

News From Congressman Ben Cline



CONGRESSMAN
BEN CLINE



Sixth District Perspectives *with Congressman Ben Cline*

Special Report: Surrender of Afghanistan

The consequences of ill planning became clear as we surrendered Afghanistan to the Taliban, leaving an untold number of American citizens behind. America also saw the compassion of its people in relief efforts throughout Virginia and the country to those families who made it to safety. While the mission has moved to Qatar, the goal of making sure every single American is rescued and that no one is left behind must become our focus. Anything short of this will be unacceptable. When books are written and military strategy is taught about the catastrophic withdrawal of Afghanistan, those lessons will unfortunately include a focus on its failures and mistakes. There will also be a reckoning for those responsible, beginning with President Biden. I urge Speaker Pelosi to begin an immediate investigation into the failures of this Administration's plan and into the civilian and military leadership who carried it out. We owe this to every American taxpayer and especially to those families impacted by this war and its conclusion.

Catastrophic Withdrawal:

Despite increasing Taliban violence in the first three months of 2021 and intelligence that the Taliban and al-Qaida were maintaining close ties, on April 14, 2021, President Biden announced a full United States troop withdrawal from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. During this announcement, the President said, "We will not conduct a hasty rush to the exit" and, "We'll do it responsibly, deliberately, and safely." This was despite the assessments from

his own intelligence community about prospects for the fall of the government in Kabul.

Matters were made worse on July 6, when the US military was withdrawn from Bagram Air Base, reportedly without notifying the base's new Afghan commander. Further, on July 12, President Biden ordered 4-star General Austin Miller, Commander of NATO's Resolute Support Mission and United States Forces-Afghanistan, to relinquish his position and depart Afghanistan, leaving the remaining United States presence without a seasoned leader in the face of a growing Taliban offensive. Additionally, despite the President saying, "there's going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy of the United States from Afghanistan," and that, "the likelihood there's going to be the Taliban overrunning everything and owning the whole country is highly unlikely," the situation still rapidly devolved.

On August 6, the first Provincial capital, Zaranj, fell to the Taliban and led to a violent onslaught of offensives throughout other Provinces. By August 15, the United States Embassy in Kabul was evacuated and Taliban fighters soon stood outside chanting "Death to America." From there, the stories of devastation only got worse. Americans and our Afghan partners struggled desperately to get to the airport for evacuation - many of which never made it - billions of dollars of US military equipment fell into the hands of the Taliban to now be used against our troops in the region, violence erupted in the streets, women and girls had their freedoms stripped from them, and of course, worst of all, 13 brave US service members lost their lives following two cowardly suicide bombings outside of Hamid Karzai Airport. Each of these tragedies was preventable. Bad decision after bad decision from this Administration compounded in an utter failure that has resulted in the loss of Afghanistan for generations. Those responsible must be held accountable for this disaster.



Americans being evacuated from the roof of the US Embassy in Kabul on August 15
(AP Photo/Rahmat Gul)

Leave No One Behind:

On August 19, President Biden told ABC News unequivocally that the US would not leave any Americans stranded. He said, "If there are American citizens left, we're going to stay until we get them all out." As the August 31 deadline came and went, President Biden broke his promise. He caved to the Taliban's demands, abandoned his fellow Americans in a hostile country, and left thousands of Afghan partners to be hunted and slaughtered by the Taliban. In a matter of just a few weeks, the mantra of the United States military went from, "leave no one

behind," to, "we're content leaving some of you behind."

President Biden has claimed that the overwhelming majority of Americans left in Afghanistan wanted to stay. But this notion was undercut by his own military leadership. General Frank McKenzie, head of US Central Command, said Monday that Americans tried to get to the Kabul airport for the final evacuations but couldn't. He said, "We maintained the ability to bring them in up until immediately before departure, but we were not able to bring any Americans out. That activity ended probably about 12 hours before our exit, although we continued the outreach and would have been prepared to bring them on until the very last minute. But none of them made it to the airport, and were able to be accommodated." At the current time, the State Department estimates that there are at least 100 to 200 Americans still stranded in the country. This is on top of the thousands of Afghan allies who aided the war effort and protected American troops. This President failed our people and neglected the promises we made to our allies.



Refugees:

The United States owes a debt of gratitude to Afghan citizens who aided the war effort in various capacities over the past 20 years. We must honor our commitments to those who put their lives on the line to protect American soldiers, and they deserve to be given refuge from the brutality of the Taliban as they were promised. However, the hurried evacuation of more than 100,000 Afghan nationals over the past several weeks raises serious concerns about the vetting process that has been done for those evacuees. On August 29, 2021, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to serve as the lead agency to coordinate the federal government's efforts to resettle Afghans in the United States. This announcement follows a memorandum from the Department of Homeland Security to US Customs and Border Protection on August 23, 2021, indicating that the agency found it appropriate to exercise discretionary authority to parole certain Afghan nationals into the United States. Since then, there have been multiple media reports of individuals with criminal records or potential ties to

terrorist organizations being evacuated from Afghanistan. For example, the Washington Times has [reported](#) that an individual who was, “convicted of rape and deported from the US was allowed to board an Afghan evacuation flight and reach America.” Further, according to [multiple media accounts](#), a US government official warned that as many as 100 Afghan evacuees flown out of Afghanistan are on government watch lists. These reports are extremely troubling, and we must ensure that anyone being brought to the United States has been fully vetted. That is why this week I joined my colleagues in writing to Secretary Mayorkas seeking answers to several key questions regarding the vetting process. That letter can be found [here](#).



More than 600 people crammed into the hold of a US Air Force cargo plane that was leaving Kabul on August 15, 2021 (Photo:Defense One)

Office Available to Help:

From the very onset of this humanitarian crisis, my office heard from concerned constituents across the Sixth District, as well as from families who had loved ones and fellow American citizens stranded in Afghanistan. My office exhausted every possible resource and worked with the State Department to provide folks with the necessary tools to get to the airport before US forces left this week. Fortunately, we were successful in several cases in assisting the State Department in evacuating folks from the country. However, there is more work to be done. My office continues to process requests and will continue working the proper channels to aid those still in need to the best of our ability. Please do not hesitate to reach out to one of my District

offices listed at the bottom of the page if you or someone you know needs assistance. For the latest resources from the State Department, click [here](#).



Resources for Veterans:

Veterans who answered the call to serve our Nation – including over the last two decades in Afghanistan – deserve our thanks and respect. They also need to know they are not alone. Listed below are resources available to Veterans, provided through the US Department of Veterans Affairs and other organizations. For emergency mental health care, Veterans can also go directly to their local VA medical center 24/7 regardless of discharge status or enrollment in other VA health care. September is Suicide Prevention Month. If you are experiencing depression or thoughts of suicide, please know that there is help available.

- [Veterans Crisis Line](#)
- [Make the Connection](#)
- [VA Website – Mental Health Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Lifeline](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center \(SPRC\)](#)
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Knowledge Network](#)
- [American Association of Suicidology](#)
- [Means Matter Website Launched](#)

Call. Text. Chat.



Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Congressman. If my office can ever be of assistance, please contact my Washington office at (202) 225-5431.

For the latest updates from Washington and across the Sixth District, please follow my [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.

Ben Clive

Washington D.C. Office
2443 Rayburn
House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: (202) 225-5431

Harrisonburg Office
70 N Mason St
Suite 110
Harrisonburg, VA 22802
Phone: (540) 432-2391

Lynchburg Office
916 Main St
Suite 300
Lynchburg, VA 24504
Phone: (434) 845-8306

Roanoke Office
10 Franklin Rd SE
Suite 510
Roanoke, VA 24011
Phone: (540) 857-2672

Staunton Office
117 S Lewis St
Suite 215
Staunton, VA 24401
Phone: (540) 885-3861

Please do not reply to this email.
To share your thoughts please visit my [website](#).

[Unsubscribe](#)