

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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Opening Statement Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney Hearing on “The Capitol Insurrection: Unexplained Delays and Unanswered Questions” May 12, 2021

Today, the Committee will examine one of the darkest days in our nation’s history: the January 6th insurrection at the United States Capitol. On that day, a violent mob—incited by shameless lies told by a defeated president—launched the worst attack on our Republic since the Civil War.

It was a harrowing and heartbreaking day for all of us. We watched as the temple of our democracy—a building we’re as familiar with as our own homes—was overrun by a mob bent on murdering the Vice President and Members of Congress. The mob’s goal was clear: they were trying to prevent the peaceful transfer of power to the newly elected President by halting the counting of electoral ballots.

This insurrection failed. But not before police officers were attacked and bludgeoned and had to use deadly force to protect Members of Congress. Shots were fired mere feet from the House floor.

Because of this horrific attack, four private citizens died, and three police officers lost their lives. Had it not been for the heroic men and women of law enforcement who faced down the mob, there would have been even more bloodshed that day.

We know who provoked this attack. That is why 17 House and Senate Republicans joined all congressional Democrats in the bipartisan effort to impeach and convict Donald Trump for, and I quote, “inciting violence against the Government of the United States.” To quote Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, “There is no question, none, that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of that day.”

But the failures of January 6th go beyond the craven lies and provocations of one man. The federal government was unprepared for this insurrection, even though it was planned in plain sight on social media for the world to see. And despite all the military and law enforcement resources our government can call upon in a crisis, security collapsed in the face of the mob, and reinforcements were delayed for hours as the Capitol was overrun.

It is our duty to understand what went wrong that day, to seek accountability, and to take action to prevent this from ever happening again.

We are joined today by the Chief of the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department, Robert Contee. On January 6th, Chief Contee and his officers did not hesitate to answer the call, and over 800 D.C. police officers voluntarily rushed to the aid of the Capitol. D.C. police stood side by side with the Capitol Police, and displayed tremendous heroism. Chief Contee, we are in your debt.

We also have with us today two Cabinet heads from the Trump Administration who led key federal agencies on January 6th. Neither has publicly testified about their role in these events, and I appreciate their willingness to testify today.

Former Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen led the Department of Justice, which was reportedly designated as the “lead federal agency” for coordinating security in Washington on January 6th.

The potential for violence that day was clear. In December, the New York Police Department warned the FBI that certain protestors viewed January 6th as an opportunity for violent revolt. Then, again, on January 5th, an FBI office in Norfolk, Virginia warned that extremists were discussing, quote, “specific calls for violence against Congress on January 6,” including a message to, quote, “Go there ready for war.”

The Justice Department and the FBI have a special duty to warn of domestic terrorist threats, yet it’s clear that despite all of this intelligence, the federal government was not prepared.

Today—more than four months later—we’re still in the dark about exactly what went wrong.

Did the Trump Administration fail to adequately prepare for violence because it had a blind spot for right-wing domestic terrorism? As the lead federal agency on January 6th, why did the Justice Department fail to coordinate an effective and timely response to the attack on the Capitol?

We simply don’t know. In part, that is because neither DOJ nor the FBI have produced a single piece of paper in response to the requests sent by six House Committees, including this one, in March.

Not a single piece of paper. This is completely unacceptable.

I was hoping to have FBI Director Christopher Wray here today to address the unanswered questions about the FBI’s actions. I sent him multiple invitations and even rescheduled the hearing twice, but he declined to appear. However, I am pleased to announce that Director Wray has agreed to appear before this Committee in June, and I look forward to his testimony then.

Our final witness today is former Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller, who led the Department of Defense on January 6th. When the Capitol came under siege and Capitol Police

were badly outnumbered, the world looked to the Department of Defense to protect our government from attack.

Yet DOD did not authorize the deployment of D.C. National Guard troops to the Capitol until nearly four hours after local officials first pleaded for help—even though we were under full-scale assault. DOD hesitated, until Vice President Pence—not President Trump—gave the order to, quote, “clear the Capitol.”

DOD’s explanations of its own actions have failed to address critical questions. Why did military leaders place unusual restrictions on commanders on the ground? Mr. Miller says that he first learned that the mob had entered the Capitol between 1:00 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. So why did the Defense Department wait until after 5:00 p.m. before sending the National Guard to the Capitol?

Today’s hearing will not be the end of our investigation. This Committee, along with other committees in the House, will continue to seek a full accounting of this attack. Even today, our colleagues in the House Administration Committee are asking tough questions of the Inspector General for the Architect of the Capitol.

This oversight is essential. But we also need an independent, bipartisan commission focused on investigating the root causes of this insurrection. The 9/11 Commission has taught us that, even in our most difficult moments, we can come together as one and answer hard questions. The 9/11 Commission made dozens of recommendations to overhaul our nation’s security and intelligence operations, and Congress followed through, passing legislation to implement most of the Commission’s bipartisan proposals. We need that same resolve and action today.

This nation stands at a crossroads, and the path we choose will define American democracy for generations to come. We must reject President Trump’s big lie and the violent insurrection it inspired. No Member of Congress, whether a freshman representative or a House Conference Chair, should face punishment for speaking the truth about what happened that day.

It is time for the American people—and this Congress—to look at the events of January 6th, and say, never again.

I now recognize Ranking Member Comer for his opening statement.

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