

Opening Statement
Hearing on “The Weaponization of the Federal Government”
Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government
10:00 AM, Thursday, March 7, 2024
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

The January 6th insurrection happened. People died. Others are still suffering from physical and psychological trauma experienced that day. It was an attack on the United States Capitol directed by former President Donald J. Trump and enabled by people who have advanced the “Big Lie” regarding the 2020 election, including Members of Congress who sit on this Select Subcommittee. January 6, 2021 was one of the darkest days in our nation's history, and it will forever be a source of disgrace for those who enabled and continue to excuse the violence of that day and its dangerous purpose.

The fact is that former President Donald Trump and his supporters attempted to overturn with force the results of a free and fair election. The January 6th attack was stoked by persistent election denialism, propagated by Republican leaders, including former President Donald Trump and Republican Members of Congress. The attack was the culmination of months of unfounded claims meant to undermine faith in American democracy.

On that fateful day, our Capitol, a symbol of freedom and democracy to the world, was besieged. The mob, incited by President Trump's election lies and call to "fight like hell," unleashed an onslaught of violence that led to the desecration of the United States Capitol.

Our Capitol Police and other law enforcement officers like Officer Michael Fanone were subjected to brutal and merciless attacks. My Republican colleagues should not be allowed to ever forget the scenes of chaos and violence we saw that day. Officers were beaten, abused, and subjected to racial epithets. Their bravery and sacrifice in the face of such adversity cannot and should not be diminished. They fought to protect not just the physical home of our democratic institutions, but the very ideals that those institutions represent.

To be clear, there was a human cost to the insurrection. Within 36 hours of the attack, five individuals lost their lives, including Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick. More than 140 officers were injured. To this day, many of them bear wounds both physical and psychological, scars that may never fully heal. And every defender of democracy the world over mourns such a profound betrayal of our democratic values could occur at the heart of world's oldest democracy. Autocrats, on the other hand, rejoice.

In the days and weeks that followed, many Members of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, acknowledged the gravity of the attack and the role of the former President in inciting the violence. Statements from Republican leaders like Representative Elise Stefanik and former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy called for accountability and even pointed to President Trump's culpability.

Elise Stefanik said, “the perpetrators of this un-American violence and destruction must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

Kevin McCarthy said former President Trump should “accept his share of responsibility” for the mob's violence.”

Refreshing clarity from two leaders of the House Republican Conference. The problem? Both have since debased themselves by engaging in gross denialism about the events of that day to rewrite history, sanitize the violence, and absolve the instigator in chief of his responsibility.

Representative Stefanik has referred to those convicted of crimes on January 6th as “hostages.” In an almost laughable defense of former President Trump, Kevin McCarthy asked rhetorically, “Did he say, ‘Go hang somebody?’ Did he say, ‘Go break into the building?’” as if that were the only threshold for guilt.

Former President Donald Trump was impeached for his leadership of the January 6th insurrection. The impeachment managers, during their trial in the Senate, laid bare the harrowing details of that day and the weeks that led up to it. And when it came time for Senators to vote to convict former President Trump, the result was the most bipartisan vote in a Senate presidential impeachment trial in the history of the United States. Yet, here we are today, seemingly intent on downplaying the severity of an attack that sought to overturn a legitimate electoral outcome.

Shame on the Republicans on this Committee for attempting to portray January 6th as anything less than a violent attempt to subvert our democracy. The very foundations of our republic were tested that day, and it is incumbent upon us, as stewards of that republic, to remember the truth of what occurred, to honor those who stood in defense of our democracy, and to ensure that such an assault never happens again.

We cannot forget the fear, the chaos, and the violence of that day. Let us recall the courage of the Capitol Police and other law enforcement officers and the resolve of those who stood firm in the face of insurrection. And let us reaffirm our commitment to the principles that define us as a nation: democracy, justice, and the rule of law.

Let us not engage in dangerous revisionism that only invites another attack on American democracy.