
We Cannot Change the Past, but We Must Learn From It

by JONI ERNST

Twenty years ago, on a bright, clear-skied September morning, our nation was attacked.

Many of us probably remember where we were on that fateful, horrific day. I know I do.

That morning, I was at home in Red Oak, Iowa with my nearly two-year-old daughter. We weren't watching TV at the time, until my neighbor Wanda called and told me to turn it on. I instantly saw the horrible events unfolding right in front of us—and those images will forever be burned in my mind.

The second phone call I got was from my Iowa Army National Guard unit. "Captain Ernst, we're doing a 100 percent accountability check. We need you to stay by the phone all day, so we know how we can get ahold of you."

It was an experience many of us had never felt before—the terrifying shock of knowing that the country we love and our fellow Americans were under siege.

Lessons Learned

Before 9/11, Osama bin Laden told the world al-Qaeda was at war with America. It's clear now that we were not adequately prepared to address al-Qaeda's threat to our country, and prevent the attack from happening in the first place.

We cannot change the past, but we must learn from it.

As a combat veteran who commanded troops during Operation Iraqi Freedom, I had the honor of serving alongside a number of brave women and men who risked life and limb in defense of our nation. For the past 20 years, the servicemembers who have served in the Global War on Terror have taken the fight to the enemy so that our homeland would be saved from further attacks.

For two decades, these troops have succeeded. They led the response to 9/11, caught Osama bin Laden, and kept foreign terrorists off our shores.

The haphazard withdrawal from Afghanistan has left many of these heroes feeling as though their sacrifices were all for naught, their efforts continuously erased with every passing day under a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

There is now a void in Afghanistan that the Taliban and

other violent extremist organizations are primed to exploit. As we've already seen, these bloodthirsty terrorists — the same terrorists that sponsored Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and the attacks on our homeland 20 years ago — will stop at nothing to imperil the lives of American citizens and our Afghan allies.

It is absolutely imperative that we remain vigilant to the potential consequences of the rushed pullout from Afghanistan.

The American people know that what happens over half a world away can have a direct impact on their safety. With our adversaries emboldened, the Taliban reinvigorated, and the threat of violent extremist organizations looming large, we must remain clear-eyed about the persistent threats jeopardizing our national security. American lives are hanging in the balance. We simply cannot afford to let our guard down.

Never Forget.

Our adversaries sought to tear us apart with their cowardly acts on September 11, 2001. But instead, they brought us together as Americans. When our nation and the entire world seemed to stop on 9/11, firefighters, police officers, first responders, and ordinary citizens rushed into danger and courageously put their lives on the line to save countless others.

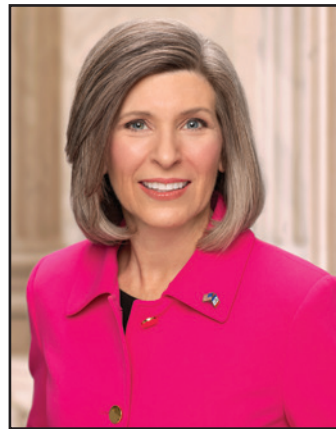
In the days that followed 9/11, America made a pledge to never forget the sacrifice of these selfless heroes — and the nearly 3,000 victims who lost their lives in the attacks. We also must

never take for granted all that our military men and women have given in the fight against terrorism over the last 20 years.

It truly cannot be said enough: I am forever grateful for the brave Americans who answered the call to protect our nation, their families, and those who still carry the burdens of war.

We will never forget. That is our sacred promise. **RF**

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