

Statement of Gary C. Peters
On the Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 2012
July 8, 2011

Mr. Speaker, like many Americans, I have been growing increasingly concerned about the ongoing war in Afghanistan. The war that was launched in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks was designed to destroy the capability of the Al-Qaeda terrorists responsible for those attacks and root out the Taliban government that was harboring them. Over the years, the purpose and goals of this war have changed, and we are now engaged in a long term effort to build up the capacity of the Afghan government and its security forces, to improve the infrastructure and economy of the country, and to provide an improved standard of living for its people.

These are admirable goals, but after almost a decade of war where we've tragically lost the lives of more than 1,600 American soldiers, we appear to be far from achieving them. I had the opportunity to visit Afghanistan last year to meet with our troops and commanders and see the situation on the ground for myself. Our men and women in uniform have been doing an outstanding job under incredibly difficult circumstances.

At the same time, my visit to Afghanistan also increased my concerns about our long-term goals and the viability of our mission there. Today, after having spent more than four hundred billion dollars, I believe we must ask ourselves how long we can continue spending \$6 billion every month for so little measurable gain.

I was disappointed by the President's announcement last month that we would be withdrawing only 10,000 troops this year and 23,000 by next summer, and that is why I supported an amendment to the Department of Defense Appropriations Act that would have accelerated that withdrawal. The amendment I supported, offered by my colleague Representative Garamendi, would have reduced funding for combat operations while allowing for a reserve force of 25,000 troops to protect American personnel, carry out anti-terrorism operations, and assist with the training of Afghanistan's security forces.

While I was disappointed this amendment did not pass, I cannot in good conscience vote against the underlying bill at this time. While our troops remain in harm's way, we have an obligation to ensure that they have the equipment, training, and support they need. However, I plan to continue to press for a plan that will quickly and responsibly bring more of our troops home from Afghanistan so that we can focus our resources on protecting our nation and targeting the terrorists who threaten our security.