

I also do not believe that we can be successful in rooting them out of Pakistan if we fail in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have some inherent advantages for al Qaeda that other places may not. Having been in the region for over 20 years, they have married into local tribes and made contacts with other extremist organizations. These connections have allowed the senior leaders to hide successfully for many years.

Afghanistan is also of strategic value to al Qaeda. In losing Afghanistan, they lost not only the support of a government and the use of an entire country as a safe haven, but suffered a tremendous blow to their image. Reestablishing a safe haven in Afghanistan could rehabilitate this image among those who resent or oppose the United States, leading to increases in recruiting and funding.

Nor can we consider Afghanistan and Pakistan in isolation—the security situation in Afghanistan can have a negative impact on the stability of Pakistan. It is foolish to think that if the Taliban and al Qaeda were able to reestablish themselves in all or part of Afghanistan, they would not lend support to those militants seeking to overthrow or destabilize the Pakistani state. Al Qaeda has already assisted the Pakistani Taliban in carrying out attacks on the Pakistani government, and I would expect this aid to increase if al Qaeda regained a base in Afghanistan. There was an attack at a mosque earlier today that killed dozens. With a secure base for al Qaeda, I would expect many more such attacks. And the only thing worse than al Qaeda loose in Afghanistan again is a destabilized, nuclear-armed Pakistan.

On Tuesday night, the President proposed what I think is a good way ahead as we address this threat. From the extensive media reporting on the process, we all know how thorough a review was conducted by the White House, lasting months and including somewhere around 10 cabinet secretary level meetings and extensive consultation with every expert they could find.

President Obama's strategy rightly focuses on seizing the initiative from the enemy, building Afghan capacity, and ultimately allowing the Afghan government and security forces to take the lead in fighting this war.

The President has appropriately called for additional troops from our allies—this is not just America's war, and we must not allow it to become that. Perhaps more importantly, the President has put the burden of reform squarely on the Afghan government, laying out clear expectations of performance and promising support for those ministries and local leaders that perform.

The President has also rightly acknowledged the importance of Pakistan. Pakistan remains a challenge, playing a key and often contradictory role in the region. Pakistan, by assisting in the pursuit of al Qaeda and Afghan Taliban leaders, could help bring the war in Afghanistan to an end. Conversely, if Pakistan were to return to old habits of supporting the Afghan Taliban, the war may be almost impossible to win. More concerning, the continued ascendancy of militant movements in the region could destabilize Pakistan, a country with nuclear weapons. This could be disastrous for all of us.

I think this is a good strategy. Perhaps most importantly, it is a strategy that I believe has a good chance of success. In the past, I have often said that we lacked a strategy for the first 7 years of the war in Afghanistan. Some of my colleagues have suggested that this assertion may not be entirely fair. But, the result of whatever the

prior Administration thought it was doing, ultimately resembled conducting combat operations without any thought of what we were trying to accomplish. So having a strategy, much less a good one, is a great start.

President Obama also, I am pleased to say, took my advice. He listened to his military leaders, including Generals McChrystal and Petraeus, Admiral Mullen, and Secretary Gates. Ultimately, the President endorsed adding 30,000 troops to carry out his strategy. This is on top of the 21,000 he dispatched to Afghanistan earlier this year. In January 2009, there were about 33,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. In about 7 months, there will be three times that. That is, I believe, a clear sign of the President's resolve and willingness to do what it takes to be successful in Afghanistan.

Yesterday, the House Armed Services Committee, which I have to honor to chair, hosted Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, and Deputy Secretary of State Lew. Next Tuesday, we will hear from General McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry. Members, properly, have a lot of questions about the strategy, and we want to make sure that the details have been thought through. I'll list a few of the areas we have explored or will next week.

Many members are concerned about the July 2011 date to begin redeployment. So far, most have focused on that date as being set, rather than completely conditions based, but to me it looks like this is a case where there isn't much to complain about. Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen were pretty clear that not only were they comfortable with the date, but that they thought it served the useful purpose of motivating the Afghans.

To me, what happens after that date is at least as important as the date itself. Secretary Gates testified that the process of transition that begins on that date would itself be slow and conditions-based, so that while the start of the process was fixed in time, the end could be adjusted as required. And I think that flexibility and realistic approach to a difficult process is exactly right.

One other concern, and one that in my mind might be more realistic, is the unintended consequences of setting out such a message. The message of a gradual, conditions-based transition may not be understood the same way by all audiences. The Pakistanis may well believe that it signals that the United States is once again leaving the region, and that might undermine our hopes of gaining their cooperation. Various ethnic groups in Afghanistan, fearing a civil war after we begin to depart, could start stockpiling weaponry or hedge their bets in other unhelpful ways. I think we have to keep our eyes open for this possibility and be creative in reassuring the Afghans and the Pakistanis that we are not abandoning them.

Corruption in the Afghan government, and the legitimacy or illegitimacy of that government, is also frequently a subject of questioning. It's a concern I share, and one that President Karzai's recent election reinforced. On the positive side, there are ministers and ministries in Afghanistan that have functioned well—Minister Wardak at the Defense Ministry and Minister Atmar at the Interior Ministry are honest effective ministers. The Health Ministry, Education Ministry, and the National Solidarity Program, run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, all seem to be functioning well.

But there are also legitimate concerns. High level corruption among ministers and governors; shakedowns by police, judges, and other authorities; and perceptions that warlords are untouchable by the law feed the belief among the Afghan people that their gov-

ernment does not serve them. And President Karzai has not always been helpful—his family is perceived to be part of the problem, and his unwillingness to remove the immunity from some ministers so the Afghan Attorney General can indict them is not helpful.

There are ways we can help push for reform—for example, not working with those leaders who prove to be corrupt so that their ability to deliver for their followers or to make money is hampered—but we have to take this seriously. President Karzai, in his inauguration speech also promised to crack down on corruption and to hold a *loya jirga* of national reconciliation. I would like to hear from General McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry how we can hold him to these promises and push to have the *jirga* also help develop a compact of what the Afghan people have a right to expect from their government.

Members will also likely ask about the promised assessment of efforts in December 2010. I think that is a good time to begin such an assessment—six months after all the promised troops arrive in country—but members will likely have many questions about it. What will we assess? What is an acceptable level of progress? What are the options if progress is insufficient? These are all obvious questions. The one thing I would say is that I think it will behoove all of us to offer the Administration some breathing space before we make judgments about the success of the plan. Asking questions is fair, drawing conclusions about the success or failure of the strategy before it is really implemented probably isn't.

So, in the first few days after the announcement of the new strategy, those are some of my thoughts. I think the President is to be commended for the strategy and the resolve he is showing. I believe he is fully aware of the threat posed by al Qaeda and the potential posed by a sanctuary for terror in Afghanistan and a possibly destabilized Pakistan. These are serious threats we are facing, and the President is clearly prepared to take realistic, effective and fully resourced steps to address them.

So I conclude as I started, by thanking all of you for what you do, and by asking you to think of the brave men and women in uniform, and the civilians who will assist them, who will have to do the hard, dangerous work to make this strategy a success. We owe them a great deal, and we should never forget it.

Thank you.

TRIBUTE TO BART NELSON,
FOUNDER AND CEO OF NELSON
IRRIGATION CORP

HON. CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

Mrs. McMORRIS RODGERS. Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize Nelson Irrigation and its extraordinary founder, Bart Nelson. Recently recognized by the Seattle Business magazine as one of Washington's top innovators and entrepreneurs, Nelson has been one of the United States' leading pioneers in the field of agricultural irrigation.

Headquartered in Walla Walla, WA, Nelson Irrigation, Nelson, plans, designs, develops, manufactures, and sells proprietary products for the irrigation equipment market. His products are sold to customers throughout the United States and the world. What makes this

company and its founder so special is that Nelson is not just focused on running an economically successful company, but doing so in a responsible way. The company specifically focuses on using natural resources responsibly, thereby saving both water and energy with its innovative products.

If one drives through my home district of eastern Washington, you can't help but spot some of Nelson's products at work. These innovative irrigation systems are helping to produce food for an expanding global population. In fact, Nelson recognizes the importance of their innovative products not just helping feed a growing population, but improving the quality of life for countless people throughout this country and the world.

Madam Speaker, with such innovative, dedicated, and sincere entrepreneurs as Bart Nelson helping to expand the irrigation products to new levels, I am confident that both eastern Washington and the United States can look forward to a future of world-class innovation and prosperity in the agricultural industry.

HONORING THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RINGLING BROTHERS CIRCUS

HON. TAMMY BALDWIN

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

Ms. BALDWIN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the 125th anniversary of the Ringling Brothers Circus and to recognize the role of both the Circus World Museum and the Wisconsin Historical Society in the preservation of circus industry history. The Ringling Brothers Circus has become a celebrated national entertainment enterprise based in Baraboo, Wisconsin, while the Circus World Museum and Wisconsin Historical Society have developed an impressive collection of circus artifacts and knowledge.

The Ringling Brothers Circus rose to prominence under the leadership of several Baraboo area brothers, eventually becoming one of the most successful entertainment enterprises in American history. This circus has contributed to the economic and cultural vitality of Wisconsin since the Ringling brothers gave their first performance on May 19, 1884. Though Chas, Al, John, Alf, and Otto Ringling launched their small business with less than \$100 in assets, these five Baraboo natives went on to purchase the world famous Barnum and Bailey Circus. The organization continued to grow, exhibiting the unique talents and showmanship of this Sauk County family for hundreds of audiences across the country. Combining their passion for performance with an entrepreneurial spirit, the Ringling brothers created one of the longest-running entertainment enterprises in the world. The work of the Ringling brothers and the success of their circus provide impressive examples for ambitious performers and business people everywhere. I am proud of the group's contributions to both the state of Wisconsin and to audiences throughout America.

Over the past half century, the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Circus World Museum have become stewards of circus industry memorabilia and information. Baraboo is home to one of the largest collections of his-

torical circus artifacts in the world, and the Circus World Museum's Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center has become the world's foremost research facility for circus history. With objects dating back to 1793, these organizations are leaders, both on a local and national level, in the preservation of circus materials. By maintaining the documents, objects, and knowledge base associated with the circus, the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Circus World Museum have conserved a valuable aspect of our national heritage. The Historical Society's work on behalf of the Ringling Brothers Circus, as well as the circus industry as a whole, serves as an ideal example of its dedication to the local communities and to the enrichment of society through historical preservation.

The citizens of Baraboo can be proud of their city, and its role as the first home to the "Greatest Show on Earth." Since its inception, the Ringling Brothers Circus has cultivated a reputation for excellence in entertainment, while the Circus World Museum has set the standard for circus history preservation. I therefore commend Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus for its sustained contributions to the national circus industry, as well as the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Circus World Museum, for their dedication to circus history and research.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AUTHORITIES AND CORRECTIONS ACT OF 2009

SPEECH OF

HON. PAUL TONKO

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 7, 2009

Mr. TONKO. Mr. Speaker, as a new Member of Congress, I have spent this year actively seeking opportunities to offer constructive legislative proposals on issues important to my constituents and to the Nation. I have been honored to sponsor measures dealing with improving highway safety and fostering research and development for alternative energy.

In addition to my other legislation focused on energy and transportation safety, I also directed my staff to contact the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee because the protection and preservation of our parks, heritage areas, forests and public lands are of vital interest to me and the people I represent.

The committee informed me that the National Park Service needed legislation to deal with a number of technical concerns facing the agency, and I was honored to act as the sponsor.

H.R. 3804 includes 10-year reauthorizations for two important advisory boards, the National Park System Advisory Board and the National Park Service Concession Management Advisory Board.

The National Park System Advisory Board was first authorized in 1935 and advises the NPS Director and the Secretary of the Interior on matters relating to the agency, the National Park System, and programs administered by the NPS, including the designation of national historic landmarks and proposed national historic trails. A full, 10-year reauthorization of

the Board is critical to maintaining the excellent management standards set by the National Park Service.

The Concession Management Advisory Board was established by the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998. The seven-member panel advises the Secretary of the Interior and the National Park Service on matters relating to the effective management of concessions in units of the National Park System. Reauthorization of this Board is important to ensure that the lodging, transportation, dining and other services provided to park visitors are of the very highest quality.

H.R. 3804 also raises the ceiling for the popular Volunteers in Parks program from \$3.5 million to \$10 million. Volunteers, of course, are not paid, but many receive reimbursement for travel costs or other small expenses. Our national parks simply could not function without these volunteers, and the VIP program is really the least we can do to repay their enormous contributions.

At the request of the National Park Service, H.R. 3804 changes the designation of the Martin Luther King, Junior, National Historic Site in Atlanta to the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park, to better reflect the size and complexity of the unit.

The bill also makes several minor boundary adjustments that will allow the National Park Service to cooperate with other sites near the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial to make ticketing easier for visitors and makes technical corrections for six provisions in the omnibus parks bill from earlier this year.

Finally, H.R. 3804 will strengthen law enforcement in our national parks by increasing and standardizing penalties for violations of park laws.

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this bill so that our Park Service can move to a more stable future.

THE HEALTH CARE REALITY CHECK ACT

HON. EARL BLUMENAUER

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, today I am proud to introduce the Health Care Reality Check Act of 2009.

It has become clear that some of my colleagues in Congress lack proper perspective on the urgency of health reform because, ironically, as Members of Congress we enjoy some of the best health security in the world through our government-administered health care:

All Members of Congress are eligible—and most participate in—the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program, which provides all Federal employees with a Government-negotiated insurance exchange that is subsidized by their employer: the Federal Government;

Almost 150 Members of Congress qualify for Medicare, a single-payer Government insurance plan;

The 121 Senators and Representatives who served in our Armed Forces are eligible for the "socialized" health care we provide for all veterans; and

Members who aren't veterans can avail themselves to a similar "socialized" program—