

Following President Obama's address to the nation at the United States Military Academy in West Point Tuesday, Congressman Peter Welch issued the following statement:

"Tonight, President Obama presented the right analysis of the situation in Afghanistan but reached the wrong conclusion.

"The President understands that we must vigorously protect Americans against another attack by al-Qaida. He recognizes the need for a regional, diplomatic effort that takes into consideration the strategic importance of Pakistan. And he understands that President Karzai's failure to root out systemic corruption poses a grave challenge to the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

"Nevertheless, increasing our military footprint in Afghanistan will not achieve the goals the President outlined. Our goal, and our obligation, is to protect the American people from another al-Qaida attack. Al-Qaida is a dispersed group pursuing a radical and violent agenda. It is not a nation state. Our strategy should focus on containing and degrading al-Qaida worldwide, not expanding our military footprint in Afghanistan, a country rife with corruption and a history of tribal loyalties rather than stable government institutions.

"The President's policy is not financially sustainable. The cost of supporting one soldier for one year is \$1 million – or \$30 billion per year for the 30,000 new troops recommended tonight by the President. Our nation is crippled by record deficits and skyrocketing unemployment. We need to spend our scarce resources rebuilding America, not nation-building abroad."