

News; Domestic

CNN: U.S. Diplomats Warned Last Month Of Potential Catastrophe In Afghanistan, Need For Quick Evacuation; Afghan Interpreter Who Worked With U.S. Special Forces Fears For His Life; Three More U.S. Senators Test Positive For COVID; Trump Allies Exploit Afghan Crisis, Push Anti-Immigrant Hate. Aired 7-8p ET

Kate Bolduan, Kylie Atwood, David Gregory, Lauren Fox, Jonathan Reiner, Tom Foreman, Charlie Dent

8,043 words

19 August 2021

CNN: Erin Burnett OutFront

EBOF

English

Content and programming copyright 2021 Cable News Network, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Copyright 2021 ASC Services II Media, LLC. All materials herein are protected by United States copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast without the prior written permission of ASC Services II Media, LLC. You may not alter or remove any trademark, copyright or other notice from copies of the content.

WOLF BLITZER, CNN HOST: "ERIN BURNETT OUTFRONT" starts right now.

KATE BOLDUAN, CNN HOST: OUTFRONT next breaking news, an internal State Department memo in July called for urgent action in Afghanistan. Was that warning ignored?

Plus, three fully vaccinated senators testing positive for COVID tonight in unrelated cases, but what does it tell us about just how common breakthrough cases are and the need for boosters now?

And Florida Governor Ron DeSantis giving more dubious medical advice to parents. Let's go OUTFRONT.

Good evening, everyone. I'm Kate Bolduan in for Erin Burnett.

OUTFRONT tonight breaking news, CNN learning U.S. diplomats warned in mid July urgent action was needed in Afghanistan. The diplomat said in a classified cable, they believe the country could rapidly deteriorate and they feared a catastrophe after U.S. troops pull out at the end of August.

And tonight, there is chaos and dysfunction in Afghanistan as the U.S. struggles to get 10s of thousands of people out of the country. Officials today saying over the past five days, just 7,000 people have been flown to safety. These are some we're showing you of the lucky ones, the Afghans able to board a flight.

But they represent just a fraction of the 10s of thousands whose lives are now in limbo. And as it stands tonight, we still don't know how many Americans have left Afghanistan and how many remain.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Is there a breakdown of those numbers, the 7,000? Saying, "This is U.S., this is Afghan -"

JOHN KIRBY, PENTAGON PRESS SECRETARY: I do not have a breakdown. I suspect that over time as our manifesting process gets more refined, we may be able to be there but we don't have that specific breakdown.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: John, as of today, how many Americans, American citizens remain in Afghanistan?
KIRBY: I don't know.

NED PRICE, STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON: Well, the 7,000 figure at this point I'm not in a position to break that down much further.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: The Defense Department, the State Department unable to answer what are important questions, important because President Biden has said U.S. troops will stay in Afghanistan until all Americans are out even if it is past the August 31st deadline. And in order to know when U.S. troops can leave, you need to know how many Americans are still in the country.

Meanwhile, outside the airport gates, this is the scene captured by CNN. Rows and rows of men, women and children shoulder to shoulder waiting. No idea what lies ahead. Make no mistake, it is a dangerous journey out of Afghanistan. I want to warn you the pictures you're about to see our graphic.

Here you can see a child being carried, his head covered in blood. Another woman wounded after Taliban fighters turned on a crowd that was outside the airport. According to Reuters, at least 12 people have been killed in the area. And today Pentagon spokesman John Kirby he walked back comments that he made about the Taliban harassing Americans.

Here's what he said and his clarification.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KIRBY: There's been no hostile interactions between the Taliban and our forces or of American citizens getting through.

I can't say definitively that they aren't stopping and/or harassing people with U.S. passports or visas. Obviously, we don't want to see that happen; we don't want to see anybody hurt or harassed, period.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: But he can't say because Kirby went on to say the Pentagon doesn't have 'perfect visibility' into what is taking place outside of the airport. Kylie Atwood is OUTFRONT live at the State Department for us tonight. Kylie, you broke this news tonight of the State Department cable warning of catastrophe if urgent action wasn't taken. That warning came in mid July. What more are you learning?

KYLIE ATWOOD, CNN NATIONAL SECURITY REPORTER: Well, these were a group of diplomats most of them in Afghanistan at the time who wrote this dissent memo, this classified dissent memo to the Secretary of State urging the Department to take more urgent action with regard to these Afghans who had worked alongside U.S. troops and diplomats to process them and evacuate them from the country.

And I'm told that they wrote this memo because they felt that what they were telling the Department was being viewed as alarmist and they felt that they needed to actually write to the Secretary of State and tell him what they thought the department should be doing.

Now, we saw Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer speaking last hour to our Wolf Blitzer about this and he said that this was a memo that did predict the fall of the Afghan government by the time of the U.S. troop withdrawal August 31st but said that that happened, of course, much more quickly than anyone had expected.

He also said that some of the suggestions in this memo were actually taken on by this Biden administration. But I think it's important to note that I'm told that some of the things that were in this memo also weren't acted upon.

[19:05:00]

And that is going to be of interest to folks on the Hill who are investigating what went wrong here with regard to the pre-planning for the chaos that we are seeing ensue right now. Now, I should also note that the State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said that this department values the dissent channel and also that Secretary of State reviews all of the dissent memos that come his way and the responses that go out.

Now, that's all good and well. He didn't comment on this dissent memo specifically, but it is important that those in this Department were raising their voice about concerns that the administration wasn't doing enough to prepare for the chaos that they expected to ensue while you have the President himself saying that the administration did everything that they could and essentially, the chaos that ensued was inevitable. What these State Department officials are saying is that it wasn't inevitable, Kate.

BOLDUAN: Kylie, thank you very much.

I want to go now to the ground in Kabul at the airport there. Ayesha Tanzeem is the Afghanistan and Pakistan Bureau Chief for VOA. She's here with us now. Ayesha, I know that you're in a military barracks on the north side of the airport right now. We've seen the video of the chaos outside of the airport, what is the situation there right now?

AYESHA TANZEEM, AFGHANISTAN BUREAU CHIEF, VOA PAKISTAN: Well, it's the middle of the night in Kabul, so things are a little calm. But during the day, things were just as bad as the videos you showed. And I can tell that because I heard live gunfire erupting throughout the day, so I could tell that they were using it as a method of crowd control.

I also talked to some of the people who came in expecting to be evacuated and many of them said that the care of outside was so bad that they got separated from their loved ones. They were in panic, not knowing where their families were. I met one young man who was crying, who said his family was everything for him. His sister was his life and he had no idea where they were.

I saw one young teenager who was alone, had no cell phone. He said, I have no idea where my family is. I met one young woman with a baby who said, look at me, look at my clothes, look at my shoes, look at the condition I'm in. And all of these people were carrying no luggage because they weren't able to bring anything in through the crowd. So the scenes outside the airport are just as bad and as things are progressing, they're getting even worse.

BOLDUAN: The stories you're hearing are horrible, not only to get to the airport but then what happens to them when they can get through the crash of people. I mean, Ayesha, tell me about your own experience just getting into the airport which is clearly the biggest challenge right now.

TANZEEM: Exactly. I mean, first of all, it took me three trips to get inside. The first two trips, of course, live fire, Taliban beating people back with sticks. The security forces locking the perimeter. I couldn't get in.

The third time and I was actually able to go in, it took two or three hours of being in the crowd, getting pushed around, shoved around. Everybody was on top of each other. I saw grown men cry. I saw babies wailing. I saw women break down and having panic attacks. I saw people drenched in sweat and people breaking into fights with each other.

It was a horrendous scene people couldn't breathe. At one point I thought some kids were going to get trampled upon. So it was not an easy journey and I was told that I was there on one of the easy days. So I can't even imagine what a difficult day of getting inside the airport is like.

BOLDUAN: It makes me sick to my stomach hearing the story that you just told, but thank you for your reporting. Thank you for what you're doing. Thank you, Ayesha.

TANZEEM: Thank you for having me.

BOLDUAN: OUTFRONT with me now, Douglas London. He's the CIA's former Counterterrorism Chief for the region. He's also the author of this soon to be released book, *The Recruiter: Spying and the Lost Art of American Intelligence*. Also with us tonight, David Gregory, CNN Political Analyst who covered the George W. Bush White House, of course, was there the night Bush announced this war.

I mean, Doug, I want to talk about kind of the big picture, but I just have to say like what Ayesha is saying about what is happening at the airport and outside is horrific. It's worse than any - I mean, hearing that things are moving along easily now from the Defense Department and the State Department is not true. But I digress, let's go on.

President Biden on the intelligence and what we knew beforehand, President Biden said that, in his words, there is no consensus in intelligence reports that this would happen. Nobody anticipated it would go this way. But you, Doug, you say the intel was actually spot on. Explain.

DOUGLAS LONDON, FMR. CIA COUNTERTERRORISM CHIEF FOR SOUTH & SOUTHWEST ASIA: So it's unfortunate when intelligence failures are used as an exclusive, convenient opportunity to sort of duck responsibility here. And intelligence failure implies that the intelligence community either didn't expect events to unfold as they did or didn't tell anybody and neither of those cases happened to be.

The intelligence community actually has been looking at various scenarios (inaudible) condition space.

[19:10:03]

How many troops are there or no troops there, what's the stability of the government. And the circumstances we've seen over the past few months, not days, but months starting with the first base closure, major base closure of Kandahar (inaudible) and then Bagram, which really ended the presence of all U.S. military and Intelligence platforms outside of Kabul. This was anticipated and it was made clear to policymakers that this was a very possible outcome and could happen in a matter of days, not necessarily months.

BOLDUAN: So Doug, let me ask you then, let's just cut through it, you wrote a provocative piece about this. If there was no intelligence failure, then what happened?

LONDON: Well, unfortunately, intelligence is supposed to inform decision making, but intelligence does not recommend courses of action. CIA particularly is not a policymaking organization. Our job is to provide assessments based on the intelligence and based on the policy options that are being brought to our attention, such as, if we do A, what happens, if we do B, what happens.

So certainly in the case of President Trump when I was there at the agency, it was clear that for about a hot minute in August of 2017, he was going to take a different look at Afghanistan, understood the threats and concerns that we had expressed and decided to invest in a more sustained approach than that didn't last for long.

I think President Biden has been consistent since he was vice president under President Obama that he wanted to act and it's clear he did even under President Obama towards the end of his administration we were actually getting ready to close additional bases, military bases and platforms that intelligence platforms function (inaudible). But the President changed his mind based on intelligence, but vice president at the time continuing to think we should just get out.

As a candidate, I think the President had some of those views reinforced by some in his circle, particularly his South Asia policy advisors, who believed the Taliban today are not the same Taliban of 20 years ago, that they're going to be more constructive, if not progressive, that they're going to need our help.

Where the intelligence community was saying the Taliban maintains control by keeping that country isolated, by not integrating with the West and by resuming the same principles and philosophies. Hibatullah Akhundzada, the current Amir of the Taliban, he's a sharia fellow. He's a clerk. He's actually more hardline in his views on what Taliban policy should be than his predecessor, Abdul Mansoor, who was killed in a military strike in Pakistan a couple of years ago.

BOLDUAN: Well, and ... LONDON: Please.

BOLDUAN: ... I'm just going to jump in because David, I want to bring you into this, because then - and I have to say I'm still really impacted when I heard the story we just heard by Ayesha who's at the airport and what she's hearing from Afghans. And add to it, David, in this moment of crisis, we don't know how many Americans even are still left in Afghanistan tonight. I'm wondering how that is possible. What did you think when you heard that today?

DAVID GREGORY, CNN POLITICAL ANALYST: Well, it's horrible. The stories are horrible to hear. This is a tragic situation and horrifying in so many instances. But I think, certainly, this was something that could be anticipated. I mean, there's no clean way to withdraw from a country like Afghanistan and that's what you're seeing.

I think the priority by this administration, I think, Doug says it, which is they wanted to get out of Afghanistan. Don't forget when during the Obama presidency, it was his Vice President, Joe Biden, who argued that he felt the military was jamming Obama up on Afghanistan options and there was a whole rethink about Afghanistan policy. And of course, Obama kept true presence there.

Biden the candidate and Biden the President has been very clear that the troops were coming up. Trump would have gotten them out sooner if he could have and certainly put the agreement in place. But what I think is being described here and what people have to understand about the government is there is a momentum that takes hold by policymakers.

And in this case, the momentum was toward complete withdrawal and I still think it is a stain on the administration that an extraction plan was not better executed than this, because the result is what we're seeing play out day in and day out. Unacceptable certainly to the President and to his team but this is the new reality on the ground.

And now there's the very real possibility that getting U.S. troops out safely was number one, getting additional Americans out which we don't have a complete handle on and then those who were supportive of the war effort for 20 years. That becomes a big question mark about what the U.S. is capable of doing as it's leaving.

BOLDUAN: Well, and let me also ask you on that, David, just quickly.

[19:15:00]

When the President commits that he's going to stay there until all Americans are out, he's not committing the same for the Afghan to help the American effort. I don't know if that's the right word, patience, but how much stomach or patience do you think American people have for troops staying longer to get Americans out and Afghans out or is that the very rough reality that they don't?

GREGORY: I think it's brutal reality. The reality has been true for over a decade now, maybe 15 years. I remember covering this from the earliest days. And the truth is that all the efforts to save the women of Afghanistan from the Taliban, that's not why we went and that's not ultimately what the enterprise was about is cruel and brutal as that is and as cruel and brutal as the Taliban still is.

I don't know that there is much appetite. The truth is it's a crude political calculation here. Americans stopped caring about Afghanistan a long time ago and a lot of Americans are (inaudible) going, "Why are we still there anyway?" So yes, when the news covers and we have images of this kind of chaos and this kind of human story playing out, it creates pressure, but I don't think there's going to be a tremendous pressure on the administration to do more than it's doing now.

BOLDUAN: David, thank you very much. Doug, thanks. Appreciate it.

OUTFRONT next, Afghans who came to the aid of American troops, they are now left begging for help as they fear for their lives.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ABDUL, FMR. AFGHAN INTERPRETER TO U.S. MILITARY: They are going to cut our heads off if they find my location.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: I'm going to speak to the man in that recording, next.

Plus, three fully vaccinated U.S. senators testing positive for COVID. The cases appear unrelated. Are we seeing the need for a booster shot play out in real time?

And Trump allies using the crisis in Afghanistan to spew intolerance.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

TUCKER CARLSON, FOX NEWS HOST: Bring in the refugees they're screaming tonight.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: (Inaudible) to a former Republican Congressman with a personal connection to Afghan refugees and he's speaking about it publicly for the first time tonight.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[19:20:40]

BOLDUAN: Tonight, desperation growing among 10s of thousands of Afghans who helped America and its allies and who now are stuck in the country. Like one Afghan who's going by the name Abdul to protect his safety and the safety of his family. His fear is evident in this voicemail we played yesterday.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ABDUL: Why are the American soldiers forgetting about us after everything we did, the sacrifices we made? Why are they leaving us behind? I don't want to be killed by the Taliban. They're going to cut out heads off if they find my location. Please help.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: OUTFRONT now the man behind that voicemail, Abdul. He worked for five years as an interpreter for U.S. Special Forces. He's a visa applicant and desperate to leave Afghanistan. For his safety, he does not want to show his face and is joining us now by phone. Abdul, you said that you and your family need to get out of the country immediately. Have you been threatened by the Taliban?

ABDUL: Yes. I've been threatened by the Taliban today. I escaped from the two Taliban that were following me. So I don't know how long they should go for this, how long should I handle this.

BOLDUAN: Even today, you're threatened and being followed. Tell me more about this, what are the threats? What do you fear is going to happen?

ABDUL: I went to get something from the shop for my kids, they were asking me. So I went there and I saw like two or three Talibans. They were like following me. So I heard something wrong is going on. I felt something wrong is going on. Then I escaped, I run away. They were after me for a long run. So I got (inaudible) to escape. I don't know how long more should I handle this?

I have a wife and three young kids. We are all (inaudible) if the Taliban find us. It's one week. It's one week that I couldn't sleep just for a second. I was guarding my family.

BOLDUAN: Can you describe for me, I'm so sorry, can you describe for me what the days have been like for you and your family since the country collapsed, since the Taliban took over?

ABDUL: Yes. We live in fear every day. And once the American leave, our lives will be over. America will have signed our death sentence.

BOLDUAN: Like at this point, do you think it's now like a matter of days before something tragic happens to you and your family?

ABDUL: It is not just a matter of days. It is a matter of seconds, minutes, hours. Anything can happen to me.

BOLDUAN: Have you heard anything from U.S. officials in the United States at all about getting out of Afghanistan?

ABDUL: No, I haven't heard anything.

BOLDUAN: We've seen just the crash of people trying to get to Kabul airport. Have you tried to get to the airport yet?

ABDUL: I tried many times but everybody is shooting at us. The Taliban Marines, they are running the gates. And the Ashraf Ghani (ph) 01 unit they're all shooting at people.

BOLDUAN: So you've tried to get to the airport many times you say and each time you ...

ABDUL: Many times, yes. Many times.

[19:25:01]

BOLDUAN: So what do you think what needs to happen now? I mean, if you can't get to the airport, you can't get out, Abdul.

ABDUL: Yes, that's what my concern is, I need something happen soon. I need somebody to take action soon to get me out of here.

BOLDUAN: What is your message, if you could get a message to President Biden tonight, what is your message to him?

ABDUL: I'm appealing to the U.S. government, to President Biden to please help me and my family and the Afghan interpreters who worked for your country. You're leaving us here to die? Please, I'm begging you. I'm begging him, I'm begging the America, please help us.

BOLDUAN: Abdul, thank you for your courage and even speaking up. Thank you for helping America.

ABDUL: Yes, no problem.

BOLDUAN: Thank you for speaking to us tonight.

ABDUL: No problem, bye.

BOLDUAN: Thank you. Wow.

And now I want to bring in Kim Motley. She's an International Human Rights Attorney with 13 years experience inside Afghanistan. She has brought Abdul's story and the stories of many other Afghans to light. Kim, it was powerful and hard enough to hear Abdul's voicemail that we played and then just to hear the pain and fear and anguish in his voice, it's really hard. It's really hard to hear.

KIMBERLEY MOTLEY, INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ATTORNEY: Yes, it is. And I think it's just like the nightmare for many of the Afghans that are in Afghanistan. We're told that if they support the U.S. that we will support them. And I think it's just so heartbreaking, I'm just getting dozens and dozens of Afghans are just reaching out and just sending me voice notes and I can't sleep, I can't even imagine what Abdul and his family are going through.

BOLDUAN: I mean, he says it's not days. He says it's seconds. Followed by Taliban even today, he said. I mean, I can only imagine what his family is living through every second. And he said that he's tried to get to the airport many times and he can't get through. His story is not unique in that regard.

So many people we are hearing about Afghans who cannot get to the airport, multiple sources also are saying that some who have actually made it and arrived, that bloodied, mentally distraught all of their belongings lost along the way, what else are you hearing from the Afghans you speak to? MOTLEY: I mean, definitely, people are fleeing their homes with literally the shirt off their back, the clothes off their backs. And

Page 6 of 12 © 2022 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.

so they're desperately going to the airport and just trying to get out, which many feel that that's the best way to be protected. And I think what I'm disappointed at is what's not happening. There's no real diplomacy.

I mean, I think what needs to be happening right now is that there needs to be Afghan female leaders, like Fawzia Koofi who go to Doha and to meet with this new government, this new Taliban-Afghanistan government. And other Afghan female leaders with the backing of the international community needs to talk about women's rights and human rights and to set actual conditional levers on this so that we can figure out how we're going to move forward.

The international community, you need to back up the Afghan women right now. We're not hearing women's voices. We're not seeing women's voices. They're being erased from this society. And women, 20 million women exist and they have a right too. And if you don't protect women's rights, you're not going to protect people like Abdul.

BOLDUAN: Kim Motley, thank you.

MOTLEY: Thanks for having me.

BOLDUAN: OUTFRONT for us next, three U.S. senators all fully vaccinated tonight revealing they have tested positive for COVID. Does this mean breakthrough cases will soon be the norm, not the exception?

Plus, former Governor Ron DeSantis says it should be up to parents to decide whether or not to quarantine their kids if they've been exposed to COVID.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GOV. RON DESANTIS (R) FLORIDA: I think quarantining healthy kids deprives these kids of an ability to get an education.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[19:34:11]

BOLDUAN: Tonight, three U.S. senators who are all fully vaccinated announcing separately they have contracted COVID. All three senators saying they tested positive after experiencing mild symptoms. It comes after another fully vaccinated senator, Lindsey Graham, tested positive earlier this month.

Lauren Fox is OUTFRONT for us from Capitol Hill tonight.

Lauren, all three senators announced their positive test on the same day. What more are you learning tonight?

LAUREN FOX, CNN CONGRESSIONAL CORRESPONDENT: Well, look, I think one underlying factor here is all three of these senator, Roger Wicker, a Republican from the state of Mississippi, Angus King, an independent from the state of Maine, as well as John Hickenlooper from the state of Colorado, they're all vaccinated, Kate. And like you sate, this is not the first time we've seen a fully vaccinated senator announce that they had tested positive for COVID-19. Just a couple of weeks ago, we saw Lindsey Graham, a Republican from the state of South Carolina making that announcement.

[19:35:04]

Now, there's no way to know exactly where these senators contracted or got COVID-19 from. But one thing to keep in mind, it wasn't that long ago, lawmakers are on recess right now, but it was just a couple of weeks ago -- excuse me, a couple of days ago, that they were all on the Senate floor for this vote-a-rama, which takes hours and hours and it really requires that senators be close together for a long period of time. Some of them were wearing masks, some of them weren't.

But I think one thing to keep in mind here is that these senators, in their day-to-day work with constituent constituents and each other, they're around a lot of people for a long period of time. And I think one thing that was interesting about two of the states we got from both King and Hickenlooper, is the fact that they were arguing this is a reminder, and encouragement to get people vaccinated, because one way to really reduce the number of COVID-19 outbreak cases is to just make sure more people are vaccinated.

So that was something that they wanted to highlight for people back home and constituents -- Kate.

BOLDUAN: Lauren, thank you for that.

Joining me now is Dr. Jonathan Reiner. He advised the White House medical team under President George W. Bush.

Doctor, three senators, one after another, announcing this, awfully vaccinated. We don't know if they're connected or not. But what does this mean for the rest of us?

DR. JONATHAN REINER, CNN MEDICAL ANALYST: Well, first of all, Kate, I find it more than a little bit ironic that there was a Democrat, independent, and a Republican --

BOLDUAN: Right.

REINER: -- because the virus doesn't care. The virus doesn't care what your politics are, the virus doesn't care whether you believe in it.

But I think we can make some conclusions about this. So first of all, all three of the senators are about 70 or above. I think Senator Hickenlooper is 69. Wicker is 70, and Angus King is 77.

We know in older people, and the antibody response is not as robust as for younger people. And it degrades over time. Also, we know that these senators were vaccinated very early. All members of Congress were vaccinated beginning in the first wave. So they would have been vaccinated in December or January. And that's now eight months out. What we're learning is that the effect of the vaccines wane.

And as we just heard, their business is to be around people, and the Senate has never had a mask mandate. So to me, that's a perfect storm. You have older people vaccinated eight months ago in an environment that caters to people without masks on. This is where you're going to get breakthrough infections. To me, it really pushes the case for boosters.

BOLDUAN: Yeah, this could be like a real-time study of making the case for boosters.

Now, Joe Biden was asked during his interview with ABC news whether he and the first lady have gotten their booster shots. Let me play what he said.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOE BIDEN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: We're going get the booster shot. We got our shots all the way back in, I think, December. So it's past time.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: And the president is 78 years old. Are you concerned that he hasn't gotten this booster yet?

REINER: I would have already boosted the president. And I don't think there's any reason for the president to wait for some arbitrary date in September. The president of the United States has a unique security and medical security requirements. So he travels around in the beast and he has Secret Service with him. And he needs protection from this pathogen.

He's 78 years old. I've already said that we know that the antibody response in older people is not as vigorous and it does wane, and he was vaccinated eight months ago. So I would just go ahead and vaccinate him tomorrow with a booster.

BOLDUAN: Dr. Reiner, it's good to see you. Thank you.

REINER: My pleasure.

BOLDUAN: OUTFRONT next, out of patience. Parents asking why the FDA hasn't approved a vaccine for kids under the age of 12. One of those parents is congresswoman Katie Porter, a single mom of three. She's my guest.

And Trump allies seizing on the chaos in Afghanistan to incite fear over immigration and an influx in refugees.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[19:43:30]

BOLDUAN: New tonight, demanding answers from the FDA. A bipartisan group of more than 100 House lawmakers demanding a briefing on why the COVID vaccine has not been approved yet for kids under 12. This as the rate of pediatric COVID hospitalizations in the country just hit a record high.

OUTFRONT now, one of the lawmakers leading this effort, Democratic Congresswoman Katie Porter, also a single mom of three kids who went back to school today, one who is 9, not yet eligible to be vaccinated.

Congresswoman, thank you for being here.

So, to your letter, what specifically do you want to know from the FDA?

REP. KATIE PORTER (D-CA): Well, parents need to know what the FDA's plan is and what the timeline is for authorizing vaccinations for children. We lost a really important moment here with back-to-school already occurring, which we could have been educating parents and offering vaccines. So, parents need simply about what is the process, how long is it going to take, what is the cause for the delay?

The FDA already received an official batch of data, so what did it show? So, our job as representatives is to get those answers and to share that information with our constituents.

BOLDUAN: Do you think the FDA is not moving as fast as they can? They're not moving with all urgency?

PORTER: I couldn't say for sure, but I can tell you, I think they're failing to communicate. So, I think what would be very helpful to know is if they're not ready now, to tell us when they will be ready, and what are the steps -- what's standing in the way of being ready?

[19:45:01]

And the American Academy of Pediatrics is also very concerned. They issued a letter recently saying that the delta variant has changed the risk/benefit calculation for vaccinating younger children. So we need to have this information.

The FDA, if they need two more weeks or they need two more months, the American public should be kept apprised of what the process is and what are the roadblocks are that they're facing? We shouldn't be wondering if they're just sitting on their hands.

BOLDUAN: One thing we have heard is that they're still waiting for data from the drug companies, as they're looking -- as they're still conducting these studies. But seven months into his presidency, President Biden has not yet named a permanent commissioner for the FDA.

Do you think that would help?

PORTER: I'm not sure if it would help, but that's the point of the briefing, is to actually put answers to -- put questions to the FDA and get answers. We do know the drug companies started conducting these trials in children quite some time ago. I, as a parent, have tried to enroll my daughter in every clinical trial I can. She hasn't gotten into any, and a lot of other concerned parents are.

So I think we need answers from the FDA. If the problem here is that the acting commissioner isn't up to speed or being slowed down, we do need to turn to pushing to the appointment of a permanent commissioner. But I think the preliminary question is, what is the status, and what are the next steps?

BOLDUAN: I want to play something that Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is being outspoken out about now. We mentioned you are a parent, he's a parent of three kids himself. But he's saying that quarantines for kids exposed to COVID should be a choice left up to their parents.

Listen to this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GOV. RON DESANTIS (R), FLORIDA: I think quarantining healthy kids deprives these kids of an ability to get an education. Now, maybe a parent would want a healthy kid to be quarantined if there's an exposure, but I think that should be the choice of the parent.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: Look, there is CDC guidance on this. There are some exemption it is both kids in class are wearing masks or not. But just on its most basic, what do you think the advice now that Ron DeSantis is handing out?

PORTER: Well, first up, I'll just point out what I think is obvious to most Americans at this point, which is Governor DeSantis is not a public health official. He's not a scientist. He's not a virologist. And so, what we need to be doing is following the science.

I think that parents who send their kids to public schools have an -- or send their kids to school or in the community have an obligation to try to keep their kids safe and try to keep other kids safe. I think families who are partially vaccinated like mine are facing that. The decisions that I make, that my older children make, we make because we're keeping my daughter in mind who isn't able to be vaccinated.

So, I think the goal here is for families and schools, in partnership, to be following best public health practices. We're going to get those from the CDC and from local public health departments. We're not going to get them from elected officials.

Our job as elected officials is to get that scientific information and then share it. Unfortunately, that's not what Governor DeSantis is doing.

BOLDUAN: Congresswoman, thank you for your time.

PORTER: Thank you.

BOLDUAN: OUTFRONT next, the right stepping up intolerant attacks on Afghan refugees who served alongside U.S. troops.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

LAURA INGRAHAM, FOX NEWS HOST: All day, we've heard phrases like, we promised them. Well, who did, did you?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BOLDUAN: Plus, breaking news out of Texas tonight. The state now on the verge of passing a controversial voting bill.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[19:52:37]

BOLDUAN: Tonight, seizing on hate. Top voices on the right exploiting the crisis in Afghanistan to stir up fear about Afghan refugees to the United States, even claiming it's simply an attempt to change the population of America for political gain.

Tom Foreman is OUTFRONT.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

INGRAHAM: All day we heard phrases like "we promised them". Well, who did? Did you?

TOM FOREMAN, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): The torrent of intolerance is hot.

TUCKER CARLSON, FOX NEWS HOST: Well, bring in the refugees, they're screaming tonight.

FOREMAN: On conservative media, the Internet, and in incendiary statements, the far right is torching the idea that America owes anything to those who helped U.S. troops through 20 years of war, and who may not face deathly reprisals in their own land.

STEPHEN MILLER, FORMER SENIOR ADVISOR TO PRESIDENT TRUMP: Those who are advocating mass Afghan resettlement in this country are doing so for political, not humanitarian reasons.

FOREMAN: Advocates for refugees are hitting back.

MATT ZELLER, CO-FOUNDER, NO ONE LEFT BEHIND: Stephen Miller never wore a uniform a day in his life. That guy doesn't represent America. He represents the worst of us.

FOREMAN: But the Afghan uproar fits so neatly into former President Trump's stance, it appears irresistible for some. Never mind that Trump contradicted himself on the issue, releasing this statement Monday: Can anyone imagine taking out our military before evacuating civilians and others who have been good to our country and who should be able to seek refuge?

Then on Wednesday, this plane should have been full of Americans. America first. Among the more virulent post, this one by a former adviser showing that same image with a caption: Raise your hand if you want this plane landing in your town.

Many big name Republicans are actually raising their hands to help, welcoming Afghan immigrants to their states and creating a huge messaging rift in the party.

SEN. MITCH MCCONNELL (R-KY), MINORITY LEADER: We owe it to these people who are our friends and worked with us to get them out safely.

FOREMAN: They helped our military members and now we stand ready to help them in ours. It is vitally important. It is our duty.

We are eager. We will take them.

There is no time to spare.

It is the least we can do.

Still, it is more than some can bear.

CARLSON: So first we invade and then we're invaded. It is always the same.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

[19:55:01]

FOREMAN (on camera): This is one of the nastier and more open rifts we have seen in this party in quite some time. That parade of big Republican names underscores it. This issue is not going away any time soon. This could last for months, maybe even years. Refugee issues maybe do so this fight could keep burning out there -- Kate.

BOLDUAN: Tom, thank you so much for that.

FOREMAN: You're welcome.

BOLDUAN: OUTFRONT with us now, former Republican Congressman Charlie Dent.

And today for the first time, Charlie's revealing that an Afghan refugee lived with his family in Pennsylvania for a time. Sammy is her name. And she's still in the United States, lives in Colorado, is an inspiring doctor.

Congressman, it's good to see you.

I want to talk about Sammy in just a minute. But, first, you heard the rhetoric and hate from some on the right on Tom Foreman's piece. What do you say to folks in your party or those who say that they are in your party talking like this?

CHARLIE DENT, CNN POLITICAL COMMENTATOR: Well, to those who made those ugly statements, that was an ugly form of nativism. It would be a shameful betrayal and completely and utterly dishonorable to turn our backs on these people who fall alongside our folks and I just think it's reprehensible. I think we should be listening to what Senator Romney and Lee and McConnell and Governor Hogan and the others you just identified were saying the right things that we have to take in our fair share. And we should not leave them behind.

I've been to Afghanistan twice. I would thank many of those Afghan interpreters them for helping our troops. They're vital. And I just kind imagine the people to say, we had Vietnamese, Korean and Cuban refugees who came to our country. They're great American citizens as we know and they contribute so much to us. I would expect of the same of the Afghans.

BOLDUAN: Let's talk about Sammy now. This is the first time you're talking about this. You have much more background, but in brief, she was a friend of your daughter at school. You found from her mother that they had fled Afghanistan with her siblings after her father was executed in front of them. And because of life circumstances, Sammy needed a place to stay and you welcomed her so she could finish her senior year of high school, and now she's thriving.

So, this hateful rhetoric we're just talking about hits especially close to home for you.

DENT: Yeah. And to hear these people say this all being done for political reasons, it's really deeply offensive. This is strictly entirely humanitarian. You know, I -- when young Sammy Azizi (ph) lived with my family, you know, this -- I would tell my children, we never have anything to complain about. She lost her father, executed in front of the Taliban.

They come to America. The mother gets in a car accident, becomes a quadriplegic. They're trying to live hand to mouth, take care of their mother, go to school, just scratch out a living. And we just felt it was our duty to help.

And we never say anything about publicly. I didn't want anybody to think it was a political thing. We're just doing because it was our little contribution to help a family in need.

And I just -- I can't tell you how proud I am of her and her family for what they've been able to accomplish here, you know, under the most difficult of circumstances both in Afghanistan and in America.

BOLDUAN: And she actually told us that her mom would dress her as a boy as a kid so she could learn. And you, here's a quote from her, you were an amazing father figure in my life. Just the most wonderful family I've ever known. A very powerful story.

How does it feel for you to hear this?

DENT: She's a sweet kid. She gave us far more than anything we ever gave her. She brought a lot of joy to us. And she was a great American kid.

I mean, I -- look, I just feel like we just did our little bit to help her. If you are concerned about these refugees, go meet some, you know? Especially the communities of faith. You know, my church has been very active with Burmese, Myanmar refugees.

That's what this is about. You know, go meet them. Help them. They need it. I mean, we were so blessed in this country, you don't know how good we have it. And these people come from such desperate circumstances. Don't make this a political issue. Just do your part. Just help.

BOLDUAN: Thanks for sharing, Charlie.

DENT: Thank you, Kate.

BOLDUAN: Breaking news. We have to turn out of Texas. The state is poised to pass a bill the Democrats claim will seriously restrict voting rights. Three Democrats whose colleagues fled the state and flew to Washington to block a bill, they returned to the House floor, giving Republicans the minimum number of lawmakers needed to vote and hold the vote. The bill among other things bans drive-through voting, puts new restrictions on mail-in voting and grants new powers to partisan poll watchers. Much more on that ahead.

A quick programming note before we go, on Saturday, don't miss that "We Love NYC: Homecoming Concert", 5:00 p.m. Eastern exclusively on CNN.

Thanks for joining us.

"AC360" starts now.

Content and programming copyright 2021 Cable News Network LP, LLLP. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Prepared by VIQ Media Transcription, Inc. No license is granted to the user of this material other than for research. User may not reproduce or redistribute the material except for user's personal or internal use and, in such case, only one copy may be printed, nor shall user use any material for commercial purposes or in any fashion that may infringe upon Cable News Network LP, LLLP's copyright or other proprietary rights or interests in the material; provided, however, that members of the news media may redistribute limited portions (less than 250 words) of this material without a specific license from CNN so long as they provide conspicuous attribution to CNN as the originator and copyright holder of such material. This is not a legal transcript for purposes of litigation.

Document EBOF000020210820eh8j00001