

Aaron Keck Reporting

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WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Congressman David Price (D-Chapel Hill) spent the weekend in Afghanistan, meeting with government and opposition leaders to gauge the country's political situation as the U.S. prepares to end its long occupation by 2014.

"We got two full days on the ground in Afghanistan," he says. "The work we've been doing now, very intensively for six years, with (their) parliament, is going to be critical to that country's ability to govern itself..."

"There's every reason that we need to phase down our military presence in Afghanistan...(but) we do need to stay engaged with them in a non-military way."

Rep. Price was in Afghanistan this weekend with the House Democracy Partnership, which he co-chairs with Republican Congressman David Dreier. While there, they met with members of the Afghan parliament, President Hamid Karzai, and opposition leader Dr. Abdullah Abdullah.

Since its inception in 2005, the House Democracy Partnership has engaged in peer-to-peer exchange programs with other national legislatures to promote democracy, stability, and multinational cooperation. As co-chair, Rep. Price has made three trips to Afghanistan.

"The Afghans themselves need to take hold of their own future," he says, "(but) this targeted kind of diplomacy that we've engaged in on the House Democracy Partnership can be very important."

That diplomacy may be particularly important in Afghanistan: Rep. Price says a strong

parliament is essential to check the power of the Afghan president and protect democratic institutions. Price says he's optimistic about the future, but the Afghan parliament faces incredible obstacles.

"There in the lower house of the parliament, on two of the seats, are pictures of two assassinated colleagues. Can you imagine what it's like to live with that every day? Those are very recent assassinations...

"This is a country that has a long way to go in terms of stability and successful governance, and yet we and they have a stake in their succeeding."

During the HDP's visit, the Afghan Parliament enacted the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement.