

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 5, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write today to express concerns about the dangers of a premature drawdown of U.S. troops in Afghanistan and to encourage you to maintain current troop levels through 2016.

In January, we formally ended our combat mission in Afghanistan. U.S. forces continue to carry out the counterterrorism mission against al Qaeda and work with coalition partners in a train, advise, and assist mission in support of the Afghan National Security Forces. While we have achieved considerable progress in Afghanistan, the nation will once again become a safe haven for terrorism if we choose to abandon our investment.

Al Qaeda and its affiliates, the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, as well as the rise of ISIS, continue to present persistent and multifaceted challenges to the region. While the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces continues to improve, they still rely heavily on our training and expertise.

Our current force strength is the minimum capable of adequately staffing our bases. Any further reduction would result in base closures, minimizing our footprint and hindering our intelligence capabilities going forward. This would severely limit our ability to conduct counterterrorism operations.

There is also reason to be optimistic about the future of Afghanistan. Unlike our previous relationship with President Hamid Karzai, we have a willing partner in President Ashraf Ghani. While Karzai refused to sign a Bilateral Security Agreement with the U.S. and a Status of Forces Agreement with NATO, President Ghani signed both soon after taking office and has publically expressed his desire for U.S. troops to remain. Additionally, key economic indicators, such as commercial activity, infant mortality, and access to clean water and health facilities, show that life is improving for the average Afghan, in part, due to U.S. efforts.

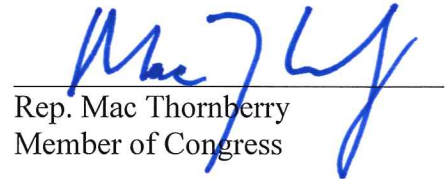
Many of us have served, or have family or friends who have served. After 14 years of war, we have a deep appreciation for peace. However, we must recognize that the fight against violent extremism cannot be won overnight. We must learn from our experience in Iraq and be careful to not put the progress we have made in jeopardy. Withdrawing from a country does not mean the problem goes away. Instead, premature withdrawal in Iraq allowed ISIS to take advantage of the nascent Iraqi Security Forces. We cannot allow this to happen again in Afghanistan.

Moreover, we must ensure that Afghanistan does not once again become a place for extremists to devise and carry out plots against the United States. Now is not the time to withdraw. Therefore, as you review recommendations for force strength in Afghanistan, we urge you to maintain a presence of at least 9,800 troops through 2016.

Sincerely,



Rep. Brad Wenstrup
Member of Congress



Rep. Mac Thornberry
Member of Congress



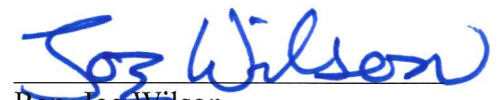
Rep. Michael Turner
Member of Congress



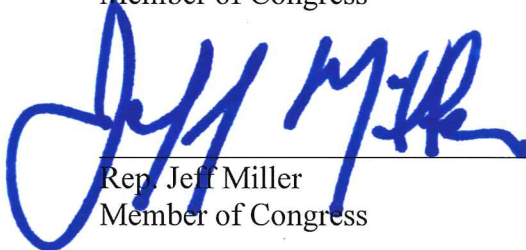
Rep. Joe Heck
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Rep. Rob Wittman
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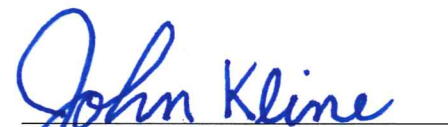
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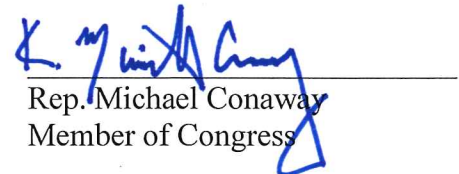
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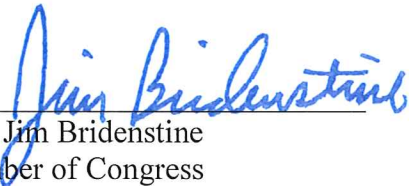
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Rep. Richard Nugent
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Rep. Paul Cook
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Rep. Jim Bridenstine
Member of Congress



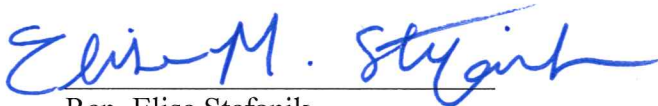
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Member of Congress



Rep. Bradley Byrne
Member of Congress



Rep. Ryan Zinke
Member of Congress



Rep. Elise Stefanik
Member of Congress



Rep. Martha McSally
Member of Congress



Rep. Steve Russell
Member of Congress