

Statement of Congressman Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)
***Full Committee Hearing on “The Capitol Insurrection: Unexplained Delays and
Unanswered Questions”***
Committee on Oversight and Reform
Wednesday, May 12, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney for calling this critical hearing. It’s been four and a half months since insurrectionists attacked the Capitol. While we know the former President is responsible for the inciting the violence of January 6th, we remain unclear why many federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies were unprepared to address known threats.

This Committee’s ongoing investigation on the insurrection determined that federal law enforcement officials knew there was a potential for significant violence on January 6th, and yet the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) did not issue a formal threat assessment to warn other federal agencies and local law enforcement of their concerns. Furthermore, the Washington, D.C.’s non-state status further prevented local officials from calling the National Guard for assistance.

For weeks prior to January 6th, then President-Trump peddled outrageous lies, attacked our democratic institutions, demagogued state election officials, maligned poll workers, and tried to coerce those in power to overturn the election. It was a months-long campaign of falsehoods and fabrications seeking to overturn the lawful results of the 2020 presidential election.

When those efforts failed, President Trump, at a January 6th rally of his most radical supporters — including the Proud Boys and the Far Right – took to the stage on the National Mall and lit the fuse of his own making. He called for violence, saying, among other violent rally cries, “We fight, we fight like hell, and if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.”

The crowd took his orders and attacked a co-equal branch of government. Armed with Confederate flags, nooses, and other weapons, the mob descended on the Capitol. Even when our lives, and the lives of our staff, and Capitol support staff were in grave danger, Trump continued to pressure his congressional allies to challenge the electoral vote count.

One hundred and forty police officers were injured, and four people died in connection with the attack. Two officers subsequently died by suicide. Tens of thousands of National Guardsmen were mobilized to protect the Capitol to ensure a peaceful transition of power in the aftermath of that catastrophic day — a day of unconscionable violence provoked and stoked by the President himself.

While we know the catalysts that led to the insurrection, we remain unclear why the Trump Administration failed to anticipate, prepare for, and respond adequately to the insurrection. The Department of Justice (DOJ), charged with leading the law enforcement response that day, appears to have done very little to prepare for the well-known, and well-documented threats of violence. And the Department of Defense (DOD) took way too long to respond to the U.S. Capitol Police’s and Washington, D.C. Mayor’s urgent pleas for help.

In comparison, during the largely peaceful racial justice protests of the summer of 2020, the DOJ deployed hundreds of officers and personnel from multiple agencies including the FBI, U.S. Marshals Service, the Bureau of Prisons, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the National Guard.

Although USCP is the principal law enforcement agency charged with protecting the Capitol, USCP relies on federal law enforcement agencies across the National Capital Region, including the DOJ and the DOD and National Guard, to provide intelligence, support, and resources during large-scale events.

And while the governors of states and territories serve as the commanders of their respective National Guard forces, the D.C. National Guard (DCNG) does not fall under a local chain of command. Instead, the President serves as the commander of DCNG and has delegated that command to the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Army. Because the District is not vested with statehood, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser lacked the authority to protect her city that day.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform will not waiver in its investigation into the attacks of January 6th. We need to know why any member of the public could have anticipated the insurrection with a few Google searches, yet several federal agencies seemed unprepared or unwilling to respond.

Some of my friends on the other side of the aisle — including those who continue to perpetrate this “Big Lie” of election theft, have called for unity. Well I ask, where were these calls for unity when a mob tore through these hallowed halls? Even in the aftermath of that destruction, these same individuals voted to bow to an unworthy president. They now seek to oust from their party any Member who dares speak the truth of what occurred.

Before we can have unity, however, we must have justice. We must have a full and thorough vetting of the facts. We must establish an independent commission to support ongoing congressional oversight, examine the root causes of this insurrection, and make recommendations to prevent an attack of this nature in the future.

History will judge us in this moment. We took one great step forward when we reconvened in the aftermath of horrible violence and certified the election results. We took another when we impeached the President responsible for igniting the insurrection. We take several essential next steps today, searching for truth and accountability.

I thank the Chairwoman for holding this hearing. We must continue this work and restore faith in our democratic institutions.