

By Matthew Continetti

It may have been his hardest vote yet. When he walked onto the House floor on March 10,

John Campbell

, Republican of California, wasn't sure how he'd vote on Dennis Kucinich's resolution to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan. He had agonized over the decision all week. In his view, the language of the resolution was too strict. It tied the president's hands.

Campbell

had decided the day before that he wouldn't vote No, however. Even so, the temptation remained to simply vote Present. Except there'd be no courage to that vote, he thought. Which is why

Campbell

ultimately voted Yes.

The vote made **Campbell** one of five Republicans calling for an immediate withdrawal from the central front of the war on terror. His compatriots -- Ron Paul, Walter Jones, Tim Johnson, and John Duncan -- all opposed George W. Bush's Iraq surge. But

bell

who won a special election to replace outgoing Chris Cox in December 2005, supported the surge and says

"Iraq was winnable and has strategic value."

He reluctantly came to the conclusion that the same cannot be said of Afghanistan.

"We're just not going to be able"

to put troops wherever terrorists hide,

Campbell

told me. He says he always had qualms about the cost of the war, but it wasn't until President Obama's December 1 speech announcing the surge that

Campbell

decided the Afghan intervention could not be won.

Campbell

doesn't serve on the Armed Services Committee, but says he's

"studied virtually every war from the Norman conquest moving forward."

The Normans did not leave England precipitously.

Campbell, a former car dealer, is neither an isolationist nor a crank. He's a fiscal hawk who writes the Green Eyeshade blog and believes America's entitlement crisis may one day turn out to be a greater danger to the republic than jihadism. He says he's reviewed the history of Afghanistan and concluded that it holds little strategic significance and has been resistant to outside powers. He buys into the comparison of Afghanistan to Vietnam and supports the "light footprint" approach backed by Joe Biden and George Will. And while **Campbell** told me plenty of his colleagues were surprised by his vote, none were rude or dismissive of it.

What's striking is how little sway **Campbell's** arguments hold over the GOP, and even the normally antiwar Democrats. The bipartisan consensus behind the president's Afghanistan policy is strong. The successful assault on the Taliban stronghold of Marjah, which the Marines cleared and are now holding, will only strengthen support. Perhaps one day the war will turn south. Perhaps one day the Republicans will give in to the America-first instincts associated with traditional conservatism. But until then, the Afghanistan Five will remain an exceptionally tiny minority in a minority party.