

EXCLUSIVE - Afghanistan Gold Star mom says President Biden asked her for a photo op as she wept in the Oval Office after heartbreaking loss of her son who was killed in the Kabul bombing two years ago

By Kelly Laco, Executive Editor Of Politics For Dailymail.Com Updated 16:39 EDT 26 Aug 2023



- **Paula Knauss Selph is the Gold Star mother of Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Christian Knauss who was killed in Afghanistan during the 2021 withdrawal**
- **'It's a moral disgrace for a president not to have mercy on the people that he serves, Selph told DailyMail.com**
- **'There's nothing like watching your child die in front of you in front of the world'**

A Gold Star mother whose son was killed during deadly [Afghanistan](#) withdrawal said she holds President Biden accountable for his death and is still seeking closure two years later.

A suicide bomber detonated his deadly payload outside of the Abbey Gate at Kabul's international airport on August 26, 2021, killing 13 American service members and at least 170 Afghans amid the chaos of the exit. The [families are seeking accountability](#) from the Biden administration almost two years later.

Paula Knauss Selph, the Gold Star mother of Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Christian Knauss, told DailyMail.com in an exclusive interview: 'There's been a lot of grief, a lot of grief.'

'There's nothing like watching your child die in front of you, in front of the world,' she said while reflecting on the two years since Ryan's death.

She recounted meeting President Biden for the first and only time on Memorial Day 2022 at an event for Gold Star families in Washington, D.C.



Paula Knauss Selph and her son Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Christian Knauss



President Joe Biden lays a wreath at The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day, Monday, May 30, 2022



'He was a beautiful baby,' and weighed 10 pounds at birth, Selph fondly recalled. Ryan is pictured here with his older brother

During a meeting in the Oval Office, Biden told her 'I can understand if you're angry.'

'I stood face-to-face with him, eyeball-to-eyeball,' she continued, saying 'I began to weep.'

'It should have never happened this way,' she told the president.

'He stood there stoically,' Selph recounted as opposed to getting an apology or a hug.

'Nothing out of his mouth except - well would you like to get a photo with me?'

Selph astoundingly responded that she would only like a picture if it was with the president next to her son's tombstone at Arlington National Cemetery.

'I can't do that because Secret Service won't let me do that,' she said Biden replied.

'It's a moral disgrace for a president not to have mercy on the people that he serves. It is a moral disgrace,' Selph told DailyMail.com about her exchange with the president.

He thought the 'sad occasion' was a 'photo op' rather than realizing it was a moment in time that he can never get back with a mother who's grieving over a child and he had the chance to make a difference, she continued.

'He had the chance to make a difference for my child. On not making decisions and indecisions that cost him his life. And I do hold him accountable,' she continued.

In contrast, Selph said Gen. Mark Milley - the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff - apologized to her after Ryan's death at an event in Florida.

Although he's not 'innocent' in what happened to her son, she said she holds more respect for him for looking her in the eyes and saying 'I am so sorry for what happened.'

She said the failures that led to Ryan's death at Abbey Gate two years ago is not a partisan problem, but rather a 'leadership problem.'

Her son Ryan always wanted to be in the armed service while growing up, she told DailyMail.com.

'He was a beautiful baby,' and weighed 10 pounds at birth, Selph fondly recalled.

'Ryan, all of his life was quite certain he wanted to go in the armed forces. And it is a pleasing thing to me. But throughout his life, he kept that focus. He was so disciplined. He was so smart.'

Although Ryan may not have been a 'martyr' or a 'perfect person,' he sacrificed his life to give others the opportunity to live the American dream.

'He was protecting and giving us the opportunity for many people to live out the American dream. That's what will long outlive all of us.'

Selph is the executive director of the Respect and Remember Foundation, which supports active duty military, encourages recruitment and partners with veterans organizations - all in the name of Ryan.



Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Christian Knauss died at Abbey Gate on August 26, 2021



The Americans killed in the blast were: (left to right, starting with top row) Cpl. Daegan W. Page - Sgt. Johanny Rosario Pichardo - Staff Sgt. Darin T. Hoover - Lance Cpl. David L. Espinoza - Lance Cpl. Rylee J. McCollum - Lance Cpl. Kareem M. Nikoui - Cpl. Hunter Lopez - Lance Cpl. Jared M. Schmitz - Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Knauss - Cpl. Humberto A. Sanchez - Navy Corpsman Maxton W. Soviak - Lance Cpl. Dylan R. Merola - Sgt. Nicole L. Gee



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Biden at the Arlington National Cemetery event on Memorial Day 2022



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Taliban soldiers are pictured at the entrance of Afghanistan's international airport in Kabul on Aug. 17, 2021, two days after the Taliban swept into the capital

The State Department releases a scathing 87-page report on Afghanistan withdrawal failures last month, immediately before the long July Fourth holiday weekend.

[The investigation found serious pitfalls in leadership and questions about who was in charge before and during the mayhem](#), which resulted in the deaths of 13 U.S. service members and hundreds of Afghan civilians.

The State Department report repeatedly blamed the administrations of both former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden for their efforts before and after the August 2021 departure of U.S. forces from Kabul.

'The decisions of both President Trump and President Biden to end the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan had serious consequences for the viability of the Afghan government and its security,' the report says.

'Those decisions are beyond the scope of this review, but the (review) team found that during both administrations there was insufficient senior-level consideration of worst-case scenarios and how quickly those might follow.'

It also outlined several strategic failures as the Taliban overran cities - saying there wasn't enough consideration given to 'worst-case scenarios.'

As a result, thousands of allies who helped the U.S. in the war were left behind, and there was chaos at Hamid Karzai International Airport as men, women and children tried desperately to flee.

Biden has stood by his decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and shrugged off the report.