Trump mob storms Capitol

PRESIDENT INCITES CROWD TO ACTS OF INSURRECTION, VIOLENCE

DEMOCRATS WIN GA. RUNOFFS — AND CONTROL OF U.S. SENATE  PAGE A6

By Rebecca Tan, Peter Jamison, Meagan Flynn and John Woodrow Cox

As President Trump told a sprawling crowd outside the White House that they should never accept defeat, hundreds of his supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol in what amounted to an attempted coup that they hoped would overturn the election he lost. In the chaos, law enforcement officials said, one woman was shot and killed by Capitol Police.

The violent scene — much of it incited by the president's incendiary language — was like no other in modern American history, bringing to a sudden halt the congressional certification of Joe Biden's electoral victory.

With police bearing blue Trump flags, a mob that would eventually grow into the thousands bashed through Capitol doors and windows, forcing their way past police officers unprepared for the onslaught. Lawmakers were evacuated shortly before an armed standoff at the House chamber's entrance. The woman who was shot was rushed to an ambulance, police said, and later died.

Canisters of tear gas were fired across the Rotunda's white marble floor, and on the steps outside the building, rioters flew Confederate flags.

See Capitol on a11

By Rosalind S. Helderman, Karoun Demirjian, Seung Min Kim and Josh Dawsey

Congress returned to work late Wednesday to complete the process of tallying the electoral college votes and confirming President-elect Joe Biden's win, hours after the ceremony was halted by an unprecedented breach of the Capitol by storming supporters of President Trump.

In a show of defiance and resolve, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she had consulted with House leaders, the Pentagon, the Justice Department and Vice President Pence before concluding that Congress should move ahead with the ceremony interrupted earlier in the day by rioters provoked to action by Trump at a morning rally.

"Today, a shameful assault was made on our democracy. It was anointed at the highest level of government. It cannot, however, see Congrats on a16

Bill O'Leary/The Washington Post
Matt McClain/The Washington Post
Mandi Vogler for The Washington Post

Clockwise from top: A rioter's face can be seen through the broken glass door of the House chamber as security agents point their weapons. Congressional staff members are evacuated by the Capitol Police after the building was breached. Supporters of President Trump swarm the Capitol. One woman was fatally shot by police during the chaos, and the riots abruptly halted the congressional certification of Joe Biden’s electoral victory.
Truth and Democracy

At noon on January 6, President Trump begins his hour-long speech on the Ellipse. Via Twitter he had invited his supporters to rally to “Save America.” Thousands have gathered since early morning.

At about the same time that the president is invoking the crowd to “never give up” and “We’re going to the Capitol,” Vice President Pence is opening a joint session of Congress to confirm the electoral college vote state by state, a ritual held every four years. Once in session, Pence releases a letter saying he will not intervene in the count: “My oath to support and defend the Constitution constrains me from claiming unilateral authority.”

In the next hours, the unthinkable takes place. The crowd transforms into a mob. They use pipes, flag poles, ladders and brute strength, breaking windows and doors to breach the Capitol. Pushing past and striking Capitol Police. They climb scaffolding, scale walls; they break historic furniture and enter offices, the Rotunda and House chambers. They shout for Nancy and Pence. They become insurrectionists.

As the first draft of history, The Washington Post covered the events of that day in D.C. and in state capitols around the country. Post photographers and those from other media who had been invited by House Speaker Pelosi to cover the electoral college vote count, captured the actions and words of Trump supporters and lawmakers and their staffs hidden in secure places.

We have reprinted news and opinion pieces, historic perspective essays, video and photographs. You are challenged to help students to understand the day’s events as they unfolded in a fair manner, as a teachable moment of lessons in the importance of listening to and understanding others, telling the truth and upholding democracy.
The time for questioning the election results has passed

BY ASHTON CARTER, DICK CHENey, WILLIAM COHEN, MARK ESPER, ROBERT GATES, CHUCK HAGEL, JAMES MATTIS, LEON PANETTAR, WILLIAM PERRY and DONALD RUMSFELD

American elections and the peaceful transfers of power that result are hallmarks of our democracy.

American elections and the peaceful transfers of power that result are hallmarks of our democracy.

Originally Published January 4, 2021

As former secretaries of defense, we hold a common view of the solemn obligations of the U.S. armed forces and the Defense Department. Each of us swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. We did not swear it to an individual or a party.

American elections and the peaceful transfers of power that result are hallmarks of our democracy. With one singular and tragic exception that cost the lives of more Americans than all of our other wars combined, the United States has had an unbroken record of such transitions since 1789, including in times of partisan strife, war, epidemics and economic depression. This year should be no exception.

Our elections have occurred. Recounts and audits have been conducted. Appropriate challenges have been addressed by the courts. Governors have certified the results. And the electoral college has voted. The time for questioning the results has passed; the time for the formal counting of the electoral college votes, as prescribed in the Constitution and statute, has arrived.

Transitions, which all of us have experienced, are a crucial part of the successful transfer of power. They often occur at times of international uncertainty about U.S. national security policy and posture. They can be a moment when the nation is vulnerable to actions by adversaries seeking to take advantage of the situation.

Given these factors, particularly at a time when U.S. forces are engaged in active operations around the world, it is all the more imperative that the transition at the Defense Department be carried out fully, cooperatively and transparently. Acting defense secretary Christopher C. Miller and his subordinates — political appointees, officers and civil servants — are each bound by oath, law and precedent to facilitate the entry into office of the incoming administration, and to do so wholeheartedly. They must also refrain from any political actions that undermine the results of the election or hinder the success of the new team.

We call upon them, in the strongest terms, to do as so many generations of Americans have done before them. This final action is in keeping with the highest traditions and professionalism of the U.S. armed forces, and the history of democratic transition in our great country.

The writers are the 10 living former U.S. secretaries of defense.
January 6 | A Day to Be Remembered for Attack on the Capitol

Trump holds “Save America / Stop the Steal” rally

President Trump had tweeted for his supporters to come to D.C. for a “Save America” rally. On Jan. 6 thousands began to gather on the Ellipse from early morning.

President Trump speaks from noon for more than an hour after his family and lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, addressed the growing crowd. Trump tells his supporters to “never give up,” to “never concede” and “we can’t let that [confirmation of electoral votes giving Biden the win] happen.”
Joint session of Congress convenes to certify the electoral college votes

“When the Joint Session of Congress convenes today, I will do my duty to see to it that we open the certificates of the Electors of the several states, we hear objections raised by Senators and Representatives, and we count the votes of the Electoral College for President and Vice President in a manner consistent with our Constitution, laws, and history,” Pence stated in a letter released as he opened the session.
Trump supporters head to the Capitol

Trump supporters reach Capitol grounds after Trump tells them, “You’ll never take back our country with weakness, you have to show strength and you have to be strong.”

Tear gas is fired at rioters surrounding the Capitol.
Protestors no more, mob forces its way into the Capitol

Rioters who hailed from at least 38 states, along with D.C. and Canada, use a ladder, flag poles and crowd pressure to try to enter the Capitol through the front doors.

Security agents with guns drawn watch as protesters try to break into the House Chamber at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.
Congress adjourns and taken to secure location

Congressional staff members evacuate the Capitol after rioters bashed through doors and windows with poles bearing Trump flags.

No entry or exit was permitted in the Capitol as law enforcement tried to regain control. "Stay away from exterior windows, doors. If outside, seek cover," police warned.
Damage and desecration done in the Capitol and grounds

Damage inside the U.S. Capitol left by Pro-Trump protesters who stormed the building.

A statue was defaced during the riot on Jan. 6 at the U.S. Capitol.
Congress reconvenes to complete certification
Congress officially declares Biden is the 46th president of the United States

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) speaks in the House chamber of the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday evening. Pelosi said she consulted with House leaders, the Pentagon, Vice President Pence and others before reconvening to certify the electoral college vote.
The similarities to the last invasion of the Capitol matter — so do the differences

They show how imperiled our democracy is

BY LAWRENCE B. A. HATTER

*Originally Published January 12, 2021*

Americans are struggling to make sense of the chaotic scenes of armed insurrectionists rampaging through the halls of the Capitol on Wednesday. In such moments of crisis, it is only natural that we look to what we know. For some historians and pundits, that meant the parallels to the attempt by British forces to burn the building on Aug. 24, 1814.

At first glance, the comparison makes sense. In both cases, enemies of the United States deliberately attacked one of the most potent symbols of American democracy. In each instance, federal authorities failed to protect the Capitol from predictable assault. But it is important to remember historical analogies are useful not only for identifying similarities, but also for highlighting differences between the past and present.

The differences between 1814 and 2021 offer a much more troubling picture of the dangers faced by our democratic republic. In 1814, the enemy came from outside; in 2021, the enemy came from within. In 1814, British forces captured the Capitol under wartime conditions; in 2021, American citizens stormed Congress in peacetime. In 1814, King George III commanded his soldiers (through his appointed officers) to attack the Capitol; In 2021, Donald Trump, the president of the United States, goaded armed insurrectionists to attack Congress.

Understanding both the similarities and differences between the two sieges is critical to properly safeguarding this citadel of democracy — and democracy itself — moving forward.

The occupation of Washington, D.C., by British forces in 1814 is one of the few things that people remember about the War of 1812. While most Americans would be hard pressed to explain the origins or significance of the conflict, many people will be able to tell you that the White House earned its name when it was painted to conceal wartime fire damage. A national humiliation has been recast as an interesting piece of trivia, largely because the United States need no longer fear invasion by a foreign foe.

By 1814, the war had been raging for over two years, with neither side dealing a decisive blow. Focused on their death-struggle with Napoleonic France in Europe, British commanders hoped the military campaign of 1814 would knock the United States out of the war by following the strategic orthodoxy of the day: capturing your enemy’s capital city. With naval supremacy in the Chesapeake Bay, 4,500 British troops landed on the Maryland coast, southeast of Washington City, on Aug. 19. After defeating ill-prepared American militiamen at the Battle of Bladensburg, British soldiers marched into the undefended U.S. capital on Aug. 24.

Just over a year earlier, it was the U.S. Army that was celebrating its triumphal
entry into an enemy capital. With naval supremacy on the Great Lakes after the Battle of Lake Erie, an American expedition landed near York (present day Toronto) in April 1813. The Americans handily defeated the Canadian militia and entered the capital city of the province of Upper Canada. Unruly American soldiers plundered the city and set fire to the parliament building and the governor’s residence, before abandoning York two weeks later.

On Aug. 24, 1814, British forces reaped their revenge for their humiliation at York. While British officers dined on the food and drink of President James Madison in the executive mansion, soldiers set bonfires in government buildings throughout the city, including the Capitol building. The total destruction of the Capitol was only averted by a fortuitous rainstorm that dampened the flames.

What happened to the Capitol in 1814 was nothing out of the ordinary in early 19th-century warfare. Capturing national capitals was a tried and tested method for winning a war in Europe. As an accepted practice, burning buildings was subject to the rules of war. British officers ordered their troops to only burn public property in Washington. Attacking private property was meant to be off-limits in the “civilized” prosecution of war.

By the time the smoke had cleared in Washington, peace negotiations between the British and U.S. governments had already begun in the Belgian city of Ghent. The burning of the Capitol and other federal buildings did not end the war on its own, but it did help to sustain the contentious diplomatic process as U.S. peace commissioners looked to end the increasingly unpopular war. American and British negotiators finally concluded the War of 1812 with the Treaty of Ghent on Christmas Eve 1814.

At war’s end, the lessons from the burning of the Capitol were clear. The United States could not rely on poorly trained militia to defend the country from harm. Despite the Founders’ concerns about the tyrannical potential of a standing army, the danger of invasion by foreign armies meant professional soldiers were necessary to defend the country.

While the illegal invasion of the Capitol by armed insurrectionists on Wednesday also revealed serious security flaws, it contrasted starkly with the lawful actions of British soldiers in 1814. It was a gross violation of the rule of law. Armed mobs, with the encouragement of President Trump, attacking Congress during its certification of presidential electoral votes is an unprecedented, and heretofore unimaginable, act of sedition. In 1814, the Treaty of Ghent lifted the immediate threat of foreign invasion to the survival of the republic; in 2021, the insidious threat of domestic terrorists to our democracy cannot be solved by simply signing a piece of paper.

The question of how to defend American democracy after the attack on the Capitol is far more difficult to answer than was the question of how to rebuild and defend the Capitol in 1814.

While security in the Capitol undoubtedly will be tightened and reinforced, truly protecting the building and its symbolism in our democracy requires addressing the root causes of the assault. That means holding leaders accountable for encouraging the insurrectionary attempt by deliberately lying to their followers about the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. Only buttressing security at the Capitol would represent a failure to recall that while the similarities to historical events are important, so too are the differences. It would leave the building — and our democracy — exposed to further assault.

Lawrence B. A. Hatter is associate professor of history at Washington State University and author of “Citizens of Convenience: The Imperial Origins of American Nationhood on the U.S.-Canadian Border.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: For another account of the burning of the U.S. Capitol, see “In 1814, British forces burned the U.S. Capitol,” originally written by Joel Achenbach to mark the event’s 200th anniversary https://tinyurl.com/y4lvdwjc.
Video shows Capitol mob dragging police officer down stairs. One rioter beat the officer with a pole flying the U.S. flag.

BY KATIE SHEPHERD

• Originally Published January 12, 2021

As a mob of pro-Trump rioters attacked the Capitol on Wednesday, one man in a white hat and backpack grabbed a police officer by the helmet, dragging the officer down the stairs. Soon, other rioters kicked and punched the officer, and one man even bashed the prone figure repeatedly with a pole flying an American flag.

The shocking violence against an outnumbered officer is shown in a video published by Storyful last week and aired by CNN on Sunday. It swiftly went viral, garnering more than 1.6 million views on Twitter by early Monday.

The officer seen in the video, as well as in other photos and videos of the moment that later surfaced on social media, has not been officially identified. The extent of the injuries the officer suffered in the attack is not clear. D.C. Metropolitan Police and U.S. Capitol Police did not immediately reply to a request for comment on the video late Sunday.

The video adds a new layer of evidence documenting the violence that pro-Trump rioters unleashed during the attempted insurrection at the Capitol, where overrun police tried to protect the federal building. One U.S. Capitol Police officer, Brian D. Sicknick, suffered injuries in the incident and later died, and more than 50 other police officers were hurt. One rioter was fatally shot by police, and three other people died following medical emergencies.

Horrific new video obtained by CNN shows a MAGA rioter (in white hat and backpack) grab a DC Metro officer and pull him down Capitol steps where he is stomped and beaten with an American flag pole. At one point they sing the Star Spangled Banner pic. twitter.com/XXJMXanGXp
— Bill Weir (@BillWeirCNN)
January 10, 2021

CNN reported that the video captured the scene outside the Capitol around 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday. That’s roughly 10 minutes after President Trump tweeted a video message addressing the crowd, telling the rioters: “We love you. You’re very special.”

“We’ve seen what happens. You see the way others are treated that are so bad and so evil,” Trump continued in the statement. “I know you how feel. But go home, and go home in peace.”

The video shows that after the man grabbed the police officer, yanking him down the stairs, others kicked and beat the officer on the ground. As the crowd attacked, people chanted “U-S-A! U-S-A!” and a man shouted, “Take him out.”

At the same time, other people in the crowd threw flagpoles, metal crutches and other projectiles at police standing just inside an archway, trying to prevent the mob from entering the Capitol.

The attempted insurrection, and Trump’s role in provoking it, were widely condemned by officials, including Republican Sens. Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) and Patrick J. Toomey (Pa.), who this weekend called for Trump to resign. House Democrats readied to impeach Trump this week, unless Vice President Pence and the Cabinet invoke the 25th Amendment to remove him first.

After most members of the mob left the Capitol for hotel rooms and flights back to their home states, the damage caused by the pro-Trump mob has been revealed through photographs, videos and firsthand accounts. Windows were shattered, furniture overturned or smashed and Senate offices raided. Police also said they found and disabled two “hazardous” pipe bombs near the Capitol.

Officials have launched more than two dozen domestic terrorism investigations, Rep. Jason Crow (D-Colo.) said in a statement on Sunday summarizing a conversation he had with Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy. Crow said he raised concerns about reports of active-duty military personnel participating in the violence last week, and he noted that the rioters brought weapons and bombs to the Capitol.

“Long guns, molotov cocktails, explosive devices, and zip ties were recovered, which suggests a greater disaster was narrowly avoided,” Crow said.
President Trump has committed treason

President Trump broke any number of laws and norms during his ruinous four-year reign. He just added one more on the way out: treason.

He lost the House in 2018. He lost the presidency in November. He lost the Senate on Tuesday. And on Wednesday, with nothing left to lose, he rallied a violent mob to attack the U.S. Capitol in hopes of pressuring lawmakers to toss out the election results, ignore the will of the people, and install him as president for another term.

Trump fomented a deadly insurrection against the U.S. Congress to prevent a duly-elected president from taking office. Treason is not a word to be used lightly, but that is its textbook definition.

“We will not take it anymore, and that’s what this is all about,” he told a sea of MAGA fans and Proud Boys on the Ellipse outside the White House at noon. From behind bulletproof glass, he told them: “If you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.”

Earlier, Trump ally Rudy Giuliani had proposed, to the same crowd, a “trial by combat” to resolve Trump’s election complaints. And Donald Trump Jr. delivered a political threat to lawmakers who don’t vote to reject the election results: “You’ll never take back our country with weakness, you have to show strength and you have to be strong,” he admonished them, with CYA instructions to make themselves heard “peacefully and patriotically.”

Wink, wink.

“We’re going to the Capitol,” he told the mob.

With that, Trump snuck back into the safety of the White House fortress. But his supporters, thus riled, marched to the Capitol and breached the barricades. They overpowered Capitol Police, climbed scaffolding, scaled walls, shattered glass, busted into the Senate chamber and stood at the presiding officer’s desk, and broke into Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s hastily abandoned office. They marauded about the Rotunda and Statuary Hall wearing MAGA hats, carrying Confederate flags, posing for souvenir photos and scribbling graffiti (“Murder the Media”).

Police rushed legislative leaders to safety. They barricaded doors to the House chamber and drew guns to protect lawmakers sheltering inside. They fired tear gas at the attackers. Shots were fired inside the Capitol; a bloodied woman who was wheeled out later died. The District of Columbia declared a curfew. And even then it took Trump nearly three hours before he released a video telling those ransacking the Capitol to “go home” — even as he glorified the violence by saying “these are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots.”

Before he lost the election, Trump refused to commit to the peaceful transfer of power. During the campaign, he defended militia violence and told his violent white nationalist supporters to “stand by” — part of a well-documented pattern of encouraging violence since he launched his first campaign in 2015.

Yet, somehow, the men in the Capitol who enabled Trump for all those years were shocked that he would unleash a mob against Congress.

“What is unfolding is unacceptable and un-American,” declared House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, who just hours earlier had announced he would support Trump’s effort to annul the electoral college count.

“Violence is always unacceptable,” tut-tutted Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who along with Josh Hawley of Missouri was leading the effort in the Senate to nullify the election results. Just moments before the MAGA mob burst into the chamber, Cruz gave a speech saying “democracy is in crisis” because many Americans think the election was “rigged” — in large part because Cruz et al. kept telling them so.

As Trump’s goons began taking over the Capitol, Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah), who had called the attempt to set aside the electoral college tally an “egregious ploy,” yelled at Cruz and his co-conspirators: “This is what you’ve preferred to do. It’s frightening.”

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getten, guys.” Romney later issued a statement saying: “What happened here today was an insurrection, incited by the president of the United States.” Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming, the No. 3 House GOP leader, told Fox News: “The president formed the mob. The president incited the mob. The president addressed the mob. He lit the flame.”

Trump’s inept legal challenges amounted to a clownish coup attempt. The Cruz-Hawley scheme amounted to a bloodless coup attempt. And now, Trump has induced his MAGA mob to a violent coup attempt.

As it happens, moments before the barbarians burst into the Senate chamber, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, long among the most faithful Trump enablers, had denounced the effort to overturn the election.

“The voters, the courts and the states have all spoken,” an emotional McConnell said, in perhaps the finest speech of his long career. “If this election were overturned by mere allegations from the losing side, our democracy would enter a death spiral.”

Or maybe the spiral has already begun.

Most Americans never imagined they would see such banana-republic images of violence from the seat of American democracy. But Wednesday’s mayhem and violence form a predictable coda to a presidency that has brought us far too much of both.

Republicans must now decide whether they are going to return to being the party of small government, individual liberties and national strength, or to continue being the Trump and Cruz party of violence, racism and authoritarianism.

Are they small-d democrats or are they fascists? After Wednesday’s terrible scene, they must choose.

Dana Milbank is a Post columnist covering national politics.
Our Capitol, our pride

The sun was shining Jan. 7 in D.C. as we were coming to terms with the tragedy here the day before. Though I know the entire country feels sadness, shame and outrage, those of us who live in D.C. feel more personally violated. That building, that beautiful building, beacon of our democracy, was broken into by a mob bent on destruction and fueled by malevolent words spoken to them just blocks away.

The Capitol is central to our lives. It looms as we go to work in the morning; at night, it gleams brightly in the distance. The wonks among us check to see which top beacon is lit, north or south, to know which congressional body is working late into the night. We stroll the Capitol grounds, noting the old trees and which state donated them. We picnic on the grounds, listening to concerts or appreciating the views. We take our guests on tours of the chambers, admiring the quotes written high up in the painted hallways, the grand art in the Rotunda and the statues in Statuary Hall. We sit on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and gaze past the Washington Monument to the Capitol. Runners jog this sacred democratic loop, putting in a good four miles.

I know I shouldn’t feel this possessive about the main public building in the United States, but it is part of our family, a member of our community, a place where wonderful memories have been made. It stands strong. The cleaning has begun, and the important work of certifying the next president of the United States occurred there at 3:30 a.m. I still feel violated.

Pat Thomas, Potomac

Remember when somebody asked, when it became clear that Joe Biden had won the presidential election, “what’s the harm” in letting President Trump go on with his protests? What was the harm in letting Mr. Trump claim his “victory” had been stolen from him, letting him hang on to what he wanted for just a while longer?

On Jan. 6, we saw exactly what the harm was. The attack on the Capitol is what happens when you decide, for fear or whatever other reason, that it’s best to give the narcissist what he wants because denying him is too much trouble.
For those who’ve lived with narcissists, the attack on the Capitol felt deeply personal. This is the macrocosm of watching that destructive force in your life deny the truth, gaslight you and others, and trash the safety and security of your world because they’re denied something they want. It’s having someone ask you the same question again and again because they’re certain that, eventually, you’ll give them the answer they want instead of the truth. It’s watching truth itself take a back seat to violence and fear.

I’m deeply thankful that Congress resumed its work and confirmed the election results. Now it’s well past time for any adults left in the room to refuse to allow the narcissist any space for more tantrums. The effects of enabling him are as destructive to this nation as the effects of an uncontrolled abuser in a family.

Kris Faatz, Parkville, Md.

On the floor of the Senate on Jan. 6, Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) gave us a history lesson that exposed the white-supremacist basis of the Republican challenge to the election of President-elect Joe Biden. Mr. Graham told us that the electoral commission Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) called for was based on the commission after the presidential election of 1876, which was created because of rival elector slates from some states — one set reflecting the participation of enfranchised African Americans, and one set created by White former Confederate rebels who disenfranchised African Americans.

Mr. Graham told us that the commission of 1876 failed to resolve the election. The resolution of the election came as part of a deal between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel J. Tilden, in which Tilden agreed to withdraw his challenge to Hayes in exchange for withdrawing federal troops from the former Confederate states and ending Reconstruction. Mr. Graham said this deal permitted the disenfranchisement of African Americans and the imposition of Jim Crow.

As in 1876, the current Republican objections to the election of Mr. Biden focus on suppressing the votes of African Americans. These objections have presumed the illegitimacy of votes from majority African American areas, including the Atlanta, Philadelphia and Detroit metropolitan areas. Significantly, Mr. Trump paid for recounts in Wisconsin only in majority-African American areas.

James Stephen Kelly, Ellicott City

The events at the Capitol on Jan. 6 must never happen again. Deploiring the behavior is not enough. Proper law enforcement and prosecutions must proceed. But still that is not enough.

Our elected representatives must work swiftly to create a nonpartisan commission, modeled on the 9/11 Commission, that will thoroughly investigate what happened, how it happened and, most of all, why it happened. The commission should do its work in a timely manner, and issue findings and recommendations aimed at restoring our collective commitment to truth and civility — and preventing future attacks. We can’t heal our democracy if we don’t diagnose and treat the wounds.

Steve Young, Arlington

Dana Milbank said in his Jan. 7 Thursday Opinion column that “President Trump has committed treason” by inciting the insurrection. In addition to any measures that should certainly be taken to ensure this unstable man does not commit other dangerous acts before President-elect Joe Biden is inaugurated, should not Congress take some very public action, such as censure, declaring Mr. Trump’s actions as treasonous?

This president should be publicly branded for what he truly is: a traitor, and certainly not a patriot.

Steven Brody, Arlington
Questions That Need Answers

January 6, 2021, was to be a ceremonial day at the Capitol, the affirmation of the electoral college vote and Congressional statement that Joe Biden was elected president. It was the day that President Trump called his supporters to come to D.C. to protest. It became one of the darkest days in U.S. history.

Many questions surround it: Where and When more easily answered. Who, What, How and Why are nuanced, debated and answered by different motives and points of view, challenging our understanding of democracy and values.

The e-Replica edition of The Washington Post takes you directly to interactive pages. Use them to read the suggested articles and to see the layout, photographs and adjacent articles. If e-Replica is not available to you, use the online edition of The Post at www.washingtonpost.com.

Read the suggested articles, columns and guest commentary. Think about the points of view and respond to each question.

Did the police and others know to expect a dangerous January 6?

• “Fourteen days that will test our democracy,” by Colbert King, January 2, 2021, A
• “What went wrong with the protection of the U.S. Capitol,” by David Ignatius, January 8, 2021, A27
• “No one watches the Capitol Police closely, says law professor Rosa Brooks. No wonder they failed.” January 10, 2021, Outlook, B1
• “Capitol Police chief: Backup was denied,” by Carol D. Leonnig, Aaron C. Davis, Peter Hermann and Karoun Demirjian, January 11, 2021, A1

Who is responsible for the Trump supporters’ breach of the Capitol?

• “We love you. You’re very special. Go home.” by Alexandra Petri, January 8, 2021, A25
• “Fox News, an accessory before and after the fact.” by Margaret Sullivan, January 8, 2021, C1
• “Mob driven by grievances and disillusionment,” by Amy Brittain, Julie Zauzmer, Jenn Arelson, David Willman and Nicole Dungca, January 11, 2021, A1

Do the actions and attitudes expressed by Trump supporters remind you of other people, actions or attitudes? Explain.

• “In this movie, the zombies think they’re the good guys,” by Ann Hornaday, January 9, 2021, C1
• “Real power is discipline, not unchecked aggression,” by Sally Jenkins, January 8, 2021, D1
For the following questions, you find the articles that provide possible answers.

Were the lives of Vice President Mike Pence, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, President Pro Tempore of the Senate Chuck Grassley and other members of Congress in danger? Why are these people significant?
- “Inside the Capitol siege: How barricaded lawmakers and aides sounded urgent pleas for help as police lost control,” Jan. 10
  https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/inside-capitol-siege/2021/01/09/e3ad3274-5283-11eb-bda4-615aaefd0555_story.html

What action might be taken against President Trump?
The Washington Post’s editorial board stated their position: “Trump caused the assault on the Capitol. He must be removed.” (January 7, 2021)

Find articles that argue for the four approaches (below). After reading and considering their positions, do you agree with any of them? Do you think President Trump should finish the last days of his term without action against him? Write a statement of your point of view.

- President Trump resignation
- Congressional censure
- Impeachment
- Invoking the 25th Amendment
Why Congress should censure, not impeach, Trump

BY DAVID E. KENDALL

- Originally Published January 11, 2021

Given the shortness of time before President Trump is out of office, congressional censure is the best way to stigmatize the soon-to-be former president for his despicable actions in fomenting a mob attack on Congress at the very moment legislators were carrying out their constitutional duties to certify the will of American voters.

Censure, a formal congressional condemnation, has been successfully invoked against sitting presidents. While admittedly symbolic, it is what is needed at this moment: an immediate bipartisan judgment that is strong, unequivocal, indelible and undeniable, a clear judgment that Trump’s conduct was a profound betrayal of both his duty and the basic legal rules of our democratic republic. Different courses of action toward this goal are available, but only censure holds any real chance of imminent success.

The 25th Amendment is a nonstarter, but not only because an invertebrate vice president and supine Cabinet will not initiate it. It is at least debatable whether Trump’s flagrantly illegal action constitutes the kind of disability at which the amendment is aimed. Woodrow Wilson’s incapacity due to a stroke preceded the 25th Amendment by five decades, but it is largely what the framers of that amendment had in mind, and they took pains to remove its initiation from the partisan political process. Any attempted application simply invites Trump enablers to protest that “bad as what he did, it doesn’t amount to constitutional grounds for removing him from office — that requires an ‘inability to discharge’ the duties of the president, and he can still do that.”

Criminal prosecution of Trump faces First Amendment hurdles. American political life is full of harsh and highly charged statements, including threats of all kind. Here, the actual words Trump used were ambiguous and could be read as political exhortations: “Be there, will be wild,” and “You have to show strength, and you have to be strong,” and “Never give up . . . never concede.” Even his most inflammatory statement, “We’re going to the Capitol. We’re going to try and give . . . [Republicans] the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country” is not directly a call to illegal conduct.

The Supreme Court has held that speech can be criminalized when it is “directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action” and is “likely to incite or produce such action,” but this test is whether the prosecution can prove such conduct here beyond a reasonable doubt. The criminal process, moreover, is complicated, full of loopholes and certainly not fast. Moreover, how much political capital a new administration wants to devote to prosecuting a former president is unclear. Trump is also likely to attempt to pardon himself out of this danger, and though it’s not certain such a step will be effective, it throws a cloud over the process.

The process of impeachment, with which I have some familiarity, is likewise not an adequate remedy, in light of the time available and the punishment that could be imposed. What Trump did was treasonous, and it is certainly a paradigm “high crime and misdemeanor” — indeed, it’s hard to imagine a more fundamental one. But the framers of the Constitution rejected the parliamentary practice of imposing harsh penalties after legislative impeachment and provided that punishment for congressional impeachment “shall not extend further than to removal from Office,” without prejudice to later indictment.

Trump is mostly saved by the bell here, because even if the House quickly impeaches him, there’s scant time for the Senate to convict him, even if it were so inclined. (The requirement of a two-thirds vote might allow Trump to avoid ejection from office by the narrowest of margins, as Andrew Johnson did a century and a half ago.) An impeachment without any hope of a conviction cheapens that solemn process.

While it can be argued that an impeachment trial in the Senate can be conducted after Trump leaves office, since a conviction there could result in “disqualification to hold and enjoy” any federal office in the future, I’m aware of no precedent for such an action. Since 13 senators initially joined the effort to forestall Joe Biden’s election, I think it’s unlikely a Senate effort to impose disqualification would gain the support of the necessary 17 Republican senators to produce the requisite two-thirds majority for such a punishment. One can imagine instead the hand-wringing of those angling to gain the affection and support of Trump’s 74 million voters.

While not entirely satisfying, a strong bipartisan censure resolution is the most effective way of forging a speedy, clear and enduring public sanction against Trump’s conduct. It ought to be drafted to reflect the concerns already expressed by both parties about the incitement of the Capitol mob. It ought not try to encompass Trump’s many mendacities, rights violations and grifts. Those are for history.

It ought to be a clear test of conscience for Republicans: Is there, at last, not some Trumpian conduct so incandescently undemocratic and un-American that you will condemn it? And if the answer to that question is “no,” there ought to be a clear legislative record of such craveness.

David E. Kendall, a lawyer at Williams & Connolly, has represented former president Bill Clinton and 2016 Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton.
DRA Win BOARD | Responsibility for Words and Deeds

Guest editorial cartoonists have appeared in Drawing Board since the retirement of The Post’s official editorial cartoonist Tom Toles. They provide visual commentary on the refusal of President Trump to concede, filing lawsuits, seeking votes by phone, and inciting his supporters to go to the Capitol on January 6.

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How experts define the deadly mob attack at the U.S. Capitol

An insurrection? A coup? Political scientists have a definition for what transpired: an autogolpe, or self-coup.

BY CHRISTOPHER INGRAHAM

The mob violence at the Capitol last week, incited in large part by the false voter fraud claims of President Trump and his Republican allies, has prompted some debate on how to properly label the destructive event.

Was it an insurrection? A putsch, perhaps? A coup?

While it may seem like splitting insurrectionist hairs, these subtleties are important. It’s easier for democracies to counter violent authoritarianism when the precise nature of the threat is better known.

To that end, there’s an obscure term of art that seems particularly apt for describing the anti-democratic actions undertaken by Trump and his allies since the 2020 presidential election was decisively called for Joe Biden: an autogolpe, or “self-coup” in English.

A self-coup happens when a head of government, like a president or prime minister, attempts to seize extraordinary control over that government from within. That could mean suspending the Constitution, for instance, dissolving a legislative body or overturning the results of an otherwise free and fair election.

The term autogolpe originates in Latin America, where a number of infamous self-coups took place in the 20th century. In Peru in 1992, for instance, President Alberto Fujimori, backed by the country’s military, “closed the Congress, suspended the constitution, and purged the judiciary,” as described by political scientist Steven Levitsky.

What differentiates a self-coup from a coup is that the threat to governance comes from within the government itself. In the United States, for instance, Trump has tried to pressure lawmakers and election officials to toss out ballots for his opponent and name alternate slates of electors based on bogus assertions the election was “stolen.” Those false claims, echoed by the president’s supporters in Congress, culminated with an angry mob of armed Trump supporters ransacking the U.S. Capitol and disrupting the official tally of electoral votes.

“As someone who studies democracy and political instability, I think it is absolutely justified to ask whether or not what occurred yesterday in Washington, D.C., was an attempted autogolpe or ‘merely’ an insurrection,” said John Polga-Hecimovich, a political scientist at the U.S. Naval Academy. “I lean towards the former, although I imagine scholars will be debating this for a long time.”

Another expert using the term “self-coup” is Fiona Hill, a former Russia adviser to the Trump White House. Hill wrote this week in Politico that the post-election actions of Trump and his Republican allies qualify.

“The storming of the Capitol building on Jan. 6 was the culmination of a series of actions and events taken or instigated by Trump so he could retain the presidency that together amount to an attempt at a self-coup,” she writes.

Since 1900, according to data Polga-Hecimovich pulled from the Center for Systemic Peace and the Cline Center for Advanced Social Research, there have been at least 64 attempted self-coups around the world (some other sources put the tally even higher). Nearly all of them occurred in countries with autocratic systems of government at the time of the attempt, according to historical democracy ratings compiled by V-Dem.

“Autogolpes tend to occur in places where democracy is already troubled or eroding; they generally don’t occur in well-performing, advanced liberal democracies,” Polga-Hecimovich said. “What this suggests about the U.S. is obviously concerning.”

In the pre-Trump era, the characterization of the United States as an “advanced liberal democracy” would have been incontrovertible. But scholars have noted with alarm an erosion of democratic values in this country, a regression that has intensified under Trump. That erosion paved the way for the violence at the Capitol last week.

“There is a not-insignificant proportion of Americans who have a weak normative commitment to democracy — including a number of influential political elites,” Polga-Hecimovich said.

That creeping authoritarianism is happening almost exclusively within the Republican Party. Party-level data tracked by V-Dem shows that members of the GOP now routinely demonize opponents as illegitimate, and appear increasingly amenable to the use of violence to achieve political ends. Just hours after the Capitol
assault, a majority of House Republicans voted against certifying Biden’s election based on a conspiratorial insistence — and despite the lack of evidence — that the results were fraudulent.

The history of self-coups in other countries suggests things will get worse before they get better. “Even if unsuccessful, self-coups leave lasting scars on their political systems,” Polga-Hecimovich said. “They tend to exacerbate many of the underlying problems, like lack of civic trust [and lack of] societal commitment to abide by the democratic ‘rules of the game.’”

*Analysis: GOP efforts to overturn election may do lasting harm to democracy, political scientists warn*

As it stands, recent surveys have shown that roughly two-thirds of Republican voters reject the legitimacy of Biden’s election victory, a belief shared by more than a quarter of Republican political elites, including judges, congressional staff and political appointees.

The best-case scenario is that the deadly attack on the Capitol becomes “a wake-up call to political elites and party leaders in the U.S. that their words — and actions — have consequences and that they must change their behavior,” Polga-Hecimovich said. ■