

January 5, 2009: Weekly Washington Update

(WASHINGTON, DC) - With the New Year and a new administration, the military is preparing for a renewed emphasis on the war in Afghanistan. During the holidays, I took part in a Congressional delegation that spent a day visiting the sailors and marines aboard our naval fleet in port at Bahrain and two days visiting the troops on the frontlines of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and surveying the situation on the ground. Much like our time spent in Iraq, the experience provided excellent perspective to inform the decisions we will make on the House Armed Services Committee in the coming year.

On our first day in Afghanistan, the delegation met with Ambassador Woods and the senior embassy staff for an overview of the current government and our diplomatic efforts. This classified briefing updated the Members on the current political situation in Afghanistan. We then visited the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), GEN David McKiernan, to receive an update on how the Afghans are maintaining security. This update included progress made by the troops on the ground formally known as the Combined Security Transition Command, Afghanistan (CSTC-A). After the update, we visited a private group of foreign and local citizens known as Turquoise Mountain. Their goal is to build an economy based upon the skills of local artisans through the sale of their traditional Afghan culture and art.

Our second day we began at a breakfast meeting with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James Conway. We discussed the need for more troops in Afghanistan to establish the security necessary for political progress. After breakfast, we traveled to the Kandahar province in southwest Afghanistan to visit with a number of Marine units performing security operations in the area. I had the opportunity to meet with Marines and Soldiers from the First District, to see the job they're performing firsthand to ask questions and to say "Thank You."

After two days in Afghanistan, we returned to Germany. Here, the delegation visited the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center to spend time with wounded warriors. Landstuhl receives all wounded service members from both Iraq and Afghanistan and provides world-class treatment prior to continued transport to Walter Reed or Bethesda Naval Medical Center. This was by far the most humbling experience of the trip.

The following year will be a crucial year for both Iraq and Afghanistan. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee and a representative of one of the largest military populations in the nation, trips like the one I took in December are important for understanding the needs and challenges of our military. I will continue to support efforts that will bring our troops home safely and victoriously.

If my office can be of assistance or if you have questions, please feel free to contact us at <http://www.wittman.house.gov/> or 202-225-4261.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was re-elected to his first full term in November 2008.