

Florida National Guard are not political pawns | Opinion

By DAN MCKNIGHT
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Dan McKnight

As a member of the Idaho Army National Guard, Marine and active duty soldier in the U.S. Army, I volunteered to serve my country for 13 years, including 18 months in Afghanistan's Pech River Valley. After two decades of endless wars in the Middle East,

an overwhelming majority of Americans — and of my brothers and sisters in uniform, both veterans and those still in service — believe it's time we bring our troops home from other people's millennia-old foreign civil wars.

Gov. Ron DeSantis is also right about bringing troops home from the decades-old partisan political wars in Washington, D.C., where more Guard personnel were deployed — purportedly to block Inaugural Day protests that never materialized — than currently serve in Afghanistan and Iraq combined.

"They're soldiers," DeSantis said of Florida's troops. "They're not Nancy Pelosi's servants."

DeSantis rightly condemned the federal investigation of Florida citizen soldiers who they suspect hold "politically incorrect" views.

"Florida didn't let them go into (our Guard personnel's) political beliefs," DeSantis said, calling it "totally inappropriate" and "disrespectful for people who are clearly patriots."

"This is a half-cocked mission," he said, "and I think it's appropriate to bring them home."

Other state leaders echoed DeSantis, condemning the treatment of Guard personnel after they appeared to become just a bothersome nuisance underfoot in the halls of power.

After their usefulness as props in D.C.'s political theater was exhausted, 5,000 troops were evicted from the U.S. Capitol to sleep in unheated parking garages, where they shared a single bathroom.

Republican Michigan state Rep. Beau LaFave urged his state's governor to bring Michigan troops home.

"The Guard can be tasked with ensuring a peaceful transition of power," LaFave said. "You were sent to ensure the violent rioting that happened when Trump was inaugurated



Members of the Florida National Guard stand near the Lincoln Memorial on Jan. 16 in Washington, D.C. (Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

wasn't replicated with President Biden's ceremony. Mission accomplished. But the way you've been treated in D.C. is simply unacceptable."

New Hampshire Republican Gov. Chris Sununu joined DeSantis in ordering his state's troops home. "It's my job to protect the team and make sure they're not put into substandard conditions, so we pulled them out. I needed to make sure we weren't part of a broken system."

Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott also brought his troops home. Guard personnel "should be respected, not denigrated. These are men and women who served in Afghanistan and overseas, and they're being forced to sleep in a parking garage."

One thing the deployment to D.C. did prove is that instead of being deployed to foreign combat zones, Guard personnel should be home performing duties authorized by the Constitution — quelling civil unrest, suppressing insurrections or invasion, or responding to domestic emergencies such as hurricanes and pandemics. But for that to happen, state leaders must reclaim control over their Guard units.

Florida state Rep. Anthony Sabatini, R-Howey-in-the-Hills, is a leader taking action that deserves Floridians' support.

The lawmaker is supporting "Defend the Guard" legislation that will be introduced in 2021 by state Rep. Melony Bell, R-Fort Meade, requiring that Florida's Guard units couldn't be deployed to foreign combat unless Congress first formally declares war as the Constitution provides.

"I support Defend the Guard," Sabatini explains, "because it will prevent purely political uses of our troops. If there's a lawfully declared war, our troops are ready to go. If there isn't, it's unlawful, unethical and unwise to send them overseas or to badly planned domestic 'missions' in D.C. ... Florida troops should be home defending our state during hurricanes, not becoming a permanent presence or playing a political role for the radical-left D.C. mayor or Speaker Pelosi."

BringOurTroopsHome.US, a coalition of Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans and allies, agrees. Before asking Guard personnel to put their boots on the ground abroad, Congress should put their names on the line with a formal declaration of war.

Please urge Gov. DeSantis and legislators to support state Rep. Melony Bell's "Defend the Guard" bill, and bring all our troops home.

Dan McKnight is the founder and chairman of BringOurTroopsHome.US.