

Pocan, Gallagher talk Afghanistan on 'UpFront'

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U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan said what's happening in Afghanistan is the result of failures 20 years ago, while Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher put the blame squarely on the Biden administration.

Both Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, and Gallagher, R-Green Bay, appeared in separate interviews Sunday on "UpFront," produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

Pocan said part of the original mission two decades ago was "botched," and the fault goes back over four administrations, with intelligence failures and "overly rosy" projections from the Department of Defense.

"I think this was inevitable. Even if we were there for another five years or 20 years, I think you would have had some of the same scenes," Pocan said.

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"Having said that, I do think we probably should have started the withdrawal of folks earlier, and that would have helped to make the transition easier," Pocan said

But Gallagher countered that "this was an avoidable tragedy."

"We chose defeat in Afghanistan and it didn't have to be this way," he said.

The ex-Marine said some of the chaos now being seen in Kabul could have been prevented if the Biden administration had kept the Bagram airbase open. He also called it a "disgrace" that President Biden blamed Afghans for the fall of their own government and failing to fight.

"It is astounding to me that in light of the clear evidence of what a tragedy, what a

fiasco this is, the president is doubling down, he's not admitting any blame, he's not demanding more from his national security team, and he's blaming the Afghans," Gallagher said.

Pocan said nation-building in Afghanistan failed and there should have been a different approach from the beginning.

"You can't expect to go into a country that is so different than the United States, like Afghanistan, and you're going to leave with having a bunch of Dunkin Donuts and Disneylands in place. That was never going to happen," Pocan said.

The two congressmen also addressed the matter of Afghan refugees that are expected to arrive at Fort McCoy.

"My own view is that if you fought with us in Afghanistan, if you risked your lives and we made promises to you, we should do everything possible to make you eligible for the (Special Immigrant Visa) process," Gallagher said, adding that the SIV process has "very high-level vetting requirements."

Pocan said the United States has an obligation to help Afghans who risked their lives to help America, and their families.

"We have to get them out of Afghanistan and we have to accept refugees like we always have; it's part of our moral compass as a nation," Pocan said.

Both congressmen agreed on the urgent need to get Americans out of Afghanistan.

"We are going to stay there and get every American out of there, and take care of our Afghan allies as well," Gallagher said.

Also on the program, a Republican candidate for attorney general, Eric Toney, said Wisconsin needs "an attorney general that will stand with the rule of law and stand with our law enforcement."

"We can't be condemning and convicting law enforcement without the facts, like we've seen our governor do and our attorney general fail to stand up for our law enforcement," said Toney, who is the Fond du Lac County district attorney.

Toney also knocked Democratic incumbent AG Josh Kaul for what Toney claimed is a less productive state crime lab under Kaul, as compared to his Republican

predecessor, Brad Schimel.

“I’m the only front-line prosecutor in this race that’s actually used the resources of the Wisconsin Crime Lab in the prosecution of cases. That’s the type of experience we need at the attorney general office, somebody that has personally used those resources, understands what it takes, what goes into them, and how best to deploy those resources,” Toney said.

Toney will face UW-Madison professor Ryan Owens in the Republican primary. The winner will square off against Kaul in the November 2022 general election.

See more from the program:

<http://www.wisn.com/upfront>