

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Ranking Member Jamie Raskin

Committee on Oversight and Accountability

Hearing on “Overdue Oversight of the Capital City: Part II”

May 16, 2023

Forgive me, Mr. Chairman, but we’re at a point when we have to ask why we’re doing this again. Is second-guessing the elected leadership of Washington D.C. really the most urgent priority for the United States Congress today?

I can think of two dozen things more urgently important to the American people, starting with out-of-control gun violence that is taking tens of thousands lives and causing millions of people to live in fear and terror.

From Kentucky to Tennessee, from Georgia to California, we have had more mass shootings in 2023 than we have had days in the year so far. In other words, there is a gun massacre—not always with an AR-15, but often with an AR-15—every single day and yet assault weapons only account for 1-2% overall of all the firearm fatalities in America. The vast death toll from firearms and our Swiss-cheese like gun laws make America an absolute outlier among industrialized nations.

There are countries on earth whose foreign ministries have issued travel warnings to their citizens about the dangers of going to America because of gun violence, which is now the leading cause of death for children under 18, surpassing car accidents, pediatric cancer, and contagious diseases.

And yet the Oversight Committee has not seen fit to call a single hearing on why massacres are increasing in America or how we can work together to stop this bloodbath.

Nor have we held a hearing on the threat of a default which could plunge America into a deep recession, crash the stock market, and cost our people millions of jobs. The Constitution does not allow any of this because Article IV, Section 4 says that the “validity of the public debt shall not be questioned.” And yet our colleagues, who were content to raise the debt limit three times under President Trump, a president who created 25% of all the debt accumulated between George Washington and Joe Biden—more than any other president—seek to play dangerous political games with the Full Faith and Credit of the United States of America, a nation which has up until this point never stiffed its creditors or defaulted on its obligations.

No hearings on that.

We’ve called no hearings on the war on freedom in America—the pervasive efforts to ban textbooks, censor and intimidate teachers, silence scientists, humiliate and “cancel” LGBTQ+ students, and rewrite our nation’s history textbooks to conform to the “white nationalist” ideology a Republican Senator publicly embraced a few days ago.

Nor have we held a hearing on the *Dobbs* decision and how the relentless attack on reproductive freedom in our country is dramatically undermining the health care that millions of American women are receiving on everything from common miscarriage to ectopic pregnancy to postpartum hemorrhage to IUD insertion to endometrial biopsy, all of whose treatments can involve misoprostol and mifepristone, which are suddenly being treated like criminal contraband. Doesn't women's health warrant even a single hearing under these crisis conditions?

Nor have we had a hearing on the vicious assault on voting rights taking place across the country.

Instead, we have gathered today to hold a second hearing to pretend to micro-manage the local affairs of the District of Columbia. I fully expect some of our colleagues to declare their candidacies for Ward 6 D.C. Council, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, or maybe even Mayor before this is all over. At least the people of Washington would then have some role in this absurd Congressional performance art.

But I was watching President Trump's so-called Town Hall meeting on CNN last week, and I saw two remarkable things that clarified what's happening here. First, Donald Trump blamed Vice President Pence for failing to steal the election for him on January 6th. As Trump stressed on January 6, 2021, he believed and continues to believe that Pence did not have the "courage to do what needed to be done." Moreover, Trump assured his cult followers that Pence was never in any danger from the invading mob chanting "hang Mike Pence," and all the violent unrest was Pence's own fault for not succumbing to Trump and becoming the first Vice President to step outside his constitutional role and declare the President the winner against the actual electoral college vote. You see, that's what Pence gets for not doing what he was told.

Trump also castigated and blamed Jean Carroll, the woman he sexually abused in a department store and later lied about and defamed. Trump called her a "whack job" and asked, "What kind of a woman meets somebody and brings them up and within minutes you're playing hanky panky in a dressing room?" You see, he thinks it's her fault that he sexually abused her.

Watching these two glaring cases of the GOP frontrunner for the nomination in 2024 blaming the victim for his crimes made me see precisely what's happening with these obsessive hearings on Washington, D.C.

They are all part of the ongoing effort to deny Americans who live in D.C. the right to participate in representative government and then to blame them for their own disenfranchisement.

Nearly 700,000 U.S. citizens living in Washington, D.C. They pay more taxes per capita than the residents of each of the 50 states. They have fought in every U.S. war. They are draftable. They are subject to all the laws of the country. Against all odds, without the power to select their own judges or prosecutors or make their own budgets without outside interference, they have made genuine progress in their community. And they have nonviolently petitioned for statehood the way 37 states have.

But they still have no voting representation in the U.S. House or the U.S. Senate. They are locked out of the normal processes of Congressional representation.

Yet, when violent insurrectionists attacked this body on January 6, 2021, a "beautiful day," according to Donald Trump, the people of Washington, as Capitol officers and MPD officers and staffers and citizens and local officials, rallied to the defense of the Republic and the very Congress that locks them out.

Local residents and leaders stood up to defend Congress and the Vice President against the rampaging mob that stormed the seat of national government in the name of the Big Lie with the explicit goal of toppling and stealing a Presidential election.

Now, for their service and sacrifice for the country, Washingtonians must endure lectures about their unfitness for democracy from other people's representatives who confuse the act of seditious conspiracy with Capitol tourism and call the convicted assailants of American police officers "political prisoners."

If our Colleagues choose to ignore the statehood petition of nearly 700,000 Americans right in front of their nose, there is not much we can do about that kind of moral indifference and smug contempt for other Americans' rights. But at least spare everyone the Trumpian spectacle of your blaming the victims for their disenfranchisement and lack of fully comprehensive government. It is an insult to Washington, an embarrassment to Congress, and a shocking waste of time.

I want to thank the Mayor and the U.S. Attorney for D.C. for appearing here today.

I also want to thank the people of the District of Columbia for not violently attacking Congress even though you have a legitimate political grievance as opposed to an imaginary one. You have exercised your Ninth Amendment and First Amendment rights to petition for statehood admission, and we salute your patriotic defense of the Constitution and your embrace of nonviolence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

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