



U.S. CONGRESSMAN

David Price

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE 4TH DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA

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Trip Report: Macedonia, Kosovo and Afghanistan

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Dear Friend:

I recently returned from an enlightening and productive trip to [Afghanistan](#), Macedonia, and Kosovo, and want to share some of my impressions.

As you may know, I have been serving as ranking Democrat on the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC), which I helped establish last year, to provide support and assistance to legislatures in developing democracies. Along with three of my colleagues, I visited the parliaments of Macedonia and Afghanistan to provide such assistance. We also celebrated Thanksgiving Day at Camp Bondsteel with our troops serving in Kosovo.

Macedonia: A Democratic Foothold in the Balkans

Our first stop was Skopje, Macedonia, where we worked with Macedonian Members of Parliament (MPs) on improving government oversight, strengthening committees, and enhancing constituent relations. Independent since 1991, Macedonia has emerged from the former Yugoslavia as one of the most promising democracies in the Balkans. Its parliament has recently undergone a shift in party control, and the ethnic and regional divisions that have led to violent conflict elsewhere are expressed and tempered through vigorous debate. But Macedonia, a small country of only 2 million citizens, is often forgotten by foreign policymakers here in Washington. As Macedonia moves to become a member of both NATO and the European Union – on this goal virtually all parties agree – it is essential for the U.S. to offer support. Macedonia has the potential to give democracy a critical foothold in the tumultuous Balkan region.



Rep. David Dreier (R-CA) and I are welcomed by Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski.

Kosovo: Precarious Status for the Region's Flashpoint

On Thanksgiving Day, our delegation traveled to Kosovo. We first visited the capital city, Pristina, where we met with Prime Minister Agim Ceku and received a briefing from the UN Mission in Kosovo about Kosovo's status. I can report that the people of Kosovo welcome Americans with open arms, thanks to our intervention against the genocidal attacks of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s. There is even a Bill Clinton Avenue! Early next year, the international community will help facilitate a final agreement on Kosovo's status; that is, whether it will become an independent nation, with guarantees for some self-governance for Serbian communities, or remain part of Serbia in some form. This agreement could provide a foundation for a lasting peace in the region, or it could precipitate a return to conflict. I left Pristina committed to increasing the U.S. role in supporting Kosovo as this process unfolds.

We then traveled to Camp Bondsteel, where we shared Thanksgiving Dinner with American troops stationed there. I dined with three North Carolinians, including Colonel Steven Scott, a Durham National

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Guardsmen. Though it's always hard to be away from home for Thanksgiving, sharing this holiday with our troops was a great honor and privilege.

Afghanistan: A Critical Situation Demanding Our Immediate Attention

Our final stop was Kabul, Afghanistan, where we once again worked with elected leaders to strengthen their parliament. We met with a group of female parliamentarians to learn about the unique challenges they face. We also worked with Afghan MPs on parliamentary rules, defense and homeland security oversight,



I am pictured here meeting with Members of the Afghan Parliament to discuss oversight responsibilities of the legislative branch.

budgetary analysis, and other topics critical to an effective parliament. We participated in the opening of a parliamentary library equipped in part through our assistance. Our work in Afghanistan was one of the most rewarding experiences I've had in my work with our Commission.

While in Kabul, I had the opportunity to see first-hand the work of Coalition Forces, the status of rebuilding efforts, and the continuing challenges we face in Afghanistan. I came away with one simple, but critical, conclusion: Afghanistan is not Iraq, and we should not treat it so. Like Iraq, its security has deteriorated recently, but the prospects for a viable, legitimate government and for broadly-based international support are far more promising. The parliament contains widely diverse elements, some of which were formerly at war. In one year's time, it has come a long way as

an institution, and our Commission's partnership aims to encourage that development.

Early on, Afghanistan suffered from the Bush Administration's diversion of attention and assets toward Iraq. At this juncture, we and our NATO allies must reaffirm our commitment to the security, reconstruction, and self-governance of Afghanistan. It is a simple and obvious choice, and I hope we will make the right one. You can be sure that I'll be working to support a new, revitalized focus on Afghanistan, the true central battleground of the war against terrorism.

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you my experiences as I work with others to promote our country's partnerships throughout the world. And as always, I encourage you to keep in touch on issues that come before the Congress.

Sincerely,

David Price