



TONY KURTZ
STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 50th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Partisan Politics or Lack of Knowledge Motivate Governor's Border Decision

In late February, Governor Evers signed Executive Order #13, withdrawing 112 Wisconsin National Guard personnel from the Southwest Border where they had been assisting the Arizona National Guard with border security missions since June of 2018. This decision has been overshadowed by the introduction of the Governor's budget, but I think that it's important to shed light on it because this disappointing action could have far-reaching consequences.

The Southern border mission, which focused on Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas started in 1989 under President George H. W. Bush as Joint Task Force Six (JTF-6). Its directive authorized the military to support civilian law enforcement to counter the flow of illegal drugs into the United States. In 1997, while assigned to the 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment (Fort Hood, Texas), I participated in one of these month-long border missions. For a young officer, it was a rewarding mission, and a great learning experience. I had the opportunity to work with other agencies, such as the U.S Customs and Border Patrol and the Drug Enforcement Agency. The missions enabled me to learn firsthand the importance of working together and that the sum is greater than the parts. These 1997 missions were conducted under Commander in Chief, President Bill Clinton. In 2004, under President George W. Bush, the mission of JTF-6 changed along with its name. The new name Joint Task Force-North (JTF-N) mission was expanded to include providing homeland security and counter transnational organized crime support to the nation's federal law enforcement agencies. Border security was now a key focus for the military units assisting U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents. In 2006, President George W. Bush called National Guard personnel to the Southwest border for a two-year mission known as Operation Jump Start. The Wisconsin National Guard, under Governor Jim Doyle, provided equipment and approximately 1,000 soldiers and airmen in support of the operation over a two-year period. The National Guard was called upon again in 2010 when President Barack Obama ordered nearly 1,200 National Guard troops to support the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol during Operation Phalanx. The mission along the Southern border has continued during the presidencies of both Republicans and Democrats, and Wisconsin National Guard troops have participated in that mission under the command of Republican and Democratic Governors. Why the abrupt change?

It strikes me that Governor Evers is making this decision either without a grasp of the history of this mission, or he is doing so strictly for partisan political purposes. In either case, this decision sets a dangerous precedent. What other military missions will he decline or withdraw the Wisconsin National Guard from? Additionally, could this effect how the Department of Defense (DOD) and the National Guard Bureau (NGB) view the Wisconsin National Guard when making strategic decisions? Over 75% of the funding for our Wisconsin National Guard comes from the federal government, and I believe that failure to complete a mission may send the wrong message about this state's commitment to service.

I'm very proud of the dedicated men and women who serve in our Wisconsin National Guard. I've had the honor to work with and train many of these fine soldiers and airmen over the years. Those that wear our nation's uniform always want to complete the mission. Unfortunately, it appears to me that Governor Evers is using our troops as political pawns, and I don't think that's right.

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The 50th Assembly district which includes all of Juneau and parts of Sauk, Richland, Monroe, and Vernon counties and is home to Volk Field and Camp Williams. Rep. Kurtz served 20 years in the United States Army and flew attack helicopters and is a member of the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs.