

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Visits Fort McCoy

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Senator Johnson, Republican State Lawmakers Visit Fort McCoy

"The finest among us, here in Fort McCoy, will do everything they can to serve honorably and to do as best a job as they can to help the people coming here and keep this country safe."

OSHKOSH — U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) and Wisconsin state lawmakers Senator Patrick Testin (R-Stevens Point), Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring Green), Representative Loren Oldenburg (R-Viroqua), Representative Nancy Vandermeer (R-Tomah), and Representative Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc) visited Fort McCoy on Wednesday for a briefing with the 88th Readiness Division, where refugees from Afghanistan are being housed.

Highlights from the press conference are below. The full video may be viewed [here](#).

Sen. Johnson remarks:

“Good morning, everyone. Let me first introduce the state senators that I’m joined with today. We have Representative Tony Kurtz. Senator Pat Tester. Senator Howard Marklin. Representative Loren Oldenburg. Representative Nancy Vandermeer. These are individuals that serve this area, that are responsible for their constituents. I think we all want to thank the members of the finest among us, the members of the military, those serving here at Fort McCoy, the members of the Department of Homeland Security, who I think are all very confident that they will fulfil their role with dedication and professionalism.

“I do want to start out, because I think this is pretty important, again, understanding the viewpoint of the finest among us, the men and women who served in the military, particularly those who served in Afghanistan. We have certainly heard — and of course Tony Kurtz served in Afghanistan as well as Iraq — but we have heard, all of us, from those people who this issue is very near and dear to their heart. They served with people from Afghanistan who put their lives at risk to help save American lives. They are very vested in having an organized process for those individuals whose lives are at grave risk now within the chaos of Afghanistan helping those individuals here safely in America and fully integrated successfully in our society. I was on the phone earlier with Jason Church and Derek Van Horton talking about the military planning always starts at the end point. What is the goal of your mission, what is the goal of your plan. I think the overall goal is something we all share. **First and foremost, make sure every American citizen in Afghanistan would get out safely before the chaos began. Certainly the goal would have been to get those special immigrant visa holders, and others that worked for Americans whose lives are in grave danger now to get them out ahead of time, fully vetted, but safely, and then integrate successfully into American society. That would have been, that is, the goal, it still is the goal. It could have been accomplished, but unfortunately it wasn’t.**

“So, what is happening right now is a travesty. It’s a disaster. It’s a large enough disaster that there are people working this problem. That obviously value their career. But they are starting to reach out to members of Congress, to their state representatives, and they’re talking about the chaos that they are witnessing, the fact that we don’t know who a lot of people are that are being transported out of Afghanistan right now. There are people being transported who don’t have any ID

whatsoever. Again, I don't know the full extent of that because there is so much chaos. But it was a point that we were making with General Guthrie, and the State Department, Department Homeland Security personnel here is that puts an even greater burden on their shoulders to evaluate, and vet, and try to identify those individuals that they are going to be taken care of here.

"Yeah, I will also say that, it certainly sounds like the first group of people that are just relieved, to have been able to escape Afghanistan. They won the lottery; they're here in America. I truly think the vast majority of people that will be coming here, and the numbers I'm hearing are probably in the 10s of 1000s, the vast majority are here wanting what we want: freedom and opportunity to raise their families in safety and security with opportunity. I know that the veterans of Afghanistan that I've spoken to and spoken with. That is what they want. They know so many of these people. They know they saved their lives, so I want the American public to understand. That's an important responsibility that America holds. Let's not forget that. But let's also not forget that we need to keep this nation safe and secure.

"And the last point I'll make until I open up, open it up to questions is the reality on the ground is ugly. **We don't know all of it because so many journalists have already left for their own safety. But I'll just leave you with this one question. How many special immigrant visa holders do you think the Taliban are letting into Kabul airport right now? How many people that are the folks that are Afghanistan veterans want to pull off to safety, how many of those people do you think the Taliban are allowing through the gates of Kabul airport? Again, this didn't have to end this way. This is a travesty. This is a disaster. This is incompetence on the part of this administration. And there's simply not enough lipstick to put on this pig at this point in time.**

"But I will end once again saying that the finest among us, the men and women of the military here on this base in Fort McCoy, they will do everything they can to serve honorably and to do the best job they can to help the people coming here and keep this country safe. So with that, happy to open up to questions."

Q&A with reporters:

On Biden Administration's lack of planning:

"First of all, the commanding general had no idea that he was going to be serving in this capacity. That this was going to be the mission of Fort McCoy until 10 days ago. There wasn't you know over the course of months from when President Biden announced the total drop out of Afghanistan. There was no, well, we are going to have to process people. We are going to have to welcome in the special immigrant visa holders. There wasn't a discussion over months to plan. This happened 10 days ago.

"The other question was, I knew the answer but I was, it was still shocking to hear is when I ask how many people have ID, do you know whether everybody has an ID that is coming to Fort McCoy yet? They couldn't answer that question. That's how chaotic this is. That's how unplanned and how unorganized this was from the top. The folks here on the ground will do a good job. I think we are all confident of that. These are dedicated individuals. The Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense. There has been a failure from their leadership which has created this very difficult situation."

"I share the heartfelt desire of our Afghanistan veterans who worked with so many people in Afghanistan as allies, whose lives have been saved by some of these people, they want them out of danger, they don't want them slaughtered by the Taliban. You've probably read them. I've heard of some horrific accounts of retribution already carried out by the Taliban. So I share that heartfelt desire to bring people out there where our allies are in grave danger and bring them here safely. But at the same time, because this wasn't pre planned, this wasn't organized and we have such chaos now, we have to understand there is a danger to this country. And we need to recognize that so we have to take our time. We can't rush through the process, we can't be playing a numbers game. I'm concerned this administration is just going to plus up the numbers. Well, look at how successful it is. We got X-number-thousands of people out of here; this is a success. **This isn't a success until we know we've had people here and they're successfully ingrained in society. But unfortunately this administration's lack of planning their competence is up for easy success here.**"

“Certainly our counsel was always conditions-based. Again I was, I was never in favor of total withdrawal. Again I thought after 20 years, after the sacrifice of the finest among us, if we could provide a stabilizing force to support the Afghanistan military, I thought, again, keep the terrorists at bay, not give them another, you know, haven, which they can plot against the U.S., I thought that would have been the right course. So I never agreed with total withdrawal, but a draw down, limiting it to just two Special Operation forces. ... Had I then sat in the Oval Office, that’s probably the choice I would have made, but I would have hoped that the previous administration would have done a lot better job planning this out and, let’s face it, this administration had seven months plus in office, and it’s telling, let me repeat, the fact that the commanding general here, didn’t even know that this was going to be his mission at Fort McCoy until 10 days ago. I want that sinking in. **This is how incompetent, the lack of planning. 10 days ago, Fort McCoy got its mission. They weren’t talking about this, you know, a couple months ago. They should have been talking about this the day that Biden made the decision to back out of Afghanistan. They should have been planning this, and they didn’t the American people have to look at that reality. It’s not as it’s not a pleasant reality.**”

“I think it just proves, sadly, tragically, who’s really in charge of Afghanistan right now. And really how, I don’t say this with any joy at all, how impotent America is under this administration. It’s a very, very sad reality.”

On refugee vetting process:

“One of the things I really have really been stressing, and I actually talked to Jason Church about this, this would be a wonderful project for him, is help organize veterans in Wisconsin, maybe nationally. People that know the folks coming in from Afghanistan, make those connections — and, by the way, the State Department representative said yes, we’re absolutely going to do that. So, we’re going to have to put this into overdrive now, making the connections of people that served our military, that that helped save people’s lives, even just did the mundane things, but as a result of helping us, were at grave risk in Afghanistan, help them make those

connections with people who served in, and that's probably the best way to vet people that might not have an education, it's a huge task. I think that the goal here, and it was only a goal, was to kind of process people in 14 to 21 days. Now, some people you may be able to move, you may be able to vet them that quickly and be certain. As certain as you can be with anybody, that these people, they're here for the right reason and represent no risk. It may take a much longer time for others, and part of the problem is we are granting them a certain immigration status, it's a legal status, they're here, which means they are also now as a result of what this administration is doing, they're entitled by our laws to certain immigration benefits.

"So, again, the question of what happens if somebody comes to this country, for example on terror watch lists, what do we do with that individual, they've been granted a legal status here? It's not going to be easy to, oh, just send them back. This will be a legal fight. This is what this administration through their incompetence has opened us up to."

"My understanding is that the number of people that really are the special immigrant visa holders is a pretty small percentage of the people that we're transporting here now. It's not, these aren't all special immigrant visa holders, it's a small percentage. Okay, and unfortunately there's a pretty large percentage of people that don't even have ID. But I don't know, I don't know what the truth. I mean, listen, I've been investigating for, like, six years. It's hard to get the truth out of any administration. They hold information pretty close to the chest; that's one of the reasons we're here and holding this press conference right now, is to ask the questions the American public should be asking, should be demanding answers to."

"The urgency is to make sure that we vet everybody and that we are as confident as we possibly can. But these are people that helped us, that, you know, we have a responsibility to make sure that they are safe and also that they can integrate successfully in our society. But we also have responsibility for the safety and security of the American public. That's why we're going to take the time, if we're going to fulfill that responsibility."

"I think the best solution here in terms of identifying vetting and integrating is to utilize the military."

On absurdity of the Biden administration relying on the Taliban:

“I would hope that the Taliban would let some people through but I don’t have a great deal of confidence in the Taliban being humanitarians, all of a sudden. This is a brutal regime. Again, I think you’ve heard some of the accounts. It’s so brutal I can’t even talk about them in an interview, but I’m highly concerned. And again, I just don’t see the Taliban in their good graces, allowing people that helped the U.S. military in any way, shape or form. I see them letting some people that could be a real problem for us through. Yes, it’s a nasty reality but we have to face that.”