

beginning of U.S. operations there. The Defense Department should have known that “ghost soldiers” represented a major risk to American personnel and American taxpayers no later than 2008, when a Government Accountability Office report raised the issue. But year after year, the administration—with far too little oversight from Congress—continues sending tens of millions of U.S. taxpayer dollars to pay the salaries of Afghan military and police, thousands of whom never show up for duty or may not even exist. And now, we are almost \$20 trillion in debt.

After 15 years of wounded and murdered Americans, it is time to bring this waste, fraud and abuse to an end. It is sickening, unaffordable, and it must stop. Many scholars have said that Afghanistan is a graveyard of empires—when this financial disaster finally brings us to our knees, maybe the ghost soldiers can visit the headstone that says United States of America.

Sincerely,

WALTER B. JONES,
Member of Congress.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, the reason I mentioned these ghost soldiers is because Americans are still dying in this godforsaken country known as Afghanistan, all while our Nation is headed for an economic collapse as we soon will see the \$20 trillion debt number come forward. For the sake of our military, we need to end this madness in Afghanistan.

I have beside me a photograph of a flag-draped coffin being taken off of an airplane. This is a humble way that I can say to the nine Americans who also came home in a flag-draped coffin in the back of a plane thank you for your service.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for Congress to have a debate on the floor of the House as to whether we need to stay in Afghanistan for another 16 years. We have been there for 16 years now.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD an article that tells the story of Afghanistan better than I can today on the floor. The title of that article is “It’s Time for America to Get Out of Afghanistan.”

[Dec. 2, 2016]

IT’S TIME FOR AMERICA TO GET OUT OF
AFGHANISTAN

(By Mark Kryzer)

“Nation-building” hasn’t achieved lasting goals, Afghans continue to suffer casualties and be displaced, and the costs to the U.S. keep mounting.

After 15 years and \$115 billion of taxpayer dollars spent on failed “nation-building,” it’s time for the U.S. to let go of Afghanistan. (The actual “total cost of war and reconstruction” which includes all U.S. military spending, has been estimated at \$783 billion by the Cost of War project at Brown University.)

The situation in 2016 has been described by one senior U.S. government official as an “eroding stalemate.” That’s optimistic. We are losing whatever has been achieved there and the Afghan government is slowly collapsing under the Taliban onslaught and its own ineptitude driven by corruption.

The Taliban control more territory now than at any time since their overthrow by the U.S. in 2001 with the Afghan government controlling only two-thirds of the country—during daylight hours. Since January 2016, the Taliban have contested five provincial

capitals, carried out some of the largest terrorist attacks in the capital city of Kabul, and have pressed attacks in all 34 provinces of the country, with an average of 68 attacks a day.

As a result, the Afghan army and police forces have incurred about 15,000 casualties so far this year, with civilians suffering more than 5,000 casualties, the highest levels ever recorded. An estimated 1.2 million Afghans have been displaced because of the fighting and are living as refugees in their own country, with another 85,000 opting to leave the country in the first six months of 2016 alone for the migrant trail to Europe.

Adding to the Taliban threat, ISIS has now established itself in two eastern Afghan provinces and Al Qaida operatives are active in seven provinces, according to a recent report in “The Guardian.” With opium production also up by 43 percent in the country, there is no shortage of funds to fuel the insurgency and corruption.

According to a 2016 World Bank report, the social and economic gains achieved with international assistance over the last 15 years are also quickly eroding due to war and corruption.

The Obama administration has opted to leave 8,400 troops in Afghanistan in 2016 in a support role to the Afghan army, down from a high of 100,000 in 2010. And the U.S. completely pays for the Afghan army and police forces. On the civilian side of reconstruction, the U.S. continues to pour money into the country for “nation-building.” At the Brussels Afghanistan “Donors Conference” in early October, the international community pledged another \$15 billion in support; the U.S. is the largest contributor.

Given the abysmal results achieved so far, isn’t it time to re-evaluate U.S. foreign policy goals in Afghanistan? Recently, a group of U.S. generals and former U.S. ambassadors to Afghanistan announced that a “generational commitment” of assistance was still required of the American people toward Afghanistan to see it securely to the end goal of . . . what? Nobody can give a coherent answer to that question, indicating that we have seriously lost our way.

Most Americans have forgotten about Afghanistan (or no longer want to hear about it) and are not aware of the ongoing costs in American lives and resources. It’s time for the next American president to drastically change direction and explain it to the American people.

That direction should be to start the pull-out of Afghanistan after 15 years of failure to achieve any lasting policy objectives there. The U.S. should immediately stop the multitude of civilian “nation-building” programs that have been so costly and failed to achieve their unrealistic goals. U.S. funding for the Afghan army and police forces should be put on a diminishing schedule that would stop entirely after two years, forcing Afghanistan to finally stand or fall on its own.

It’s time to let go of Afghanistan and end the 15-year drain on American lives and resources.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I ask God to bless our men and women in uniform, and I ask God to continue to bless America.

PUTTING FLORIDA FIRST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. GRAHAM) for 5 minutes.

Ms. GRAHAM. Mr. Speaker, I am so very fortunate to have grown up in a family dedicated to public service. I watched and learned from my father as

he served as a State legislator, Florida’s Governor, and as a United States Senator, and from my mother who worked tirelessly as an advocate for students and seniors. Together, they were a team that always put Florida first.

Following in their footsteps, I served my community as a PTA volunteer, and I worked for my local school district. While I was happy to serve, I never planned to follow in my father’s footsteps into politics. But as our country became more divided, my thoughts began to change. Like so many Americans, I was disappointed to see our Nation’s civil discourse deteriorate to shouting matches on cable news and gridlock in government.

In 2013, I decided to run for office with my own message and my own mission: to bring back civility, to work with both parties to actually get things done, and to always put the people of Florida first.

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I ran for office to bring the north Florida way to Washington. Almost 4 years after making that decision, I am proud to say we have had many successes in our own mission.

After winning my election, I immediately began reaching out to my Florida colleagues, Republicans and Democrats. I am proud to say that those friendships have paid off to the benefit of Florida.

We were able to recruit almost the entire State delegation to support our Apalachicola Bay Restoration Act. I cosponsored legislation with Congressman PATRICK MURPHY to protect the Everglades and with Congressman DAVID JOLLY to ban oil drilling off the coast of Florida.

I asked to serve on the committees that were most important to my district—the Armed Services Committee and the Agriculture Committee.

On the Armed Services Committee we were able to make substantial legislative gains. We were able to amend the National Defense Authorization Act with initiatives to protect programs that helped Florida’s economy, create jobs, and strengthen our national security, as well as the work we have done to improve our relationship with Israel, including authorizing a joint anti-tunneling program to fight terrorism and to protect both of our countries’ borders.

On the House Agriculture Committee, I work closely with farmers across the State. I will never forget our 14-county north Florida farm tour, where I tried my own hand at planting peanuts and even pregnancy checked a cow. I am so proud of the work we did to bring the U.S. Department of Agriculture Strike Force program to Florida, which will help rural counties to protect their communities, to grow their economies, and to create jobs.

While we have had many successes in Washington, I am even more proud of the work we have accomplished in

Florida. Our focus on constituent services and cutting through bureaucratic redtape has paid off. We have helped return almost \$2 million in benefits owed to Florida seniors and families, including more than half-a-million dollars to veterans.

While the numbers are impressive, the stories behind them are what really count. Stories like Kenneth McCray, a Vietnam veteran who was denied benefits by the VA until our office stepped in to help. In every vote and in every way, we always put the people of Florida first.

While working in Congress, the people of north Florida have never let me down. I have felt their love and support in each hug, whether at a press conference or along a parade route. I have witnessed their compassion after Hurricane Hermine, when neighbors helped neighbors clear debris and sheltered those in need. I have seen local leaders put partisanship aside to fight for our communities.

We call this the north Florida way, but we don't have a monopoly on that spirit. It is the essence of the American spirit. I have witnessed a bit of it here in Washington. Between campaigns and commercial breaks, I have seen that Republicans and Democrats can actually like one another. If we can begin talking to each other again instead of shouting at each other, we can move our country forward in a way that helps every American.

So, as I prepare to leave Congress, I offer up this parting advice to new and veteran Members. Take the time to form friendships, put partisanship aside, and always put the people you represent first.

Now that I have shared this advice, I would like to end my speech by saying thank you. Thank you to my committed staff, my family, and, most importantly, I want to thank the people of north Florida's Second Congressional District. I am so thankful to them for giving me the opportunity to serve. Running for Congress and serving in the House has been an enriching experience with many workdays, possum festivals, and parades along the way.

I am sad it is coming to an end, but this moment is bittersweet. I will always treasure the friendships and experience I have gained in Congress. I know that as this chapter closes, another opens, and I will continue to serve my community and the people of Florida for as long as I am able.

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF PEARL HARBOR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Utah (Mr. STEWART) for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEWART. Mr. Speaker, as I think all of us know, today marks the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor; a devastating event that took the lives of more than 2,300 Americans and ultimately led, of course, to the

United States' entrance into World War II.

Though it is painful to think of all the brave men and women we lost that day, I am grateful for this heroic generation of soldiers, including my own father, who served in defense of the freedoms of our country during World War II. I wear my father's wings. I have them on today. I wear them every day. My mom and dad love their country and they, like so many others, sacrificed so much. It was examples of heroes such as these that led me to make the decision when I was a young man to become a pilot in the Air Force.

I would like to take a moment and share the story of one brave Utahn, Mervyn Bennion, who was stationed at Pearl Harbor on the day of the attack. After graduating from high school in Salt Lake City, Bennion accepted his appointment to the United States Naval Academy, where he graduated near the top of his class. He later assumed command of the USS *West Virginia* in July of 1941.

The ship was moored with other vessels on Battleship Row on that Sunday morning. Just shy of 8 a.m., Japanese forces struck the USS *West Virginia* with at least six torpedoes and two bombs.

Under attack and struggling to organize a defense from the bridge, Captain Bennion was struck with shrapnel from one of these bombs; but, still, he continued to direct the ship's battle while using one of his hands to hold his own wounds closed. Several sailors attempted to convince him to go to the first-aid station and seek medical attention, but he refused to leave his post. Sadly, he later died from a loss of blood.

Captain Bennion was recognized with the Medal of Honor—our Nation's highest military honor—for his "conspicuous devotion to duty, extraordinary courage, and complete disregard for his own life."

Today, on the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, let us remember not only the brave men and women who lost their lives in that attack, but also those who have continued to fight for our freedoms for the last 75 years.

In dark and dangerous places all around the globe, American soldiers, sailors, and airmen are doing what they can to bring stability and safety to many parts of the world. We should remember them. We should thank them. We should keep them and their families in our prayers. What we have asked them to do is not easy. They deserve our gratitude and our respect.

CONGRATULATING COMPLETION OF THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU RECORDS PROJECT

Mr. STEWART. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few minutes to congratulate the completion of the Freedmen's Bureau Records Project.

The Freedmen's Bureau was organized by Congress in 1865 at the conclusion of the Civil War. It offered assistance to freed slaves in a variety of ways. The Bureau opened schools to

educate the illiterate. It managed hospitals, it rationed food and clothing for the destitute, and it even solemnized marriages. In the process, it gathered priceless handwritten personal information on potentially 4 million African Americans.

Due to the work and commitment of over 25,000 volunteers, with the help of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and FamilySearch International, they have been able to uncover the names and stories of over 1.9 million freed slaves. In some cases, for the very first time, African Americans are able to discover their Civil War-era families through an online and searchable database.

I was especially pleased to attend an event yesterday where the newly indexed database of the Freedmen's Bureau Records was delivered to the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African American History and Culture.

If I could just divert for a moment, I would like to share a story from this experience from one of the leaders of the museum, and I hope he will forgive me for stealing his story and repeating it to you. This gentleman told of how his grandparents passed away when he was very young. He had no memory of his grandparents, except for going to his grandmother's house and watching her cook on some old tin cookie sheets.

But as he was able to, for the first time, research his own family records, he found the records of one of his ancestors who was a slave; and part of those records was an accounting of money that was paid to her and some of the things that she was able to purchase. One of them was a line which recorded that she paid 22 cents for a set of tin cookie sheets. What an emotional moment it was for him to have that connection now with his ancestors that he would not have been able to otherwise.

The Freedmen's Bureau Records Project allows families to discover their ancestors. It allows them to connect with them. It allows them to see the heroes among their ancestors that so many of them have.

I would like to congratulate and thank the thousands of volunteers who sacrificed their time in this wonderful project.

HONORING REID RIBBLE AND RICHARD HANNA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I have been privileged to serve with many exceptional people during my tenure in Congress. This year, there are a number of my Democratic colleagues who are leaving who will be sorely missed. We just heard from one—GWEN GRAHAM. And LOIS CAPPS is in a chair in front of me and will be speaking soon.