

try to do all three, you will end up not doing any one of them very well. STEVE ISRAEL proved the premise of that book wrong because he proved to be superlative at each and every aspect of being a Member of Congress.

On policy, STEVE developed an expertise in energy policy and became a leading champion of the development of renewable sources of energy. He became an expert on defense issues; and as one of the members of the Appropriations Committee, he helped eliminate wasteful expenditures on systems we didn't need and investment in defenses that would really protect the country.

He became an expert on Middle East policy and sorting out the difficulties of all the complicated relationships between the nations in the Middle East. He became an expert on the Syrian conflict.

He also became an expert on issues affecting the middle class and has always been a champion for what needs to be done to make sure that people in this country can enjoy a secure retirement, can get a good job, can raise their family, and that their kids will enjoy a quality of life at least as great as that of their parents, and hopefully even better.

He also founded and co-chairs the Center Aisle Caucus, doing something very difficult in this institution, and that is bringing people together of both parties—something we need to see a lot more of.

In addition to those policy strengths, he was also and has been one of our greatest political leaders. He served for many years as the DCCC chair and had an encyclopedic knowledge of each and every district in the country belonging to friend or foe alike. He was an extraordinary chair, not only in terms of raising resources, but recruiting some of the finest candidates, and a great many Members of this institution owe their very presence here to his incredible work.

He then became the chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee and was a very effective Member at shaping our message and at helping us articulate what the Democratic Party was about and has been among the most effective surrogates the Democrats have.

In addition to his political expertise and policy expertise, having visited his district and having met his constituents, I know he was also so attuned to the needs of his constituents, particularly the veterans and the homeless, but also in championing the economy and bringing improvements to Long Island Sound. His casework was renowned within New York, and his staff was among the most superb anywhere on the Hill or in any district office.

In addition to all that—and that would be enough for any of us—he also wrote a fabulous novel on his iPhone, "The Global War on Morris." Who can do that? Who can write a book at all, let alone one on his iPhone, let alone it

gets published by a major publisher and does phenomenally well?

When STEVE retires, this Congress is going to lose another of its great Members, someone of genuine talent, intellect, and integrity, someone who has come to be relied upon by Presidents. We are also going to lose someone with a great sense of humor, who is a wonderful friend and a bit of a practical joker—like the time he convinced his chief of staff that one of his district staff had run over his dog. Yes, STEVE is a cruel man, but funny. We are going to miss him tremendously.

I want to wish him all the luck in the world in the exciting career that awaits him when he retires, and all his new endeavors. I look forward to finding him not in the center aisle necessarily, but in a different aisle in the bookstore near me with his latest work.

I want to join my colleagues in thanking STEVE ISRAEL for his tremendous years of service and for his wonderful friendship. We will all miss him as, indeed, will this entire institution.

TRAGIC LOSS OF AMERICAN LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I am back on the floor again today to discuss the tragic loss of American life in Afghanistan. This past week, I was touched by George Stephanopoulos and ABC as they publicly listed the nine servicemembers that died in Iraq and Afghanistan during the month of November.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD the names of the nine American heroes.

Sergeant John W. Perry of Stockton, California; Private 1st Class Tyler R. Lubelt of Tamaroa, Illinois; Sergeant 1st Class Ryan A. Gloyer of Greenville, Pennsylvania; Captain Andrew D. Byers of Rolesville, North Carolina; Senior Chief Petty Officer Scott C. Dayton of Woodbridge, Virginia; Specialist Ronald L. Murray, Jr., of Bowie, Maryland; Staff Sergeant James F. Moriarty of Kerrville, Texas; Staff Sergeant Kevin J. McEnroe of Tucson, Arizona; Staff Sergeant Matthew C. Lewellen of Lawrence, Kansas.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic that the last moment of silence for our men and women in uniform who have died serving this Nation during wartime by the House Chair took place on March 23, 2015, almost 2 years ago. I, frankly, do not understand how House leadership is not more concerned about those who have given their life serving this Nation.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I wrote to Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter several weeks ago regarding an article that said that there are 200,000 Afghan soldiers who do not exist—they call them ghosts—who are on the payroll of the Department of Defense. I asked him in the letter: Why are we wasting this money, and can you identify where the money is going?

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD my letter to Secretary Ashton Carter.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, October 14, 2016.

Hon. ASHTON B. CARTER,
Secretary of Defense,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY CARTER: I am responding to Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Acting) Jedidiah Royal's October 3, 2016, response to the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)'s letter to you (dated August 5, 2016) regarding "ghost soldiers" in Afghanistan.

I am appalled that the U.S. taxpayer has, and continues to pay, for "ghost soldiers" in Afghanistan. Moreover, I am also concerned about the risks that inadequacy of data concerning personnel levels of the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces (ANDSF) may pose to American forces in Afghanistan.

In Deputy Assistant Secretary Royal's response to SIGAR, he indicates the systems that U.S. Forces-Afghanistan are putting in place to try to verify Afghan personnel data will not be ready until at least July 2017. Given the estimate that there may be up to 200,000 "ghost soldiers," I would respectfully request an estimate of how much funding provided to the ANDSF for salaries in fiscal years 2016 and 2017 is expected to be wasted on "ghost soldiers."

Additionally, Deputy Assistant Secretary Royal indicates that a limited amount of funds has been withheld from the ANDSF for not adhering to the agreed-upon timeline for implementation of personnel verification systems. How much money was withheld, and what percentage does that number represent of the amount originally designated to be allocated?

Given that many Afghan military and police outposts have limited, if any, access to electricity and telecommunications systems, I would also ask whether there is a contingency plan to back-up the biometric database and personnel system given that units may not always have regular access to the technology needed to operate them? Further, under the current deployment arrangement ordered by President Obama, U.S. forces do not have the capability to witness firsthand, at the lowest levels of the ANDSF, whether there is fraudulent use of the biometric cards. With that in mind, does DOD expect there will be salary overpayments even after July 2017?

I am also concerned about the effect the "ghost soldier" problem is having on U.S. forces in Afghanistan. While the Afghan Minister of Defense was recently quoted as saying there is not a single "ghost soldier" in Afghanistan, the Deputy Assistant Secretary's letter makes clear that is not the case. We know the collapse of the 215th Corps in Helmand in 2015 was at least in part due to an overestimation of ANDSF personnel in Helmand based on inflated numbers reported to the Ministry of Defense. USFOR-A subsequently deployed additional personnel closer to the front lines in Helmand to assist with improving that corps. The "ghost soldier" issue clearly is affecting decision-making within the Defense Department that affects U.S. personnel. I would like to know how DOD plans to mitigate any further risk to U.S. military and civilian personnel that may result from the ongoing "ghost soldier" problem.

Finally, how confident is the Defense Department that the ANDSF and the Afghan government have the capability and the will to effectively implement the new systems, and when will that implementation be fully achieved? When implemented, does the Defense Department expect the "ghost soldier" problem to be eliminated, or merely reduced?

Mr. Secretary, the "ghost soldier" problem has clearly existed in Afghanistan since the

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