

May 1, 2009: Weekly Washington Update

Just yesterday the Secretary of Defense Robert Gates testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee in an effort to request 50 million dollars to cover the costs of continued detention of enemy combatants currently at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba after the facility is shut down within the next year. The money Secretary Gates is requesting could cover the costs of modifying U.S. military or civilian prisons or adding new wings to accommodate the detainees.

The Secretary went on to joke that he "fully expect(s) to have 535 pieces of legislation before the process is complete saying ‘not in my district, not in my state". However, for the rest of America and the Commonwealth of Virginia this is no joking matter.

The ramifications for bringing these individuals onto American soil reach far and wide, particularly in the case of the First Congressional District which hosts a number of military facilities. The Marine Corps Base at Quantico has been discussed as one of the facilities to house detainees. Quantico is currently an open base where anyone may drive onto the facility by simply showing a government ID, and would cost untold millions to securely close.

Further, at a time where defense spending is being cut across the board there is no logical reason why we would spend vital dollars duplicating a secure facility which has served as a safe and removed location for the detention of these individuals. Additionally, the constraints on the outlying area in terms of infrastructure, traffic, and movement would in of itself cause the localities and citizens a major headache. Not to mention the concern it would place on residents about a possible jail break or attack to free these detainees.

To this end I have cosponsored three pieces of legislation to prevent such an idea from becoming a reality. First, Congressman J. Randy Forbes (VA-4) has introduced a bill which would prohibit federal funds from being used to transfer individuals from Guantanamo Bay to facilities in Virginia or to pay for their housing at any of these facilities.

Next, my greatest concern is that these detainees are brought to the United States under any circumstances. I have joined Congressman Tom Cole (OK-4) in support for his legislation which would effectively accomplish the same ends of Congressman Forbes bill, but would apply to all states in the U.S.

Lastly, I have also cosponsored a bill by Congressman Jeff Miller (FL-1) which would not allow for the treatment of any enemy combatants detained at Guantanamo at any Armed Forces or Department of Veterans Affairs medical facility.

I have been monitoring this situation from the first discussions of transitioning detainees to the U.S. and I will continue to use my position on the House Armed Services Committee to fight their movement to not only the Commonwealth, but our

Nation.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.