

GED, it requires you to enroll in a qualified GED program. Education is the key to success in this country.

Finally, as a part of this bill that I was proud to support, it provides 2 years of preventing an over 27 percent cut to the Medicare part B Medicare reimbursement rates for both hospitals and physicians.

As a former health care provider, manager within rural hospitals, I know how devastating those cuts would be, and I was very proud that not only did we address that, we did it with more certainty than has ever been done in the past since 1997, when we did that for a 2-year period.

Mr. Speaker, I am very appreciative of my colleagues for supporting this bill and passing it out of the House. And I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that the Senate give it the same full due diligence in quickly moving it out of that side of Congress so that the American people can benefit from all of the provisions within that extension package.

END THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN NOW

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday The New York Times reported that our Ambassador in Afghanistan, Ryan C. Crocker, told a group of journalists that U.S. troops could stay in Afghanistan long past the President's 2014 deadline if the Afghan Government asked us to stay.

The very next day, The New York Times reported Afghan President Hamid Karzai blaming foreigners, including the United States, for the corruption that is so rampant in his government. He had the audacity to say this at an event marking International Anti-Corruption Day.

Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt countries on the face of the earth. Transparency International ranks Afghanistan as the second most corrupt government, right behind Somalia and North Korea, which tied for first place.

So I ask my colleagues, why should we shed a single drop more of blood, sacrifice the lives of our service men and women, for a corrupt government that doesn't even have the decency to take responsibility for its own failures.

Enough is enough. We have spent over \$440 billion on military operations alone in Afghanistan since 9/11. In 2012 we aim to spend another \$113 billion. By this time next year, our total spending on the war in Afghanistan, just the military operations, will be around \$557 billion. That's over half a trillion dollars.

And when I say "spend," I really mean borrow, because from day one of the Afghanistan war—and the Iraq war, for that matter—we have not paid for the military operations in these wars. We have borrowed nearly every single penny of that money, put it on the na-

tional credit card, let it rack up over a quarter of our cumulative deficit, and help explode our debt year after year for a decade.

Sadly, when it comes to paying for this war, too many in Washington are silent.

Mr. Speaker, over 1,800 service men and women have died in Afghanistan, 42 of them from Massachusetts. Over 14,000 wounded. Husbands, fathers, wives, and mothers. Sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Holes created in families and communities that can never be filled, losses that will be felt for a generation or more.

Each month the tally of dead and wounded gets higher. 2010 was the deadliest year for American troops in the history of the Afghanistan war. And 2011, a close second.

We have become numb to the numbers. We don't even hear them any more. But these losses resonate around family kitchen tables in the homes of the deployed every day and night of the year.

We all know that the human cost of the war is found not only on the battlefields of Afghanistan. It's also found in veterans hospitals and counseling clinics around the country. We continue to struggle with soaring rates of traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress and suicides among our soldiers and our veterans. So many leave the service or try and carry on military careers wounded in both body and soul.

Even if we were to leave Afghanistan tomorrow—and I'm so very glad to see that our troops are coming home from Iraq—our war debt will continue for decades. And for what? For 10 years of support for a corrupt government in Afghanistan? Ten years of sacrificing our brave uniformed men and women? Ten years of borrowing money we never had? This war is no longer about going after al Qaeda—which I voted to do. Osama bin Laden is dead. Instead, we're now bogged down in a seemingly endless occupation in support of an incompetent and corrupt Karzai government. This is not what I voted for.

So yes, I'm really worried when I pick up the newspaper and read Ambassador Crocker saying we may be in Afghanistan for years beyond 2014. The American people are way ahead of the Congress and the White House on this issue. They want this war ended now. But it seems that Washington just doesn't get it. But when all is said and done, the responsibility for continuing or ending the war is right here in this Chamber. We approved this war, we must now take the responsibility to end it.

This is why, Mr. Speaker, I will vote against the conference report on the FY 2012 National Defense Authorization bill. The defense bill includes many good and important provisions, but it does nothing, absolutely nothing to wind down the war in Afghanistan.

It's way past time to bring our troops home from Afghanistan. I can't authorize any more funding that doesn't ex-

plicitly call on the President to plan and carry out the accelerated removal of our troops.

Bring them home, Mr. President. Bring them all home now.

[From the New York Times, Dec. 10, 2011]

U.S. TROOPS COULD STAY IN AFGHANISTAN
PAST DEADLINE, ENVOY SAYS

(By Rod Nordland)

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN—The American ambassador to Afghanistan on Saturday raised the possibility that United States combat troops could stay in the country beyond the 2014 deadline that the White House had set for their withdrawal.

The ambassador, Ryan C. Crocker, speaking at a roundtable event with a small group of journalists, said that if the Afghan government wanted American troops to stay longer, the withdrawal could be slowed. "They would have to ask for it," he said. "I could certainly see us saying, 'Yeah, makes sense.'"

He emphasized, however, that no such decision had been made.

White House officials said that Mr. Crocker's comments were consistent with its previously stated position.

"The president never excluded the possibility that there would be some U.S. forces here, but he stressed that security would be under Afghan lead by 2014," said the embassy spokeswoman, Eileen O'Connor. "The president has always spoken of a responsible winding down of the efforts here, so talk of the possibility of some troops still being here post-2014 is not a change in policy."

But Mr. Crocker's comments were an explicit acknowledgment that the post-2014 forces may include combat troops, not just the trainers and advisers who had been publicly mentioned before.

His comments came as the administration was engaged in discussions with the Afghan government on arrangements after 2014. At a conference in Bonn, Germany, last week, President Hamid Karzai and other Afghan officials called for political and military support for at least another decade.

Referring to the NATO summit meeting in Lisbon last year at which Western leaders agreed to transfer security responsibility to Afghan forces by 2014, Mr. Crocker said: "There is nothing in the Lisbon declaration on 2014 that precludes an international military presence beyond 2014. That is to be determined by the parties, who could be numerous, not just us, as we get closer to that date."

In June, President Obama announced that American troop withdrawals would begin the following month, with 10,000 of the roughly 101,000 American troops then in the country to leave by Dec. 31, and an additional 23,000 to follow by the summer of 2012. "Our troops will continue coming home at a steady pace as Afghan security forces move into the lead," he said. "Our mission will change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security." Of the first 10,000, 4,000 have left, according to a senior NATO official. In most of those cases, personnel who had been scheduled to leave were not replaced, the official said.

"We are on a timeline, as you know," Mr. Crocker said. "Ten thousand out by the end of the year, that is being met." With the additional 23,000 by September 2012, he added, "that basically recovers the surge"—the reinforcements Mr. Obama ordered two years ago.

"Beyond that, there are no decisions," he said, adding, "And as far as I'm aware, there are no formal recommendations yet."

Asked if that meant that the United States would not necessarily withdraw all combat troops by 2014, Mr. Crocker said, "I don't know what we're going to be doing in 2014."

Caitlin Hayden, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council, said that "the president will make decisions on the size and shape of our presence after 2014 at the appropriate time, based on our interests and in consultation with our Afghan and NATO partners."

"We have been clear that any post-2014 presence by the U.S. would be at the invitation of the Afghan government and aimed at ensuring that we are able to target terrorists and support a sovereign Afghan government so that our enemies can't outlast us," she added. "We have also been very clear that we do not seek permanent bases in Afghanistan or a long-term military presence that would be a threat to Afghanistan's neighbors."

Military leaders have been quietly pushing to keep as many troops in the country as they can during the next two years as a safeguard while responsibility is transferred to Afghan forces.

On Wednesday, The Wall Street Journal reported that Gen. John R. Allen, the United States and NATO commander in Afghanistan, had been promoting the view that the withdrawals should stop after next year, with the remaining 68,000 soldiers to be kept in Afghanistan through 2013, before cuts resume in 2014. The article said he had not formally recommended that course of action, however.

Mr. Crocker noted that General Allen had made it clear that trainers and advisers would be likely to remain after 2014. Mr. Crocker said that in some cases "major weapons systems will not reach Afghanistan" until after 2014, so Afghans will need assistance learning how to operate and maintain them.

He said he did not expect America's diplomatic presence to be reduced along with the military pullback. The number of civilian American government employees in Afghanistan increased more than threefold from 2009 to 2011, to more than 1,130, from 320.

"The decisions get made in Washington, but it's my intention that we're going to stay pretty steady," he said. "As the military does draw down, I think our role will even increase in importance."

[From the New York Times, Dec. 11, 2011]

KARZAI SAYS FOREIGNERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CORRUPTION

(By Alissa J. Rubin)

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN.—President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan blamed foreigners on Sunday for the corruption of Afghan officials and demanded that the United States extradite the former chief of the Afghan Central Bank in connection with the collapse of Kabul Bank, the country's largest financial institution.

The former governor of the Central Bank, Qadir Fitrat, is living in Virginia. He fled Afghanistan, saying he feared for his life after he was involved in making public the massive fraud at Kabul Bank and removing its senior management.

Neither of the top bank officers nor any of the major shareholders, who include a brother of Mr. Karzai's and a brother of the first vice president, Marshal Fahim, have been prosecuted, although all of them are still in Afghanistan.

Referring to Mr. Fitrat, Mr. Karzai said, "The government of the United States should cooperate and hand him over to us."

"Bring Fitrat and hand him over to Afghanistan to make clear who is to blame," he said. "But our hand can't reach to America."

Mr. Karzai made the remarks at an event sponsored by the United Nations to mark International Anti-Corruption Day. Afghanistan is one of the world's most corrupt countries, tying for second worst in rankings by Transparency International, which tracks perceptions of global corruption.

Several Western diplomats and officials working with the Afghan government said they were disappointed by Mr. Karzai's speech, in which he appeared to again shift much of the blame for corruption to foreigners. While foreigners are unquestionably involved in some of the corruption, they shared responsibility with the Afghans and were only peripherally involved in the Kabul Bank debacle.

Mr. Karzai also asked that foreigners who give aid to the country tell Afghan officials if government officials or their relatives ask for bribes. Foreign governments have helped finance anticorruption efforts, but the Afghans have often squashed high-profile corruption prosecutions of senior officials. That has been a continuing effort by NATO to comb through military contracts with Afghan businesses to detect corruption and terminate contracts in which there has been manifest abuse. That effort has gone on largely behind the scenes, so it is difficult to tell if it has had much success.

Ryan C. Crocker, the American ambassador, said he believed that corruption was now being taken more seriously, although progress was slow and none of the main people responsible for the Kabul Bank fraud had been prosecuted. The Afghan government lost more than \$850 million in the bank's collapse. While some of that money has been recovered—more than expected, according to several officials—the government will probably have to pay \$450 million to \$500 million to cover losses.

"I am told they have a series of indictments that have been kept in the pending file as they concentrate on asset recovery," Mr. Crocker told reporters on Saturday. "Look, it's hardly a perfect world. And it isn't going to be for quite some time. What I look for is a trajectory: Is the line going up or down? Very cautiously and very incrementally, I see it going up. In other words, corruption is being taken more seriously at higher levels."

"Does that mean we've turned the corner? We'll see," he added.

Mr. Karzai's focus on Mr. Fitrat and his jab at the United States are the latest in a series of similar comments he has made about the fraud at Kabul Bank. In an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel last week, he also blamed the United States for Kabul Bank's troubles, saying, "The Americans never told us about this."

"We believed a certain embassy was trying to create financial trouble for us," he said. "We felt the whole bank scam was created by foreign hands." Mr. Karzai declined to be specific, but the American Embassy is the only one that has deeply consulted with the Afghan banking system.

CONGRATULATING ROBERT GRIFFIN, III

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FLORES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FLORES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate a constituent of Texas District 17. His name is Robert Griffin, III, of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and he is the recipient of the 2011 Heisman Memorial Trophy.

The son of two U.S. Army sergeants, RG3, as he is more popularly known,

epitomizes what it means to be a student athlete and a role model for all Americans.

During the Baylor Bears' 2011 season, Robert threw for nearly 4,000 yards and had 45 touchdowns. His 72 percent completion rate placed him among the most accurate passers in the Nation, and he was the only player in the country who had at least 3,300 passing yards and 300 rushing yards.

□ 1030

He is one of only three players in Football Bowl Subdivision history with 10,000 career passing yards and 2,000 career rushing yards. He owns or shares 30 Baylor football records.

Among his awards and accolades in 2011 were the Chic Harley Award for the National Player of the Year, the Big 12 Player of the Year, first team All-American, the Davey O'Brien Award, and, of course, the 77th annual Heisman Memorial Trophy, awarded to the most outstanding player in college football each year. He did all of this while leading the Bears to their first nine-win regular season since 1986 and a berth in the Alamo Bowl in 2011.

What makes Robert such an excellent role model is that his success at Baylor has not only been on the field. Robert graduated from Baylor in 3 years with a 3.67 GPA and a degree in political science. He is currently in graduate school pursuing a master's in communication and plans to attend law school in the future. He is a six-time member of the Big 12 Commissioner's Honor Roll and a two-time Dean's List honoree. This year, he was named second team Academic All-American.

Robert is also very active in his community, regularly volunteering for several charities in the Waco area. Robert is also a world-class hurdler, and he hopes to qualify for the 2012 Olympic Team. I am personally proud of RG III because he is a fine Christian man and publicly professes his faith in God.

I also want to congratulate Baylor University and football coach Art Briles on a great 2011 football season. As Coach Briles says, "great things come with great effort," and the Baylor Nation should be justifiably proud of their football team and coaching staff for their great effort this year.

Before I close, I would like to wish all Americans a safe and fulfilling Christmas season and holiday season. I ask that all of us continue to pray for our country and our military men and women during these difficult times.

Sic 'em, Bears.

THE OBLIGATION OF EVERY CITIZEN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, as we move toward the close of this congressional session, I have been embarrassed at the number of people that have recognized me and ask, What's wrong with