

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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February 21, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson:

On his first day in office, despite warnings from senior Republicans, President Trump issued a blanket pardon to the more than 1,500 people charged in the deadly January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.¹ President Trump's pardons are egregious and another attempt to rewrite history and cast the insurrection as a "day of love."² Two masterminds of January 6th, Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, returned to the Capitol complex today, raising significant questions about their intentions, including potential plans for retribution.³ As the Speaker of the House, your office has a duty to ensure the protection and physical safety of your colleagues, as well as the staff and employees of the House of Representatives.

President Trump's pardons breathe new life into and embolden violent extremists, posing a real danger to our fellow Members of Congress and their staffs, the Capitol Police, and the millions of visitors to the Capitol each year. Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Tarrio have been freed from prison after being convicted of seditious conspiracy—meaning they were found to have plotted to overthrow the government. Mr. Tarrio and Mr. Rhodes were serving the longest sentences of any of anyone convicted for the January 6th attack, 22- and 18-year prison sentences, respectively, which speaks to the gravity of their crimes.⁴ They are not only unrepentant—they

¹ *Proud Boys and Oath Keepers Leaders Are Free. Who Are They and What Are Their Groups?*, USA Today (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2025/01/22/trump-pardons-proud-boys-oath-keepers-leaders/77861478007/).

² *Trump's Continuing Effort to Downplay Jan. 6 Violence as 'Day of Love'*, ABC News (Jan. 6, 2025) (online at <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trumps-continuing-effort-downplay-jan-6-violence-day/story?id=117381861>).

³ *"We're Going Back": Proud Boys and Oath Keepers Plan Presser At Capitol They Stormed*, Raw Story (Feb. 21, 2025) (online at www.rawstory.com/proud-bys-2671191893); Kyle Cheney (@kyledcheney), X (Feb. 21, 2025) (online at <https://x.com/kyledcheney/status/1892997430032875682?s=46>).

⁴ *Proud Boys and Oath Keepers Leaders Are Free. Who Are They and What Are Their Groups?*, USA Today (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2025/01/22/trump-pardons-proud-boys-oath-keepers-leaders/77861478007/).

want revenge on their enemies, including the Capitol Police.⁵ Mr. Rhodes's only regret about January 6th appears to be that the Oath Keepers failed to commit *even more* violence. Just days after the insurrection, Mr. Rhodes lamented to his far-right brethren, "We should have brought rifles. We could have fixed it right then and there. I'd hang f--king [Nancy] Pelosi from the lamppost."⁶ After his release from prison, Mr. Rhodes claimed that on January 6th, "I simply stood outside and exercised my right to free speech."⁷

Shortly after being released from prison, Mr. Rhodes was seen roaming the halls of Congress with Ivan Raiklin, President Trump's self-proclaimed "Secretary of Retribution" who has published a "deep-state target" list of hundreds of names of enemies, including Members of Congress, their staffs, and Capitol Police officers.⁸ Similarly, Mr. Tarrío, the leader of the Proud Boys, is also looking for retribution following his pardon. After being released from prison, Mr. Tarrío told Alex Jones that members of the House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack "need to be imprisoned," adding, "They need to pay for what they did."⁹ He also alluded to his hope that under a second Trump Administration he would be empowered far into the future, telling Mr. Jones, "We've got to do everything in our power to make sure that the next four years sets us up for the next hundred years."¹⁰

President Trump's pardons, which are an affront to the rule of law, have also drawn criticism from multiple senior members of the Republican Party. Vice President JD Vance said that those who committed violence "obviously" did not deserve a pardon.¹¹ Republican Senator Thom Tillis, who has proposed legislation that would increase penalties for murdering police officers, said of the pardons, "Anybody who was convicted of assault on a police officer, I just can't get there at all. I think it was a bad idea."¹² Senator Mitch McConnell expressed alarm at

⁵ *Freed Capitol Riot Ringleaders Regroup - and Vow 'Retribution,'* BBC (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at www.bbc.com/news/articles/c210krlpdl2o).

⁶ *In FBI Recording from Jan. 10, 2021, Oath Keepers' Stewart Rhodes Talked About Hanging Pelosi 'From the Lamppost,'* CBS News (Nov. 2, 2022) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/oath-keepers-trial-pelosi-trump/).

⁷ *Freed Capitol Riot Ringleaders Regroup - and Vow 'Retribution,'* BBC (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at www.bbc.com/news/articles/c210krlpdl2o).

⁸ *Trump's 'Secretary of Retribution,'* The Atlantic (Nov. 2, 2024) (online at www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2024/11/trump-secretary-of-retribution-ivan-raiklin/680494/); *Released Oath Keepers Founder Stewart Rhodes Goes to Capitol Campus to Meet with GOP Lawmakers,* WANE 15 (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at www.wane.com/hill-politics/released-oath-keepers-founder-stewart-rhodes-goes-to-capitol-campus-to-meet-with-gop-lawmakers/amp/).

⁹ *Freed Capitol Riot Ringleaders Regroup - and Vow 'Retribution,'* BBC (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at www.bbc.com/news/articles/c210krlpdl2o).

¹⁰ *As Jan. 6 Leaders Call for Retribution, Judges Warn Against Revisionism,* Washington Post (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/01/22/tarrío-rhodes-retribution-jan6-revisionism/).

¹¹ *Fox News Sunday with Shannon Bream,* Fox News (Jan. 12, 2025) (online at www.foxnews.com/media/jd-vance-trump-process-rectify-unfair-jan-6-prosecutions?msocid=095e5f19d4bf6daf10664a62d5696ce8).

¹² *GOP Senator: 'Bad Idea' to Pardon People Who Assaulted Police Officers,* The Hill (Jan. 21, 2025) (online at <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/5098362-thom-tillis-trump-pardon-justice/>); *Freed Capitol Riot Ringleaders Regroup - and Vow 'Retribution,'* BBC (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at

the prospect of allowing these violent criminals to walk free, stating, “No one should excuse violence. And particularly violence against police officers.”¹³

Law enforcement groups also warned about the risks of pardoning more than 1,500 insurrectionists. U.S. Capitol Police Chief Thomas Manger said of the pardons, “My concern is the message that it sends when people who are arrested for committing violence against police officers are not held to account.” He added, “And I worry about the morale of my officers. I worry about just how this impacts them, and I don't want them handling some protest or making some arrest in the future and scratching their head wondering, ‘Well, I wonder what’s going to happen with this case?’”¹⁴ In a joint statement issued by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Fraternal Order of Police, they warned that the pardons may be “potentially emboldening others to commit similar acts of violence” and said that the early release of these offenders “diminishes accountability and devalues the sacrifices made by courageous law enforcement officers and their families.”¹⁵ After just one day in office, President Trump broke his campaign promise to be the “law and order” president who always “back[s] the blue.”¹⁶

As the Speaker of the House, I call upon your office now to take meaningful action by acknowledging and condemning the violence that occurred on January 6th and assure our colleagues, staff, and the American public that those who sought to overthrow our government are not welcomed back to the Capitol through an open front door.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman

www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2l0krlpdl2o).

¹³ *Trump Picks Fights with His Party*, Semafor (Jan. 21, 2025) (online at www.semafor.com/article/01/21/2025/mcconnell-criticizes-trumps-broad-pardon-of-capitol-riot-defendants).

¹⁴ *Capitol Police Chief: Jan. 6 Pardons Send Message That “Politics is More Important Than Policing,”* CBS News (Jan. 21, 2025) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/capitol-police-chief-jan-6-pardons-send-message/).

¹⁵ International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), *Press Release: Joint IACP-FOP Statement on the Recent Presidential Pardons* (Jan. 21, 2025) (online at www.theiacp.org/news/official-statements/joint-iacp-fop-statement-on-the-recent-presidential-pardon).

¹⁶ *Trump’s a Fraud When it Comes to ‘Backing the Blue,’* The Daily Beast (Apr. 22, 2024) (online at www.thedailybeast.com/trumps-a-fraud-when-it-comes-to-law-and-order-and-backing-the-blue/).