

As many of us enjoyed turkey, ham, and all the fixins' on Thanksgiving, thousands of troops continued to honorably serve our country overseas. It is because of their sacrifice and the sacrifice of their families, that we celebrated peacefully here in Virginia and across the country. We have much to be thankful for, but we especially thank those troops and their families for their service and sacrifice. Just two days before Thanksgiving, I returned from a Congressional delegation fact-finding trip to Afghanistan to meet with troops and American military leaders, and to hear of Afghan efforts from local government officials.

It was a quick two-day visit, stopping in Kabul, Regional Command - East, and Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan for meetings with U.S. Ambassador Eikenberry, American military personnel, and Afghan national and local officials. Discussions centered around a wide range of issues including the recent elections, the status of the Afghan National Security Forces, and the overall security and political pictures in Afghanistan. In Kabul and at Camp Leatherneck in the Helmand Province, I especially enjoyed having lunch with numerous Virginians serving in Afghanistan.

There is still much progress to be made in Afghanistan -- both in the government and with its security forces, but it is evident we are making progress. It is invaluable to have the opportunity to travel there to visit with our troops, commanders, and local Afghans, especially as a member of the House Armed Services Committee which oversees and debates many aspects of this country's defense policies. This trip gave true perspective to the conditions on the ground and will help us better understand how we can best support the efforts of our men and women in uniform as they serve overseas in combat situations and as they work to transition security responsibilities to Afghan security forces. For more details about the trip, [visit my website for my personal journal](#)

Back in Washington, DC, House leaders brought legislation to the floor for a vote on Thursday, December 2, that failed to extend all tax cuts that will expire at the end of the year. I don't think it gets any simpler than this - higher taxes will not get anyone hired. We must be doing everything in our power to create an atmosphere of growth for our economy, and the legislation voted on this week failed to do that. The most recent jobs report released Friday, December 3, showed that unemployment continues to hover around 10% with a .2% increase over the previous month. We cannot afford to raise taxes on hard-working Americans. I believe that hard-earned taxpayer dollars should remain with families and businesses, rather than being sent to Washington, DC. However, the debate on these tax cuts is not over, and I look forward to supporting a bill that extends the tax cuts for every American, to encourage economic growth across Virginia and across this country.

On Tuesday, December 7, I hope you'll join me for a telephone conference to discuss the issues before Congress, as we wrap up the 111th Congress and begin the 112th Congress in January 2011. I'll be hosting this town hall Tuesday evening, at 7:00 p.m.- 8:00 p.m. You can call 877-229-8493 and enter the pass code 13327 to join me. And if you can't join, but have thoughts, questions, or issues to discuss, please contact my office at 202-225-4261 or by email on my website <http://wittman.house.gov> .

*Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.*