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Jones pushes for end to Afghanistan War

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They are faces, not numbers, for Rep. Walter B. Jones, R-NC.

Jones has signed more than 9,803 letters to immediate and extended family members of the fallen. And he regularly visits those wounded in battle.

At least 1,462 U.S. military personnel have died since the 2001 beginning of war in Afghanistan, Department of Defense numbers through Feb. 7 show. American military wounded in action in Operation Enduring Freedom now totals 10,308, according to the DoD.

“We are mentally and physically breaking the military,” Jones said. “We are wearing them out.”

Jones, who handily won reelection to an eighth District 3 House term in 2010 in an area that includes or abuts military bases including Camp Lejeune, Cherry Point and Seymour Johnson, was initially a strong supporter of U.S. military action after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

But in 2005, he joined three other congressmen in introducing a resolution to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq beginning in October 2006. He said he realized that there had been little reason to go to war and that his early support had been based on selective intelligence supplied to Congress.

Slow but growing support among his House Republican colleagues is now encouraging Jones in his push to bring the U.S. military home from Afghanistan, too.

Jones attended a classified House Armed Services Committee briefing on the Afghanistan War Thursday and said later that he spent his five allotted minutes “asking again for clarification of why we are there.”

“A year ago there were probably seven or eight Republican representatives who feel as I do about getting out,” he said. “Now with the new group coming in, we’ve got 10 who won office while saying we need to get out.

“There is a small movement developing, still small if we had to vote, but even the number of conservatives who want to get our troops out is growing. Here we are talking about staying in Afghanistan, and 72 percent of the people are saying bring them home” according to a Gallop poll.

That poll was eye-opening, he said, and he used it in the briefing on Thursday. The mid-January poll showed 86 percent of Democrats, 72 percent of Independents and 61 percent of Republicans polled want an escalated timetable for withdrawal, he said.

“And we’re being told (military officials) want more time,” Jones said. “They can’t explain what victory looks like and how to achieve victory. I’m tired of seeing our young people getting killed and getting their arms and legs blown off.”

Jones said he can’t share what was said in the briefing, which was confidential.

“But I can tell you what I said. I said, ‘We’re asking the same old questions and there are no answers. I’m not convinced. What do you say to the mother, father, wife of our military killed there — that we support a corrupt government in a fight we can’t win?’”

Jones said a retired general who advises him tells him that Afghanistan is a different world, one unchanged since Alexander the Great. The general also points out that al Qaida has moved to a different part of the world.

There’s also the issue of the money being spent on efforts in Afghanistan.

“The next budget for that action that we will vote on this spring calls for \$120 billion. Here we are, can’t even balance our books and are spending this,” he said.

He worries that troops will be there four to five more years unless Congress votes to get them out.

“That’s what I’m trying to do with my colleagues of both parties,” he said. “We’ve got to make some sense out of this craziness.”