



Wartime Contracting team arrives in Afghanistan to examine U.S.-funded construction projects

ARLINGTON, VA, Nov. 9, 2010 – An eight-member team from the federal Commission on Wartime Contracting is headed to Afghanistan for nine days of inspections and briefings on U.S. taxpayer-funded construction projects in that country.

The United States funds thousands of projects in Afghanistan, some for Afghan military and government use, and many for reconstruction investments like clinics, schools, irrigation systems, and bridges. But some projects appear to be unusable because of poor construction, and billions of construction dollars spent by the U.S. Departments of Defense and State, and by the U.S. Agency for International Development defy full accounting.

“Running a good construction project in a wartime setting requires more than quality materials, good workmanship, and direction,” said commission Co-Chairman Michael Thibault, who is leading the trip. “It also requires attention to local needs, jobs for local people, and ensuring that the Afghans can maintain and sustain it after the American and allied military presence declines. Otherwise, poorly conceived, wastefully built, and unsustainable work can simply alienate people and expand the recruiting pool for the Taliban and al Qaeda.”

The commission team reached Kuwait today, en route to the Afghan capital of Kabul. The team will examine projects including a \$94 million contract for a police training center, a \$67 million contract for air base improvements, and a \$20 million contract for prison improvements. Total value for all projects to be examined on the trip exceeds \$450 million. (Dollar figures are for estimated contract values, not actual spending.)

Commission Co-Chair Christopher Shays said, “It’s hard enough for the U.S. government to plan, execute, and oversee contracts in this country in peacetime. When you’re trying to get things built 10,000 miles away, in a country fighting poverty and illiteracy, with thousands of foreign subcontractor employees, with a shortage of trained military and federal civilian oversight personnel, and with hostile people trying to sabotage the work and kill the workers, then the risks for waste, fraud, and abuse skyrocket.”

The Commission team will gather information on construction issues like local involvement in project selection, staffing and training, cost trends, quality control, contract management and oversight, use of subcontractors, security, and project sustainability. The team’s findings will be used in a future hearing on construction-contract issues and in refining the commission’s recommendations for reforming the contracting process to support contingency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the future.

Congress created the Commission in 2008 (Public Law 110-181) to examine contingency contracting for reconstruction, logistics, and security functions, and to recommend improvements. Its final report to Congress is due in July 2011. Co-chairs are Michael Thibault and Christopher Shays; other members are Clark Kent Ervin, Grant Green, Robert Henke, Katherine Schinasi, Charles Tiefer, and Dov Zakheim. The Commission’s executive director is Robert Dickson; its website is www.wartimecontracting.gov.