

Coffman Returns from Afghanistan

Hears Worries about Early Pullout

(LONE TREE, CO) - U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, R-CO, returned last week after visiting Afghanistan with three other members of Congress. The six-day trip also included a stop at the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet Headquarters in Bahrain to review and discuss efforts to counter Iran's growing influence in the Persian Gulf region.

In Afghanistan, Coffman met with the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division in Kandahar and attended a *shura* or community meeting in the Arghandab River Valley where Afghan local government, tribal, army and police leaders met to discuss the security challenges in combating the influence of the Taliban in the area.

"They were very worried that the U.S. would abandon them and let the Taliban take over. I told them I thought the U.S. should continue our support for their efforts but I made it clear to them that there will come a time when that support will no longer involve U.S. ground troops," Coffman said.

In Kabul, Coffman met with Marine Corps General John Allen, Commanding General for International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ryan Crocker. According to Coffman, General Allen and Ambassador Crocker fully support President Obama's plan to withdraw the 33,000 additional forces that the president ordered into Afghanistan in December 2009. However, they expressed concerns that a further drawdown of U.S. forces before the end of 2014 would put at risk the gains that have been made. The General and the Ambassador want the remaining 68,000 troops to stay through 2014 when operational control is scheduled to be shifted over to Afghan security forces. Both felt that after 2014 the U.S. presence in Afghanistan could be dramatically reduced.

"Both General Allen and Ambassador Crocker expressed to me a concern that if the drawdown of U.S. forces is accelerated then the hard fought gains in Afghanistan could be lost. No doubt, they are worried that the president is considering just that," Coffman said.