

WASHINGTON, DC – Every day I think about our dedicated servicemen and women overseas who sacrifice so much for our freedoms, and I wonder what I can do as a legislator to help them complete their mission so they can return home safely. I've found that one of the best ways to be educated on these issues is to interact directly with these devoted citizens and receive their feedback firsthand. In the days before the Thanksgiving holiday, I was privileged to be able to travel down-range and meet with many servicemen and women whose selfless sacrifices keep our country safe. The trip, which took me to Afghanistan, Bahrain, and the USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN 74) aircraft carrier in the northern Arabian Gulf, was very enlightening, and I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to receive first hand feedback on the Operation NEW DAWN and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM from those individuals on the front lines.

I went into this trip looking forward to interacting with our troops and the commanders in the field, as well as U.S. diplomats and foreign leaders, so that I could return from the field with a better grasp of the challenges and successes that our servicemen and women are experiencing every day.

In Afghanistan, U.S. forces continue to perform bravely and honorably, and the troops I spoke with remain upbeat, many of them expressing to me their belief that we are making progress. I was also able to meet with General John Allen, Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and Ryan Crocker, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, who stressed the importance of both diplomatic efforts and security operations in ensuring stability in the region. They and other leaders discussed the significance of ensuring an environment in Afghanistan in which a system of government and a national economy can proceed naturally while the citizens remain safe. Impressive gains have been made in Afghanistan, and we must remember that if we don't remain vigilant in our mission to leave the country in the hands of its own government and its own security force, we could risk losing ground on what has already been accomplished. I am committed to ensuring that our troops in Afghanistan are well-equipped and that our policies going forward are made with sound judgments.

I traveled next to Bahrain and had productive meetings with government leaders who assured me of their country's steadfast commitment to the United States. A good relationship with Bahrain is truly a vital part of U.S. efforts in the Middle East, as their support helps the United States maintain such a strong presence in the region. Part of this presence includes aircraft carriers like the USS JOHN C. STENNIS. On board the STENNIS, I was able to view at-sea operations and receive briefings from military leaders familiar with the dynamics in the region and the Carrier Strike Group's intrinsic role in preserving stability. The simple truth is that we must maintain this strong presence in order to protect sea lanes that are crucial to our economy, especially considering the large percentage of trade conducted by merchant ships crossing

these seas. At the same time, a strong American presence in this region allows continued attention to activities conducted by nations such as Iran and even China, which is vigorously trying to gain influence in the Middle East. It is vital that the United States maintain a role in this area, and continued diplomatic efforts with nations like Bahrain are extremely necessary to ensuring stability in the Middle East.

I returned from this trip more impressed than ever with the capabilities and attitudes of our Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen, and I am grateful to everyone who provided me with their insight and expertise. As a Member of the House Armed Services Committee and the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, I am dedicated to supporting our men and women in uniform, as well as to examining the greatest possible methods of enhancing our defense capabilities and military personnel policies. Our military is facing grave cuts to our national defense that would be disastrous for our national security capabilities, and Congress must act to ensure that our nation is able to provide our troops with the tools and training that they need to succeed.

I assure you I will stay on top of developments in the Middle East and do everything I can to support our brave men and women who risk their lives to defend our freedoms every day. I encourage you to stay in touch with me by phone at (202) 225-4261 or through my website: ([w](http://www.wittman.house.gov)
[ww.wittman.house.gov](http://www.wittman.house.gov)
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Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He serves on the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Armed Services Committee where he is the Chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.