

[By Neal Goswami](#)

Vermont Democratic Rep. Peter Welch and Utah Republican Jason Chaffetz brought their case for ending the war in Afghanistan directly to Vermonters Tuesday in a statewide telephone conference call.

Welch and Chaffetz, a political odd couple, have found common ground and joined forces in an effort to have U.S. troops withdrawn from Afghanistan, save those directly involved in counter-terrorism operations.

"I'm a Republican, a conservative from Utah, but I'm proud and glad to be on this call. Peter Welch is one of the more agreeable people to get along with, and it's, I think, what the American people want, for people on both sides to come together," Chaffetz, who is serving his second term in the House, told those who joined the two lawmakers on the phone.

Welch and Chaffetz have been seeking support among House colleagues to end the war in Afghanistan following the death of Osama bin Laden at the hands of U.S. commandos. Instead of a costly nation-building and counter-insurgency strategy, American policy should instead rely on a counter-terrorism strategy focused on drones and special forces to take out Taliban and al-Qaida fighters, they have argued.

"The killing of Osama bin Laden, bringing him to justice earlier this month by a targeted, special forces raid in Pakistan, has allowed members to ask questions about the future of the war in Afghanistan and our current anti-terrorism policy," Welch said. "Many in Congress are asking the question: Is the current strategy in Afghanistan effective in combating the threat of terrorism, and is it financially sustainable when our country is facing such incredible fiscal challenges?"

Two amendments they sponsored that called for a withdrawal of troops recently failed in the House, but the level of support the amendments received indicates growing unease in Congress over the 10-year-old mission in Afghanistan.

Chaffetz said their message is clear -- it is time to bring U.S. troops home but remain involved in counter-terrorism operations around the globe. "That's not something we should ever be bashful about saying," he said.

The argument for staying in Afghanistan could be applied to advocate for military action in many countries, Chaffetz said. "Certainly, if those metrics for that type of action were applied to other countries we'd be in countries in almost every continent."

Welch said the U.S. experienced "mission creep" in Afghanistan that extended U.S. objectives and caused led to "the responsibility of building this feudal society into a modern nation-state."

Several callers from Bennington County raised questions or concerns about withdrawing troops. "Carol" in Manchester questioned whether a quick withdrawal would allow the Taliban to regroup.

Welch said the threat to the U.S. was from the safe haven the Taliban provided to al-Qaida, but the terror group has largely been chased out of the country.

"They're terrible people and the things they believe are not the things that we believe. We all understand that," Welch said. "But the threat to America was al-Qaida and the safe haven that was provided by the Taliban. So, the counter-terrorism approach that we believe can be effective to protect us can address that."

"Reg" in Bennington said he feared politics would scuttle any effort to end the war because many Republicans in Congress "seem to be more intent on making Obama look bad and blocking his positions, whatever they might be."

Chaffetz said Republican support for the position he shares with Welch -- and he hopes Obama will adopt -- is growing. "I hope the growing number of Republicans that have voted in favor of the two amendments give him whatever air cover he needs if he truly does want to bring the troops home," he said.

Chaffetz said he disagrees with the president on many issues, but "cannot go so far as to say that I think he's playing politics with our troops."

"I would not take it that far," Chaffetz said. "We're going to have to sort out the people who are opposed to the president always because he's the president and let's argue out the issues one at a time."

Meanwhile, "John" in Bennington said he is concerned the war could burden the U.S. in ways similar to past wars.

"Are we going to end up like we did in Vietnam where we have half a million troops go over there and die because of politics? Or are we going to end up with another place we have to rebuild like Germany?" he asked.

"Edward," a Burlington resident, was skeptical of the plan advocated by Welch and Chaffetz, saying a withdrawal of U.S troops "sends the message that we don't have the staying power."

"It's always sent a message to our enemies that if we wait long enough we'll lose our resolve and just pull out," he said. "I'm just concerned with us leaving of a vacuum being there."

Any withdrawal of troops must be managed by the military, Welch said, not politicians.

"Congress can't do that. Jason and I can't really micro-manage. We have to really defer to the leadership of our military. The job that the president and we in Congress have is to try to promote a policy that is in the interest of the national security of this country," he said.