

Coffman Seeks Answers on Iraqi Reconstruction Funds

Sends Letter to Administration Citing Million Dollar Mural

(WASHINGTON D.C.) —Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO) today sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates seeking answers regarding the mounting evidence of misuse and lack of oversight for billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars spent on Iraqi reconstruction projects. Citing the Department of Defense (DoD) Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) 2009 quarterly reports, Coffman articulated great dismay at the poor judgment and glaring lack of oversight in how taxpayer dollars are being used. Coffman also inquired about four billion dollars currently sitting in DoD accounts that has been appropriated, but not obligated or spent, and whether it could be reprogrammed for more pressing national security needs.

In the letter, Coffman expressed his deep discontent with how taxpayer dollars are being spent and questioned why U.S. tax dollars, rather than Iraqi oil revenue, is being use to pay for infrastructure projects. “With all the problems facing our own nation, not to mention Iraq and the region, how could this possibly be the best use of our money? Why are we still funding Iraqi infrastructure at a time when the United States has an estimated deficit of \$1.6 trillion and a national debt of \$12.3 trillion?”

Text of the letter is below:

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January 19, 2010

The Honorable Robert Gates
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

I am writing to express my strong concern about evidence of the misuse of, or failure of oversight regarding, funds authorized and appropriated for the reconstruction of Iraq, including the rebuilding of the security forces. I have closely reviewed the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) most recent 2009 quarterly report to Congress, and considered its implications for the authorization and appropriation of additional funding for Iraq's reconstruction.

I am frustrated and disappointed by reports of gross misuse of funds, a glaring example of which was a one million dollar mural near the Baghdad airport funded by the Commander's Emergency Reconstruction fund. With all the problems facing our own nation, not to mention Iraq and the region, how could this possibly be the best use of our money? Why are we still funding Iraqi infrastructure at a time when the United States has an estimated deficit of \$1.6 trillion and a national debt of \$12.3 trillion?

The above is but one glaring example, for as noted in SIGIR's own report, "Iraq Reconstruction Funds: Forensic Audits Identifying Waste, Fraud, and Abuse—Interim Report #1," an examination of 22,000 Defense Department transactions involving about \$10.7 billion has preliminarily identified not just overpayments by the government, but also duplicate payments, and payments to fictitious people and addresses.

As a Marine Corps combat veteran who served in both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, I strongly believe that it should go without saying that these funds must be managed in such a way as to assure addressing the underlying causes of instability in Iraq. Our own national interests are not served by simply wasting taxpayer dollars to redecorate a country hit by war. At a time when we have so many pressing readiness and procurement needs for our own military, and for our nation as whole, this is not meant to be a blank check.

I remain committed to this topic of concern and request additional information on this troubling issue for the American taxpayer. Please provide additional information on the following areas of inquiry:

- Of the four billion dollars already appropriated, but unobligated or unexpended in Department of Defense Reconstruction accounts such as the Commander's Emergency Response Program or the Iraq Security Forces Fund, what is the breakdown of planned spending by specific purpose?
- Can unobligated funds be redirected to better use?
- What is the plan for obligation of these funds for various purposes and are these accounts being scrubbed for possible deobligation or reallocation toward higher national security priorities?

I welcome any opportunity to discuss this critical matter further. I know you share my view that we must all make every effort to assure that American taxpayer funding is spent responsibly and while keeping concrete goals serving our own national interest closely in mind.

Thank you for your time and prompt attention to this inquiry.

Sincerely,

Mike Coffman

Member of Congress