

Oral Testimony of Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Michael Brooks, The Subcommittee on Oversight, Committee on House Administration, U.S. House of Representatives Wednesday, April 17, 2024.

Good morning Chairman Loudermilk, Ranking Member Torres, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am Command Sergeant Major (Retired) Michael F. Brooks, I am the former Command Senior Enlisted Leader of the District of Columbia National Guard, The Capital Guardians. I retired on March 1, 2023, with 29 years of active federal service in the Army and the Army National Guard. While I am no longer in service, I continue defense of our great nation as a compliance and investigations specialist with the Compliance and Adjudication Division of the Office of Information and Communications Technology and Services of the Bureau of Industry and Security.

I served as the Command Senior Enlisted Leader of the DC National Guard from December 2017 to December 2022. As the most senior noncommissioned officer in the organization, I reported directly to the Commanding General. From 2017 until his retirement and selection as the 38th Sergeant at Arms for the House of Representatives, my commander was Major General William J. Walker. As his senior enlisted advisor, I reported only to him and I was with him throughout the days before, the day of, and the subsequent weeks and months that followed the events of January 6, 2021. So, imagine my surprise when the DoDIG released their report without once interviewing myself or other critically significant DC National Guard members with firsthand knowledge of what occurred that fateful day. Not anonymous witnesses or anonymous officials, but senior ranking military members that were there, in the room, on the calls, and on the secure video teleconference.

I am not here to disparage the Army that I love and served for nearly three decades, but to correct the record and speak for the hundreds of enlisted Soldiers and Airmen of the DC National Guard who have always answered the call to serve without political bias or prejudice, who have always faithfully fulfilled their oath to “Support and Defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic”, those Capital Guardians who continue to do so today even after being degraded by senior officials of the Army and the Army Staff in their inaccurate and biased report.

I believe those who steered the narrative of the DoDIG Report did so not for historical documentation or to enhance future military response capability, but to protect and advance individuals who sought to shield themselves from responsibility, to overly enhance their role and perceived significance in a critical moment in the history of our nation's democracy. In truth their actions, no matter how innocent they believe them to be, have led to an awful mark on our

military and shown an incredible lack of respect for the service of the men and women who serve in the DC National Guard before, during and after January 6, 2021.

Trust in our Army's most senior leadership was lost. Their actions and comments have highlighted the Army Staff and the Secretary of the Army's lack of knowledge and understanding of the DC National Guard, its authorities, and capabilities. Prior to the protests following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, I do not believe any of them understood just how unique the DC National Guard is and the responsibility that is delegated from the President to the Secretary of Defense and further delegated to the Secretary of the Army. I believe it is this lack of understanding that led to the significant delays in the military response on January 6, 2021.

I will not sit here today and say if we had been given the authority to immediately respond when Chief Sund, the Chief of the Capitol Police made that first frantic call for support at 1:49 PM, that we would have prevented the breach of the capitol. What I can tell you with absolute certainty is that we had a force equipped and ready to respond and despite the inaccuracies found in the DoDIG report, we had a plan and would have liked the opportunity to try. Instead, we waited for hours just two miles east of the capitol building absolutely frustrated, knowing our capitol had been breached, and not understanding why we had not received the authorization to respond.

I cannot tell you the number of times someone has asked me "where were you", "where was the National Guard" or "how can you call yourselves Capital Guardians." There is no easy response to those questions and the truth is we were there, we were ready, we just weren't authorized to respond and that is difficult to explain.

The Soldiers and Airmen of the DC National Guard deserve better, they deserve to be recognized for their sacrifices over a prolonged period of civil unrest from May 2020 to May 2021. I look forward to any questions you may have, thank you.