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TIMOTHY J. WALZ
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
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VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Oversight

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr President,

Thank you for your leadership on developing the way forward in Afghanistan. I appreciate and respect the fact that you took the necessary time to review all aspects of the situation before making your final decision. This year marked the eighth anniversary of the horrific events of 9/11. As our nation takes part in a long-overdue conversation about our strategy in Afghanistan, I believe the fight there is as vital as ever to our national security. Every bit of intelligence that I have seen says that Al Qaeda continues to seek a safe haven in Afghanistan from which they will harm America, so I applaud you for taking this threat so seriously while also taking time to develop the sound strategy our men and women in uniform deserve.

In the past few months, I have held two town hall meetings on the subject of Afghanistan to hear directly from my constituents and to address their questions and concerns. I held a town hall on Monday, and my constituents still have several unanswered questions.

While the threat from those who would hurt us has not vanished, some people in my district are skeptical about maintaining or increasing our military presence in Afghanistan, especially when they have seen so little progress in the region in recent years. My constituents want to know that success in the region is possible and that your new strategy will help us defeat terrorism, strengthen the Afghan military and police force and allow a speedy, but responsible, exit for American forces. They also want to be sure our armed forces have the tools and training they need to be successful.

Although you addressed many of these issues in your speech at West Point, I have some more detailed questions about the strategy based on my own research and analysis and on the concerns I've heard from my constituents. I shared your desire to be transparent and accountable on this issue. Therefore, I'm asking that some of the plan's more granular details be communicated to Congress and the American people in a way that will not put our troops' lives in danger.

Though I believe you have formulated a strong overall plan for the region at the strategic level, I want to be able to respond to my constituents with answers to their questions. Additionally, I have formulated questions based on my 24 years of experience as an enlisted member of the Minnesota National Guard. Hence, I respectfully request the following questions be answered by members of your Administration:

- Within the White House, who is responsible for coordinating our national security strategy for the AfPak region? What specific methods are being used to coordinate the Department of State, the Department of Defense, law enforcement agencies and other governmental agencies into one synchronous plan for the region?
- On a strategic level, how will the White House measure the progress of the region?
- How will the Defense and State Departments execute an integrated and synchronized civil-military-diplomatic strategy?
- What are the details of the “civilian-surge?” How many civilians will be added to the mission and what will their skill sets contain? Where will these assets be placed and what will be their mission? How will these assets be synchronized into the overall plan for the region?
- How will USAID and the State Department promote economic stability and increase the capacity for basic needs services within Afghanistan?
- How much of a threat does Al Qaeda pose on Afghanistan and Pakistan? How much of a threat does the Taliban pose on the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan? Are there definite support connections between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban and between the Taliban and the Pakistani government?
- What specific measures will ISAF take to deal with corruption and the lack of capacity within the Afghan Government and Afghan security forces?
- How is the population-centric strategy going to be executed? Is ISAF going to place a special emphasis on allying with the Pashtun population?
- What are the methods coalition forces will seek to disrupt, deny, and defeat Al Qaeda and Taliban forces? In a general sense, what will be the task and purpose of each of the surge’s brigade-level combat units? What is the commander’s intent for these units?
- What is the training plan to plan to build up the Afghan security forces? How will our forces build up and train Afghan security forces using performance measures?
- What is the airlift plan for our surge forces?
- What is our strategy for counternarcotics? How does this strategy synch with the larger strategy for the region?
- What is the Administration doing to increase transparency and accountability of civilian contractors involved in the region?
- How will our nation pay for our continued efforts in the region?

At their earliest convenience, I would appreciate hearing from the appropriate members of your Administration with more details

As our nation enters its eighth year in Afghanistan, it is critical that this issue receive the proper amount of attention both in the public forum and within Congress. The American people understand this fact and are becoming more actively engaged on this critical issue.

Thank you, again, for your leadership on this important national security issue, and I forward to working with you

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Walz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Tim Walz
Member of Congress

CC:
The Honorable Robert Gates, Department of Defense
The Honorable Hillary Clinton, Department of State