

Opening Statement of Chairman Rand Paul, M.D
Federal Spending Oversight Subcommittee

Afghanistan in Review – Oversight of U.S. Spending in Afghanistan
5/9/2018

I call this hearing of the Federal Spending Oversight Subcommittee to order.

Almost 17 years ago the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to topple the Taliban regime that provided safe harbor to the perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

I think that was the right thing to do at the time, but I think we have simply stayed too long. This is the longest military engagement in U.S. history. We have already been there 7 years longer than the Soviets, and their occupation is often characterized as a failure – their Vietnam.

Instead of learning from their experience, we seem to want to duplicate it. We have occupied their old bases, we are trying to build the same kind of infrastructure, and we are fighting the same kind of guerrilla force.

What is more troubling is that some talk about never coming home. We are told our mission there is vital and that we are making a stable country in the region which will pay a peace dividend even if we have to stay 50 years. 50 years?

Recently, Secretary Pompeo admitted there is not a military end to the Afghan War, and yet this administration just upped our troop numbers.

- We build dams and electric transmission lines and the Taliban blow them up, or worse, take them over and sell the power back to the Afghan people. And by the way, while we are building infrastructure there, our infrastructure back home is aging and crumbling.

- The country isn't safe. You cannot leave the embassy and most of the time our personnel cannot even visit many of the infrastructure projects we pay for. Let me repeat that: We cannot even visit many of the projects we are paying for.
- We have an opium problem here in the U.S., and despite spending over \$8 billion, Afghanistan is still a leading producer of poppies.

This is just insane. And to top it all off, we are spending over \$40 billion, each year for this. So this hearing is to really take a deeper dive to examine that spending.

We have the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction here today, to talk about some of his great work exposing things like the \$42 million natural gas, gas station, the \$60 million power transmission system that doesn't work, buildings that melt in the rain, and the \$80 million consulate we never occupied because it was not secure. We want to hear about their ongoing corruption review as well.

Our second panel will be staff from this Subcommittee who recently returned from an oversight trip to Kabul. As mindboggling as the waste seems back here in Washington, I understand from them it is all the more galling when you are there on the ground.

I've made it no secret I think we should come home. I think we went in for the right reasons but we stayed way too long. It isn't our job to build countries and frankly I think we do a poor job of it. I think we anger as many people as we help – and that should make the taxpayers back home angry.

With that, I'll recognize Ranking Member Peters for his opening statement. Senator Peters.