

# Military Families Speak Out

January 2021

## Troops Home Now!

### Editorials from MFSO members:

Tracy Eiswert, Ocala, Florida

On December 23, 2020 a delegation of MFSO and Veterans for Peace members met with Joe Biden's transitional team. Below is a loose transcription of Tracy's remarks to the Biden staff.

Our tragedy begins in 2004 when my husband and father of Unity and Breanna was sent to Tuz, Iraq on Operational Base Bernstein from 2004-2005. After being honorably discharged, he returned home on November 25, 2005 with no obvious scars. I remember counting all fingers and toes as he stepped off the bus! Just when we felt that our nightmare had ended, we immediately noticed a change in his behavior after his return.



My name is Tracy Eiswert. I live in Ocala, Florida. I am the widow of Scott Eiswert who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was a combat engineer specialist with Troop E, 2<sup>nd</sup> squad 27<sup>th</sup> regimental combat team with the Army National Guard. The VA's failure to properly diagnose and treat Scott's PTSD **contributed** to his suicide. Today, I want to talk to you about bringing our troops home. I am not going to talk about the politics of ending our 17 year-long presence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. I want to appeal to your compassion. The American people are currently suffering as a result of having their loved ones overseas and from the mental health strain we put on the soldiers themselves. 17 years is a long time! It is time now to end the suffering of all Americans who continue to sit by the phone waiting for the word that it's their son, husband, mother or father that has been killed! This is our stress and anxiety from not knowing from day to day. Think of the loneliness of husbands, wives, sons and daughters that depend on the emotional support in our day-to-day lives; the children that do not have a father or mother present to help meet all those milestones in life that determines character and personality. What is the mental health cost of keeping our soldiers overseas? Seriously, what is the cost on the American people, the mental health system, insurance premiums, and LOSS of LIVES due to SUICIDE??? Let's talk cost benefit. Unless you are putting a price tag on America lives, does the benefit of keeping our soldiers overseas outweigh the cost of LIFE? I am not ignorant to the benefit of having Iraq and Afghanistan as allies, but we should have secured that by now. Seventeen years is a very long time and we have to ask ourselves is a trillion plus dollars and thousands of lives worth the effort?

### In the News:

**The Pentagon continues Afghanistan troop drawdown despite law barring it and plans** to reduce troop levels in Afghanistan to 2,500 by Jan 15 despite the new defense law that prohibits personnel levels in the country from dipping below 4,000 [Link to article](#)

**Biden should finish the job**-“A conditions based withdrawal means no withdrawal at all”.. Trump got that part right, but will Biden do better and finally conclude our country's longest war? [Link to article](#)

**Support for full withdrawal from Afghanistan grows:** 73% of veterans support a full withdrawal of American military forces and 69% of family members agree. [Link to article](#)

**Will Biden Turn Syria into another Afghanistan?** US forces are building up in eastern Syria. Will Biden take the middle road or choose endless war? [Link to article](#)

**Will We Really Leave Iraq for Good?** Iraqi PM Mustafa al-Kazemi said this week that most American troops will leave Iraq “within days”. American advisers say once American forces withdraw they won't return, “even if ISIS manages to conquer whole cities.” [Link to article](#)

### **Meet your New and Growing MFSO's Advisory Board**

**Ann Wright**-US Army colonel, Ret and U.S. State Department official, known for her outspoken opposition to the Iraq War and recipient of the State Department Award for Heroism, after helping to evacuate several thousand people during the civil war in Sierra Leone.

**David Swanson**-is a peace activist, journalist, radio host and author of several books including War Is a Lie. Long time MFSO ally, David currently resides in Virginia and is the Executive Director of World Beyond War.

**Andrew Bacevich**- US Army colonel, Ret., an American historian specializing in international relations, history and diplomacy, Professor Emeritus of International Relations and History at the Boston University and co-founder and president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

**Jane Bright**- is the mother of Sgt. Evan Ashcraft who died on July 24, 2003 along with two other U.S. soldiers in an ambush near Mosul when Evan was 24 years old. Jane and her husband founded the Evan Ashcraft Memorial Foundation in his memory which provided grants and scholarships for many years to returning soldiers, thereby fulfilling Evan's wish to help others.

**Laurie Loving**- Longtime advisors and MFSO leaders, she and her husband established the N.CA MFSO chapter when Laurie's son deployed to Iraq. Organizers of many actions at the state Capitol and DC, where Laurie spoke at the Washington monument surrounded by combat boots and shoes, they continue advise the national organization, most recently as part of the MFSO-VFP coalition which successfully established an ongoing relationship with key members of President Biden's transition team.

**Daniel Sjursen**- Graduate and American History teacher at West Point and US Army officer, he served combat tours with reconnaissance units in both the Iraq and Afghanistan surges. Medically retiring as a major due to post-traumatic stress, he transitioned to full time writing, speaking, and peace/social justice work. He is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy (CIP), contributing editor at Antiwar.com, and member of Veterans for Peace

**MFSO Meets with President elect Biden transition team December 23, 2020** Getting a meeting with the Biden transitional team seemed like a pipe dream, but thanks to the So. Cal local chapter, the national MFSO board MFSO convinced us to "go for it". On the advance planning team were Paul Cox, Gerry Condon (VFP) and Pat, Jeff, Laurie Loving and Diane Bremer (MFSO) and MFSO supporter Jan Meslin. We requested an on-going dialogue with the administration and that all troops be brought home now from Iraq and Afghanistan. On Dec 23 we met with representatives from the Biden transition team, which included staff from Dr. Jill Biden's office on vet care, and a foreign policy representative. Representing MFSO were Michael McPhearson (Army dad and former Exec. Dir. VFP), Tracy Eiswert (Gold Star spouse) and Pat Alviso (active duty Marine mom) representing VFP were Garrett Reppenhagen (VFP Exec. Dir) and Danny Sjursen (ret. Army Major, historian, former grad and teacher at West Point, author). We aimed for the heart when we told our stories and felt the Biden team was moved. They promised to submit our written testimony to the appropriate people in the White House and identified us as future stakeholders for meetings they will recommend. In the meantime, the planning team continues to meet to identify how we can make the greatest impact on this administration while continuing to organize to bring all of troops home NOW. We welcome and listen to all comments... [mfsooc@earthlink.net](mailto:mfsooc@earthlink.net)

### **From Jeff's desk**

Remembering our military families members who died in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan in 2020: Army Spc. Antonio I. Moore, 22, Marine Gunnery Sgt. Diego D. Pongo, 34, Marine Capt. Moises A. Navas, 34, Air Force Staff Sgt. Marshal D. Roberts, 28, Army Spc. Juan Miquel Mendez Covarrubias, 27, Army Sgt. 1st Class John David Hilty, 44, Army Staff Sgt. Ian P. McLaughlin, 29, Army Pfc. Miguel A. Villalon, 21, Air Force Lt. Col. Paul K. Voss, 46, Air Force Capt. Ryan S. Phaneuf, 30, Army Sgt. 1st Class Javier J. Gutierrez, 28, Army Sgt. 1st Class Antonio R. Rodriguez, 28, Army Spc. Branden T. Kimball, 21, Army 1st Lt. Trevarius R. Bowman, 25, Army Spc. Vincent S. Ibarria, 21 and Army 1st Lt. Joseph T. Allbaugh, 24. You will always be remembered.

**Note:** The opinions above and in future editorials do not reflect any official stance approved by the MFSO board, which meets monthly and posts official positions decided by the board on our website. Your responses and opinions are welcome. If you would like to send your own editorial on any MFSO related issue, please send to [mfsooc@earthlink.net](mailto:mfsooc@earthlink.net)

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**4,586 American Troops killed in Iraq; 2,452 American Troops killed in Afghanistan**