have built their lives and invested much of their earnings into their homes in Forest Glen, Sauganash, North Park, and Harwood Heights. My constituents worry that their peace of mind and property values are being eroded in the name of profits and air traveler convenience.

As one constituent told me:

> We can no longer open our windows, enjoy eating outside on our new front porch, or gardening.

Madam Speaker, I agree. Neighbors should not be exiled from backyards and gardens because of the ceaseless din of commercial aircraft. I also believe that if we take the right steps, maintaining a vibrant neighborhood won't be incompatible with a safe and efficient O'Hare.

Since O'Hare became part of my district in January, I have pushed for important changes that can bring relief to residents in the near term. I have advocated that O'Hare continue to use all available runways to mitigate the increase in air traffic, and I have called for expanding the practice of routing aircraft over industrial parks, interstates, and forest preserves, not over residents' backyards.

But we need to do more. The Federal Aviation Administration needs to overhaul the metric it uses to determine how much noise around airports is acceptable. The FAA's current measurement—the so-called 65 DNL—is outdated and woefully incomplete at measuring the impact of unabated noise overhead. I know the FAA has been studying and reviewing the 65 DNL metric for years. It is time to stop studying this 30-year-old relic and take action.

So, too, must the city of Chicago and the airlines. The city has told us it will not revisit its Fly Quiet program, which adjusts runway usage at night, until the O'Hare modernization is completed in 2020. There may be obstacles to reviewing this program, but the city needs to be more nimble in addressing the needs of these residents.

The airlines, too, must help. They will save millions in lower operating costs as delays at O'Hare decrease. A portion of these savings should be earmarked for neighborhood soundproofing efforts. The airlines must also get quieter quicker. That is why I just introduced the Silent Skies bill, which will accelerate the airlines' use of newer, quieter aircraft.

Madam Speaker, I know the O'Hare modernization plan is here to stay; and I know air traffic noise, like noise from expressways or the ''el'' is a fact of life in our metropolitan area. But it is also a fact that neighborhoods, not noisy aircraft, make life in Chicago and its suburbs special. We all need to work together to ensure the vitality of our neighborhoods isn't drowned out in a roar of aircraft overhead.

□ 1015

LIEUTENANT COLONEL WILL VAUGHN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HOLDING). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. NUNNELEE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. NUNNELEE. Mr. Speaker, the Legislative Fellowship program is a selective mideducation program where the Air Force places the very best and brightest officers and civilians in congressional offices so that they may learn the legislative process. For this past year, my office was given the opportunity to host Lieutenant Colonel Will Vaughn.

Prior to the start of serving his fellowship, Lieutenant Colonel Vaughn was assigned as chief training officer for the 97th Flying Training Squadron, an Air Force Reserve associate unit supporting the multinational Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training program at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas. He also served on a joint, interagency and multinational staff in Jerusalem as a plans and programs officer for the United States security coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority. He served on Active Duty, flying the F–16 and T–37 until 2008, where he transitioned to the Reserves, instructing in the T–37 and, most recently, the T–6.

Lieutenant Colonel Will Vaughn has effectively served the people of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to watching him do great things for America.

IT IS TIME TO LEAVE AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, the time has come for our military to leave Afghanistan. Afghan President Karzai's refusal to sign the bilateral security agreement should be the last straw in putting an end to what is becoming America's longest war.

After more than 12 years, hundreds of billions of dollars, and over 2,100 American servicemen and -women killed in combat, it is time to bring all of our troops home now. In poll after poll, the American people have made it clear that they want our troops home. Certainly, our brave men and women in uniform and their families have done everything that we have asked of them and more. We must not ask them to continue to fight, bleed, and die in Afghanistan for another 10 or 12 years to support a government more interested in extorting America and ripping off our tax dollars than working with us to strengthen its own security.

Mr. Speaker, President Obama needs to turn this interminable conflict over to the Afghans. As of yesterday, 2,153 members of our Armed Forces have died in Afghanistan since 2001; another 19,526 have been wounded; and every Member of this Chamber knows that tens of thousands of our troops have returned home with invisible wounds to their minds and spirits. Suicide rates among our veterans are among the highest ever, and they continue to climb. For many, the care required to help heal these wounds will last a lifetime.

It is estimated that health care and veteran benefits for the men and women deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan will cost trillions of dollars. In both human and fiscal terms, we simply cannot afford to waste more lives and dollars in Afghanistan.

The President has not made a case about how any number of troops remaining in Afghanistan after 2014 can improve the confidence of Afghan forces when our current greater and more intensive engagement over the past decade has not been able to do so. It is completely unclear whether the April elections will improve the Afghan Government, given its ingrown corruption, sectarian divisions, and Taliban insurgency. There are no compelling reasons to remain.

We need to turn Afghanistan over to the Afghans now, not 10 years from now. We need to bring our troops home by no later than the end of 2014, just as President Obama promised. If this is the so-called ''zero option,'' then it is the best option. We do not need to keep another 10,000 to 12,000 American troops in Afghanistan for another 10 years at the cost of about $80 billion or more each year. They will continue to be in harm's way; they will continue to be carrying out dangerous operations; they will continue to be wounded body and soul; and they will continue to be killed.

For what? So one of the most corrupt governments in the world can continue living off of our blood and treasure? So military contractors can continue lining their pockets? We are cutting programs right and left in the budget, but we are supposed to keep pouring tens of billions of dollars into Afghanistan for another decade? All of it is borrowed money charged to our national credit card. I say enough is enough.

In June, 305 Members of this House voted in support of an amendment that I offered along with Congressmen WALTER JONES and ADAM SMITH to bring our troops home by the end of 2014 and to accelerate that process if possible. It clearly stated that if the President determined to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan after 2014, then Congress should vote on authorizing that mission. Senators MERKLEY and LEE were ready to offer a similar amendment in the Senate when the defense bill was to be taken up over there. They had more than a dozen bipartisan cosponsors on their amendment.

Instead, the FY14 NDAA went into conference negotiations without debate by the full Senate. In those negotiations, the principal Senate conferees demanded that the House amendment

be completely watered down. The conference language only requires the President to ''consult'' with Congress about any post-2014 deployment of troops. That is worthless. It is absolutely worthless, Mr. Speaker. We don't need consultation. What we need is a vote. I call on Speaker BOEHNER and Leader PELOSI to take seriously the call of 305 Members of this House and schedule a vote next year on keeping thousands of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Whether or not you support such a decision, the House needs to vote on it.

It is time for us in Congress to do our job. It is time we stop asking our troops and their families to sacrifice their lives in a war that has outlived its purpose. It is time to bring our troops home. It is time to get out of Afghanistan.

[From the New York Times, Nov. 23, 2013]

THE LONG GOODBYE IN AFGHANISTAN

(By the Editorial Board)

From his first campaign for the White House, President Obama has vowed to end more than a decade of war, bring the troops home and put America on a less militaristic footing. He has reduced the forces in Afghanistan from about 100,000 in 2010 to about 47,000 today and has promised that all American and international combat forces will be out by the end of 2014.

But he has also indicated that a residual force of American troops will remain in Afghanistan to train Afghan security forces and engage in counterterrorism missions. In all this time, he has not made a clear and cogent case for any particular number of troops or explained how a residual force can improve the competency of Afghan forces when a much broader and intensive American engagement over the last decade has not.

Yet last week the Obama administration announced that it had reached an agreement with Afghanistan on a long-term bilateral security arrangement that, officials say, would allow up to 12,000 mostly American troops to be in that country until 2024 and perhaps beyond—without Mr. Obama offering any serious accounting to the American people for maintaining a sizable military commitment there or offering a clue to when, if ever, it might conclude.

The administration's focus, instead, has been on whether an Afghan tribal council and the Afghan Parliament will formally approve the pact and whether President Hamid Karzai will sign it.

Even now, key details of the security agreement are unclear. Mr. Karzai has spoken about a force of 10,000 to 15,000 American and NATO troops; President Obama has not yet announced a figure, but officials have talked of 8,000 to 12,000.

Officials have said the troops' main role will be to continue to train and assist the 350,000–member Afghan security force. The capability of the Afghan security force has improved, but it still cannot defend the country even after a $43 billion American investment in weaponry and training. Proponents of a residual force also argue that it is needed to protect Kabul, to prove that the United States is not abandoning Afghanistan and to pressure the Taliban to negotiate a political settlement, which military commanders say is the only path to stability. In addition, since Afghanistan cannot finance its security apparatus, American officials say Congress is unlikely to keep paying for the Afghan Army and police, at a cost that could range from $4 billion to $6 billion per year, unless Americans are there to verify that the money is properly spent.

The American forces are also expected to conduct counterterrorism missions when needed. The draft agreement allows United States Special Operations forces to have leeway to conduct antiterrorism raids on private Afghan homes. As Mr. Obama's letter to Mr. Karzai says, American troops will be able to carry out the raids only under ''extraordinary circumstances involving urgent risk to life and limb of U.S. nationals.'' (Under current protocol, Afghan troops take the lead in entering homes.) The pact also gives American soldiers immunity from Afghan prosecution for actions taken in the course of their duties. The failure to reach agreement on this immunity issue blocked a long-term security deal between the United States and Iraq and led to the final withdrawal of troops there.

President Obama said in May that the United States needs to ''work with the Afghan government to train security forces, and sustain a counterterrorism force, which ensures that Al Qaeda can never again establish a safe haven to launch attacks against us or our allies.'' Managing a productive relationship with Afghanistan has always been difficult with Mr. Karzai, who is an unpredictable, even dangerous reed on which to build a cooperative future. And it is unclear if Afghanistan, driven by corruption, sectarian divisions and the Taliban insurgency can have any better governance when elections are held next April.

Mr. Karzai's long record of duplicitous behavior is just one of the many reasons it is tempting, after a decade of war and tremendous cost in lives and money, to argue that America should just wash its hands of Afghanistan. There is something unseemly about the United States having to cajole him into a military alliance that is intended to benefit his fragile country.

Regardless of what he, the tribal council and the Afghan Parliament decide, President Obama still has to make a case for the deal to the American people.

[From Politico, Dec. 8, 2013]

CALL KARZAI'S BLUFF

(By John Paul Schnapper-Casteras and Lawrence Korb)

When Chuck Hagel, the U.S. secretary of defense, touched down in Afghanistan on Saturday for an unannounced visit to U.S. troops and Afghan officials, it was telling that he had no plans to meet with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

The snub appears deliberate; it reflects American frustration with Karzai's recent decision to place fresh obstacles in front of a stalled security pact with the United States. Among other new conditions, Karzai threatened to delay ratification until after April and demanded that Washington engage the Taliban and release certain detainees from the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Tensions rose further after a U.S. drone strike killed civilians in Helmand province, provoking this outburst from Karzai: ''For as long as such arbitrary acts and oppression of foreign forces continue, the security agreement with the United States will not be signed.''

It's time to play hardball. If Washington has any chance of de-escalating the situation, it should look to the lessons of negotiating a similar agreement in Iraq and prepare in earnest for the ''zero option'' leaving no troops in Afghanistan after 2014. Hagel's visit, unfortunately, has the potential to reinforce two unhealthy facets of Karzai's thinking: bolstering his fears that the United States seeks to undermine Afghan sovereignty, and underscoring his belief that he—and Afghanistan—occupies a place of strategic preeminence in American policymakers' minds.

The lessons from Baghdad are instructive. Soon after the Iraq invasion, Washington tried to negotiate a comparable accord, known as a Status of Forces Agreement, that authorized the presence of troops and defined their status and role. But interim Iraqi leaders recoiled, citing sovereignty and legitimacy concerns. Instead, coalition officials summarily granted themselves de facto SOFA rights—a provisional measure that actually lasted for years and caused major blowback after contractors killed civilians and were subsequently shielded from prosecution. When SOFA talks reopened in 2008, they were so contentious and destabilizing that some policymakers murmured about ''replacing'' Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. In late 2008, the George W. Bush administration eventually secured a three-year deal after substantial compromises: Troops would withdraw first from cities and then Iraq entirely, and would nominally be subject to shared jurisdiction. As that agreement neared its conclusion, the Obama administration put forward another SOFA that would have authorized a residual U.S. military presence past 2012. But the negotiations were profoundly divisive, and the Obama administration eventually gave up and proceeded with a complete withdrawal.

Afghanistan bears striking similarities. Interim Afghan officials one agreed to a de facto SOFA via a two-page diplomatic ''note.'' In 2005, Karzai planned to offer a full-fledged agreement—but after a 2008 airstrike caused numerous civilian casualties, he insisted on a reassessment of foreign forces and a SOFA similar to Iraq's. By 2012, Washington and Kabul had hammered out some high-level goals and reopened SOFA talks, but controversy quickly ensued, particularly surrounding issues of jurisdiction, village/night raids and security guarantees. After months of negotiations and a personal intervention by Secretary of State John Kerry last month, it appeared that a deal was finally done. Karzai convened a loya jirga of 2,500 tribal elders to vote on the SOFA, which somewhat unexpectedly approved it. But then Karzai added new conditions and re-escalated his rhetoric.

There's little mystery here: Karzai has taken a page out of Maliki's playbook. His move holds three lessons for Washington:

The zero option is real. Karzai apparently dismisses the seriousness of a full U.S. withdrawal, recently smirking at the prospect. Washington should now prepare for this option in earnest—both to call Karzai's bluff and also because it increasingly appears to be the only feasible course. The White House should immediately ask the Pentagon to update its plans, particularly since some officials there have anonymously disavowed the practicality of the zero option. Washington should also begin negotiating expanded access rights in neighboring countries and consider reallocating naval assets in the area to facilitate and compensate for withdrawal of ground forces.

All politics is local. Analysts are widely baffled about what now motivates Karzai—perhaps some combination of political and legacy concerns, with a dash of the paranoid and erratic. But if anything will sway Karzai, it is likely domestic political pressure. In Iraq, several spoilers lined up—against the SOFA. Afghanistan is different. Outside of the Taliban, the SOFA enjoys much greater local support—including among elders and members of Karzai's Cabinet, some of whom publicly disagree with his latest demands and have threatened to quit. Washington should stay closely attuned to

local political movements and work all back channels to build and amplify support for the SOFA in the coming weeks.

Look for a face-saving resolution. Karzai clearly cares deeply about the SOFA, however misplaced his actions, so providing him a graceful means of de-escalation is important. While some policymakers have staunchly insisted that Karzai must sign the accord, sheer adamancy failed in the final days of Iraq's SOFA. Indeed, if Karzai is seeking to prove his independence from Washington, then publicly insisting that he obey U.S. diktats is not necessarily helpful. It would be better to look for a few relatively harmless concessions to offer Karzai, or frame discussions so as to allow him to fall back upon the loya jirga's decision.

But ultimately, the United States needs to be ready to walk away. The aim of U.S. policy is not to keep troops in Afghanistan indefinitely—the goal is to cooperate on security in mutually beneficial and comparatively modest ways, and that can be done without boots on the ground. If Karzai is unwilling to accept reasonable terms that his own negotiators and loya jirga have approved, then the United States should prepare to protect its interests through other means. At this point, the zero option is entirely realistic and might even yield more favorable negotiating terms with Karzai's successor.

BENGHAZI

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the 15-month anniversary of the Benghazi attack. Once again, another anniversary has come and gone with no new answers about what happened that night or just what so many Americans, reportedly around two dozen, were doing at a secret CIA base in Benghazi to begin with.

Another anniversary has come and gone with no new public hearings. By my count, the last public hearing was held on September 18, nearly 3 months ago, and no new public hearings are being held. The keyword is ''public.''

But perhaps most important, another anniversary has come and gone with absolutely no one being held responsible for the security and intelligence failures leading up to the attack, and no one has been brought to justice. And despite several recent developments related to the Benghazi investigation, practically nothing has been done in Congress to address them.

First, we have recently learned that CIA Director John Brennan distorted the facts in letters to the House Intelligence Committee and me when he claimed that Benghazi survivors were not made to sign new nondisclosure agreements.

Another major development is a November 24 article published by Breitbart reporting surprising new comments by Kevin Kolbye, the FBI's lead investigator for Benghazi, who stated for the first time that the FBI arrived on the scene in Benghazi within days, not weeks, of the attack. According to the article by Kerry Picket:

> The Washington Post reported that while the FBI had legats in Algiers and Cairo, a team of FBI investigators could not get into Benghazi 2 days after the attack. Kolbye disputes this. ''We were there,'' he said.

Is Agent Kolbye correct? Was the FBI secretly on the ground in Benghazi within days of the attack? If so, why is this being kept from the public? Once again, the Congress should know and, to my knowledge, has never asked Agent Kolbye to testify.

Equally important, why is it that we are learning additional comments before a paid audience of $400 a ticket? You had to pay $400 to hear this guy speak, but he has never spoken for free to the American people. This is just like when the American people heard new information about that night from retired General Ham when he appeared at a big-ticket event in Aspen. The American people did not hear. If you paid the money in Aspen, you got to hear. I guess there was no need to tell the Congress and the public what happened that night since paid audiences will hear through conferences, through books, and maybe even a movie.

Finally, I return to my concerns first raised on the House floor in July that the large CIA base in Benghazi may have been used to support covert operations with regard to Syria, including the possible transfer of weapons collected in Libya to Syrian rebels, possibly in coordination with third parties of foreign countries, particularly Saudi Arabia.

These concerns need to be addressed now more than ever after reports yesterday that both the U.S. and the United Kingdom have cut off support to rebels in northern Syria along the Turkish border after the Islamic front, a coalition of jihadi extremist fighters, overran bases run by the Free Syrian Army and seized their weapons and resources. According to a report from the BBC yesterday, the U.S. and European countries have reportedly facilitated secret arms shipments to Syrian rebels, allegedly including antiaircraft weapons commonly referred to as ''MANPADS,'' just like the weapons collected in Libya over the last 2 years.

A separate Washington Post article stated:

> A covert CIA program providing lethal aid to the rebels, consisting mostly of small arms and ammunition channeled to southern Syria through Jordan, would continue unchanged.

It is particularly noteworthy that during the same period of time the CIA was operating in Benghazi and U.S. weapons collection in Libya were underway, respected national security reporter Mark Hosenball wrote August 1, 2012:

> President Obama has signed a secret order authorizing U.S. support for rebels seeking to depose Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his government, U.S. sources familiar with the matter said. Obama's order, approved earlier this year and known as an intelligence ''finding,'' broadly permits the CIA and other U.S. agencies to provide support that could help the rebels oust Assad.

Hosenball continued:

> A U.S. Government source acknowledged that under provisions of the Presidential finding, the United States was collaborating with a secret command center operated by Turkey and its allies. NBC said the shoulder-fired missiles, also known as MANPADS, had been delivered to the rebels via Turkey.

Are these the same secret arms shipments that were just seized by the Islamic extremists in northern Syria? Have these weapons, transferred with alleged U.S. covert support, been used to kill innocent civilians, Christians, and Muslims? Don't the American people have a right to know if their tax dollars are being spent to supply Islamic extremists with weapons to use against Christians and Muslims? We need a select committee. The current process is not working.

It is time for the administration and the Congress to say what the CIA was doing in Benghazi and elsewhere around Syria.

A Wall Street Journal article from August detailed just how closely Saudi Arabia was working with the CIA to train and arm Syrian rebels, despite some concerns that the weapons could fall in the hands of the extremists.

It appears those concerns are coming true, but the American people still aren't being told the truth about the U.S. role in arming the Syrians and the role of the CIA base in Benghazi.

It's time for answers.

It's time for a select committee on Benghazi.

DO-NOTHING CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KILDEE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, this Republican-controlled Congress has been one of the least productive Congresses in modern times. Recently, the Speaker of the House actually said, ''We've done our work.'' This year we passed only 56 bills. That is sad and that is wrong. And this month, we are in session here on this floor for only 8 days.

Important issues continue to pile up, unresolved and unanswered. And yet tomorrow, we are getting ready to leave for the rest of the year, even as the Senate will continue to work on behalf of the American people. The list of what we have not done is much longer than what we have passed. We need to stay here and get the work of the American people done.

We haven't taken up a jobs and infrastructure bill. We could do that next week.

We have not passed a long-term budget deal that tackles the big issues that we face.

We have not voted on comprehensive immigration reform, despite the fact that a majority would support immigration reform. All we need to do is bring it to the floor. We could do that next week.

We haven't done our work to extend unemployment compensation for 1.3 million Americans who will lose their benefits on December 28, yet we are going to leave this body having failed to act to protect the livelihood of 1.3 million Americans. That is just wrong.

We haven't considered raising the minimum wage, despite the economic