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Washington, DC - In an effort to strengthen the relationship between the United States and the post-Taliban government in Afghanistan, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-Fair Lawn) today met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his Cabinet Ministers during a meeting of the Congressional U.S-Afghan Caucus of which the Congressman is a member. Rothman pledged to use his position on the powerful House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations to help obtain U.S. aid for Afghanistan to ensure that the U.S. and coalition forces fighting to destroy the remnants of al Qaeda and the Taliban, and stabilize that country, are successful.

"I was delighted to meet today with Afghan President Karzai to discuss ways in which the United States can better support Afghanistan in our joint efforts to arrest or kill remaining elements of al Qaeda and the Taliban," Rothman said. "In addition, we talked about the progress of Karzai's civil and political reforms, including an education system open to boys and girls, improved health care for the Afghan people and an accurate and transparent voter registration process that is proceeding in advance of Afghanistan's scheduled October 2004 democratic elections."

Currently, there are approximately 20,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, along with more than 6,000 soldiers from 35 different countries. This year, Afghanistan is receiving \$1.6 billion in U.S. aid for security purposes, economic development, health care, disaster relief, food, and other necessities.

"I told President Karzai, whom I greatly admire and respect, that I will also fight for the U.S. aid his country needs to realize the social and democratic reforms he has worked so hard to achieve. This will further enhance U.S. security by successfully helping to create another moderate and successful Islamic country, and thus eliminate another breeding ground for terrorists," Rothman said.

During a joint-address to Congress this morning, Karzai said, "I thank [the Congress] and the people of this great country for your generosity and commitment to our people. You have supported us with your resources, with your leadership in the world community and, most importantly, with the precious lives of your soldiers."

The U.S.-Afghan Caucus is a bipartisan group of Members of Congress whose purpose is to promote and strengthen the relationship between the United States and Afghanistan, and to assist Afghanistan in its efforts to bring peace, prosperity, and democracy to the Afghan people.

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