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U.S. Rep. Tiffany: Sends letter to Wisconsin Afghan refugee resettlement organizations

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WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Tom Tiffany (WI-07) sent a letter to several resettlement organizations throughout Wisconsin requesting that they thoroughly vet Afghan refugees before they are resettled in Wisconsin communities. Due to the White House's lack of planning, the resettlement groups are filling in major gaps and responding to an influx of Afghans coming to the United States.

In the letter, Tiffany raises concerns about the lack of preliminary screening capabilities at the Kabul airport and the Biden administration's vague and inconsistent answers to questions about the nature and timing of the screening. Vetting procedures that in the past took months or years, now are being hastily conducted in just days or hours.

The full list of recipients: International Institute of Wisconsin, Lutheran Social Service of WI and UP, Jewish Social Services of Madison, World Relief, Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bethany Christian Services, Human Rights First, HIAS, Church World Service, International Rescue Committee, Episcopal Migration Ministries

The full letter can be found here or read below:

To Whom It May Concern,

With the Biden administration caught off guard by the rapid collapse of the Afghan government, and the subsequent evacuation of some 120,000 people from the Kabul airport, groups like yours are now filling major gaps in our response to the massive influx of Afghans into our country – owing largely to the White House's

unprecedented lack of planning and abdication of responsibility.

The Pentagon indicated as of this weekend that just 5,100 of those airlifted out of Afghanistan are U.S. citizens and roughly 7,000 were Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients (although none of those housed at Fort McCoy held a valid SIV as of Friday). However, we know very little about the other 100,000 or so people who have arrived – and will continue arriving – in the United States.

What we do know is that vetting procedures that previously took months or years have been hastily conducted for many of those currently arriving to just days or hours. Making matters worse, NBC News reported that preliminary biometric screening capabilities were not in place at Hamid Karzai International Airport and CNN quoted a Customs and Border Protection official who characterized the White House priority as "get[ting] as many people on the plane as you can, and we'll sort out the (immigration visa) stuff later." The same source added that "some people have landed with no documents whatsoever, creating a very challenging work environment for the officers."

My office has assisted, since this crisis began, with getting those Afghans who participated in sensitive U.S. military, diplomatic and intelligence activities out of the country. I strongly support admitting these individuals to the United States and will continue to assist with that effort however I can. However, not every Afghan national seeking to enter the U.S. fits into that category, and we must all work together to ensure that those who did not directly support American efforts are thoroughly screened and vetted before being released into American neighborhoods.

As you know, U.S. immigration officials now face major challenges when it comes to independently verifying the backgrounds of, and claims made by many of those arriving given that Afghan national and provincial governments no longer exist. Even when the Kabul government was functioning during the first three months of this year, a whopping 84 percent of Afghan SIV applications were rejected.

Complicating matters further, the White House has been vague and inconsistent when asked about the nature and timing of evacuee screening. An administration official claimed two weeks ago that this was happening in Qatar and Kuwait – a claim Pentagon spokesman John Kirby appeared to contradict the same day, saying that "processing" of arrivals would occur at sites inside the United States. Some alert U.S. officials have already detected dangerous individuals who managed to slip

through the haphazard screening procedures and board flights out of Afghanistan.

This is a deeply disconcerting situation given that Afghanistan is arguably the most dangerous country on earth, a failed state, and a headquarters for multiple foreign terrorist organizations. In addition, officials at Fort McCoy informed me last week that Afghan nationals housed at the facility are free to leave the base – without any check-in or monitoring requirements – making this lack of thorough vetting and screening even more alarming.

The burden is now on groups like yours to "say something" if you "see something."

As organizations who are working to resettle migrants arriving in Wisconsin, it now falls on you to make sure the Biden administration and groups like the International Organization for Migration have fully vetted Afghan nationals before they disappear into our communities. You must exercise due diligence by observing, asking questions, and sharing any significant information with the appropriate authorities. Americans are counting on you.

Sincerely,
Tom Tiffany