U.S. troops and engaged with regional leaders on civil, political, and military matters and explored opportunities to strengthen partnerships with the two countries. I was joined by Virginia Congressman Scott Rigell, representing Virginia's Second Congressional District, as well as Congressmen Todd Young (IN-9), Larry Kissel (NC-8) and Dave Loebsack (IA-2) – all members of the House Armed Services Committee.

We share common interests with both countries in combating terrorism and furthering economic development. We also recognize the need to work towards lasting peace in the region that ultimately benefits the entire world. Our Congressional delegation first visited Pakistan, where we met with Chief of Army Staff General Kayani, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, and local Parliamentarians. As they work to bring peace and stability to their country these leaders have firsthand experience with the violence that extremism has brought to Pakistan. President Zardari lost his wife at the hands of terrorists in their country. We communicated our respect for their commitment to fighting extremism and encouraged them to be more aggressive in taking on those who seek to destabilize the region.

During the visit to Afghanistan, we met with local and national leaders and a number of our U.S. Regional Commands. We also received an in-depth briefing from General David Petraeus, Commander of International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces Afghanistan. He focused on the specific transition plans between our U.S. forces and the Afghan local and national police, and the Afghan Army. I last visited Afghanistan in November, and since that trip there has been progress. In fact, if it weren't for a sandstorm in Kandahar, we would have been able to visit areas that were until recently under Taliban control. Even though conditions on the ground are improving many challenges remain to ensure that current progress is not lost.

I was grateful for the opportunity to meet with many service members from Virginia. Our first day in theater, I had lunch with men and women from the Commonwealth who serve our nation and heard firsthand of their experiences and opinions on ground operations. I was left with an even greater admiration for their service and sacrifice to our country; their morale remains so high, and their dedication to the mission is unwavering. We cannot thank our servicemembers and veterans enough for what they do for the cause of freedom for this country and around the globe.

This week, we also heard more recently revealed alarming stories from workers at Arlington National Cemetery, adding to the already-disturbing stories we have heard due to the

mismanagement at Arlington. As the Chairman of the House Armed Services Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, I announced that a hearing has been scheduled in mid-April on this very issue. When this was first brought to my attention last year, I was appalled, and talked to the Army about my concerns. With these new reports out this week, I am not convinced that they are doing everything they can to right these wrongs. These startling problems have been happening for far too long. We do not know the full extent of these troubles and must get to the bottom of the situation. The continuous stream of unconscionable mistakes and cover-ups simply will not stand. This blatant lack of respect for our fallen American heroes and their families flies in the face of this country's commitment of unconditional reverence and honor for those who have fought and died for our freedom. I plan to address these issues during the upcoming hearing and I will not be satisfied until we have restored full faith and confidence in Arlington operations. Nothing less than absolute resolution of existing problems and full accountability for all of those involved in the problems and mismanagement will be acceptable.

If you have issues, thoughts or questions, please feel free to contact my office at 202-225-4261 or by email on the website (<http://www.wittman.house.gov>).