



## HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

### **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **CHAIRMAN HUNTER OPENING STATEMENT**

### ***Full Committee Hearing on Afghanistan: Operations and Reconstruction***

Washington, D.C. – If you watch the talking heads on television, it's pretty easy to pick up on the latest hot topics inside the Washington beltway. We may not learn too much factual information, but they are a good indicator of where the city's attention is. As we read, hear, and see Washington's chattering classes at work, we need to remember that there are some 444,900 American military personnel deployed around the world defending our freedom. Nearly 17,000 of them are in Afghanistan; just as they were yesterday and just as they'll be tomorrow.

Members of this committee have frequent opportunities to get updates on Afghanistan during our posture hearings and classified briefings. Nevertheless, it has been over a year since we held a hearing devoted solely to the topic. The gentleman from Missouri discussed this with me and I agreed one hundred percent that the committee needed to get a more formal update, especially since our authorization bill is off the floor.

A lot has happened in Afghanistan and we need to remind people of the substantial progress that's being made there. First, Afghanistan had the first national elections in its modern history when 8.1 million Afghans went to the polls last October and elected Hamid Karzai to the office of president. That's no small feat when you remember that just three and a half years ago some of the so-called experts were declaring that the Taliban were undefeatable and Afghans were incapable of governing themselves.

Second, in December of last year, President Karzai announced a multi-ethnic cabinet that's governing today and is spreading its authority throughout the country. It's a slow process and requires us to be patient with the complexity of Afghan politics. But, NATO is expanding its commitment and the Afghan people are demonstrating they've had enough violence and want democracy to succeed.

Third, the United States and other countries have come far in training an Afghan National Army that's loyal to the Afghan government and is capable of defending that government against extremists and foreign fighters who want to take the country back.

There's still a long way to go on all three fronts. We face challenges in reigning in the warlords, stopping the poppy growers and heroin dealers, and eliminating the remnants of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, but Afghanistan is off to a solid start. We need to remember that, and the thousands of American and coalition soldiers who are there making it happen and helping give the Afghan people a chance at a better future. That's part of what I want to accomplish with this hearing.

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