



Written by [Benjamin Faulkner](#) on January 24, 2023

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1/6: Two Years Later

On the one-year anniversary of the Capitol riot, Kamala Harris solemnly addressed the nation: “Certain dates echo throughout history, including dates that instantly remind all who have lived through them where they were and what they were doing.... December 7, 1941, September 11, 2001, and January 6, 2021.”

Before a joint session of Congress, Joe Biden went further, characterizing the roughly five-hour long melee on January 6 as “the worst attack on our democracy since the Civil War.”



[AP Images](#)

Two years have passed since the Capitol riot, and its memory continues to divide the nation. To Trump’s critics, the 6th was an aborted coup attempt, a failed insurrection. To the Right, scandalized by a season of disorder following the death of George Floyd, it was part and parcel of the winter of America’s discontent. Was January 6 a unique day of infamy in American history, or just another “mostly peaceful” protest that turned, regrettably, to criminal unrest?

Representative Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.), one of the chief proponents of the “failed insurrection” proposition, was tagged to co-chair the House Select Committee on January 6 under Congressman Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.). This committee has publicly linked Donald Trump to a “conspiracy,” and characterized protesters as “domestic enemies.” Though boasting of a bipartisan composition, the committee was organized exclusively of political enemies of Donald Trump and Trumpism.

Public statements from the committee comparing MAGA to the Confederacy have been not only routine, but tactical. Bennie Thompson revealed the strategy when, during an early public hearing, he declared, “in 1862, when American citizens had taken up arms against this country, Congress adopted a new oath to help make sure no person who had supported the rebellion could hold a position of public trust.”

To those who have witnessed six-plus years of state-directed attacks on Trump — among which “Russian collusion” and “the Zelensky phone call” can be counted as especially noteworthy examples — the veneer of objectivity the committee seeks to project appears thin indeed. The endgame, demonstrably, of the Thompson/Cheney committee is to render Trump legally disqualified from the pursuit of public office.

On December 22, 2022 the Select Committee’s report was released. In the tradition of the Warren Commission report on the assassination of President Kennedy, the report of the flawed Robert Mueller-led investigation into September 11, 2001 (inadequately exploring the question of Saudi government complicity in the attacks), and the #resistance bible that was the Mueller Report on Russian interference in the 2016 election, the Select Committee’s report on January 6 is what the establishment would leave to history as the final word on its subject. Less a work of scholarship than symbolism, this 845-page tome arrives with imposing heft, representing to Washingtonians the solemnity and



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seriousness of the panel's labors.

Though the government and media class will regard the report's release as a milestone, it is unlikely to capture the interest of the American public. Where the Select Committee has gone, that public, largely, has not followed. Ratings for prime-time hearings have been a disappointment, and in a December 2021 poll, responders proved more likely to characterize the Capitol riot as "a protest that went too far" than as "an insurrection." The Left has moved on. To the extent the Right is focused on January 6, their attention has turned to alternative-press researchers such as Darren Beattie and Julie Kelly, whose dogged reporting has revealed shadowy figures such as Ray Epps, and civil-rights abuses endemic to a jail dubbed the "D.C. gulag."

Despite waning popular interest in the Capitol melee, the date the riot occurred — often condensed to "1/6" — has been absorbed into the public consciousness as a political brand name. To the American security state, the date represents the physical manifestation of Trump's long shadow, the paramount threat to "Our Democracy."

If 1/6/2021 bears meaningful comparison to epochal dates such as 12/7/1941 and 9/11/2001, it is in representing the clearest arrival date of generation-defining federal foes: Axis, al-Qaeda, MAGA. The drift toward war footing in the battle against Trump and Trumpism is evident in the growing resources now dedicated to pursuing the specter of MAGA terror. "It's not because the FBI is partisan, but more because society ... and Washington remains obsessed with January 6 and Donald Trump," declared a senior government official in a recent *Newsweek* piece by William M. Arkin. "In other words, the focus now is political terrorism."

The federal government appears to view Donald Trump as a secessionist in the model of Confederate leadership. Does it view everyday MAGA activists as approaching the status of wartime traitors?

A possible answer lies in the treatment of the roughly 900 January 6 defendants. With echoes of the Abu Ghraib era of delayed trials and widespread prisoner abuses, individuals indicted for participation in the January 6 riot have endured beatings and protracted stays in solitary confinement, an outrage that elicited alarm even from the ACLU and Democrats such as Senators Bob Casey and Elizabeth Warren.

Another, more uncomfortable parallel to Pearl Harbor and September 11 has arisen in the 24 months following the chaos at the Capitol; this concerns a compelling vein of subterranean speculation as citizen researchers sift through evidence, organizing the case for negligence, foreknowledge, and tactical state coordination.

Was the inability to prevent disaster at the Capitol an inevitability, a failure of imagination, or, perhaps, something more damning?

The Fire Rises

The year 2020 was one of the most consequential in modern American history. The initial spread of the Covid-19 pathogen and the resulting lockdown represented an unprecedented attack on the American psyche. In the summer of 2020, the "woke" revolution would hit its crescendo in a season of protest following the death of George Floyd, resulting in roughly two dozen deaths and two billion dollars in damage.

While Democratic politicians and celebrities in many cases took an equivocal or even supportive tone



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regarding the unrest, the Department of Homeland Security under Trump regarded the chaos more critically. Violence was chronicled on the DHS website, notably in a page documenting numerous and sustained attacks on federal buildings in Portland, Oregon. What occurred in that city was not a single siege akin to the events of January 6, 2021, but a 47-day marathon assault designed to upend the existing order. Though Portland was the site of some of the most concentrated and protracted disorder, a study of 68 cities found that 574 protests that occurred in the summer of 2020 involved acts of violence.



Summer of chaos: Violence and destruction engulfed dozens of cities following the death of George Floyd. In Portland, Oregon, BLM and Antifa sustained a nearly 50-day crime spree. (AP Images)

Anger, not limited to the Left, was exemplified by a widely publicized Michigan case in which an obscure militia group called the Wolverine Watchmen, in the telling of federal prosecutors, devised a plan to kidnap the state's governor, Gretchen Whitmer. The leader of the plot, Adam Fox, lived in financial precarity, occupying the basement of a friend's business among vacuum parts and filing cabinets. His co-conspirators referred to Fox as Captain Autism; his seemingly Hollywood-inspired plan allegedly involved blowing up a bridge and an audacious daylight apprehension of Governor Whitmer after attacking her security detail with explosives. His goals may have been fantastical, and colored by his admitted drug use, but the rage of the men — emblematic of many on the Right — relating to Covid-19 lockdowns, and the perception of creeping tyranny, was dangerously authentic.

The Whitmer case, initially treated as an investigative triumph, later unraveled following revelations that up to a dozen confidential informants participated in the central conspiracy. The reliably left-wing BuzzFeed News even profiled the case critically, its authors observing that “[federal informants] had a hand in nearly every aspect of the alleged plot, starting with its inception. The extent of their involvement raises questions as to whether there would have even been a conspiracy without them.”

After the defense unsuccessfully attempted to have charges dismissed on the grounds of entrapment, the federal trial of four Wolverine Watchmen began in March 2022. The result found two men declared not guilty; a hung jury resulted in a mistrial for two others. Those two would be retried, resulting in convictions, but controversy associated with the saga would be an embarrassment to the FBI. A new War on Terror was beginning to look like an old War on Terror, replete with overzealous informants blurring the line between observer and enabler in pursuit of terrorism convictions.



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If the case was ultimately to represent a black eye for the FBI, it nonetheless was a success for the head of the Detroit field office who oversaw it. He would be promoted to the D.C. office in October 2020, where he would later participate in the January 6 investigations of Capitol rioters. The men and women that office would pursue in the days, months, and now years after the riot often resembled the men of the Wolverine Watchmen — frustrated individuals living lives at the convergence point of personal powerlessness and fervently held conservative and patriotic belief systems, devastated by a chaotic era in American history.

In the background of the tension of 2020 stood President Donald Trump, a figure unique in American politics: folk hero to the Republican base, and once-in-a-lifetime political villain to a reinvigorated, race-obsessed Left. With a one-of-a-kind campaign, the brash New York media star blended Pat Buchanan-style paleo-conservatism with raucous insult comedy, capturing the obsession of a nation, then, at least nominally, the ultimate levers of power in its political system.

The 2020 presidential election, though less singular than that of 2016, represented another factor working to destabilize an already anxious nation. Trump, by autumn of 2020, was engaged in a bitter contest with Joe Biden. In a reversal of the 2016 season, the “October surprise” was oriented against Trump’s democratic rival, as revelations about Hunter Biden’s laptop — though dismissed as Russian disinformation by many on the Left — seemed to move the race convincingly in Trump’s favor.

By election night 2020, the optimism of Trump voters appeared vindicated. Early tallies trended in Trump’s favor, with a big win in Florida evoking the critical turning point of 2016. Many Trump supporters can recall going to bed on the night of November 3 believing the incumbent presidential candidate was on a clear path to reelection, a phenomenon termed a “red mirage.” Overnight election tallies turned toward Biden as ballot counting extended late, then later still, with no clear result being established by the night’s end.

When many Trump voters woke up on November 4, their belief in an easy Trump victory, along with their trust in a fair electoral process, had been terminally eroded.



Entrapment 101: Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer was the subject of a bizarre kidnapping plot, later deemed a “fednapping” when the influence of a dozen confidential informants was revealed. (AP Images)



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The Siege

The “Stop the Steal” movement was launched on election night with a hashtag on Twitter. It represented a mélange of grievances concerning election integrity that emerged, first from the shocking reversal of Trump’s early gains on Election Night 2020, then from the slow pace of election returns, and finally from varied reports of voting irregularities that spread virally over social media.

If the concerns of Trump supporters were only partially accurate, they were sufficient to drive the activist wing of the Trump movement toward mobilization.

The threat the Stop the Steal movement posed to the establishment was significant. Not only did it have sympathizers at all levels of elected office, suggesting the possibility of a legally meaningful confrontation between Trump and Biden supporters in the courts, it represented an embarrassment to the United States on the world stage, undermining America’s carefully crafted image as the foremost defender of free and fair elections. Millions of Americans appeared to be doubting not only an election’s outcome, but the legitimacy of the system itself.

Stop the Steal protests began just days after the November election, representing roving and mostly peaceful demonstrations largely occurring on courthouse steps in a handful of cities, and culminating in the Million MAGA March. Some events were marked by violence, as during a December 12 Washington, D.C., protest in which Proud Boys and Trump supporters were confronted by Antifa and BLM-aligned activists. The day ended with 33 arrests and nine seriously injured, including two police officers.

As 2020 turned to 2021, America had once again become a land of not only widespread political violence, but normalized political violence. As crowds supportive of Trump, including Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, and Proud Boys, poured into D.C. for the pivotal date of election certification, violence was not merely anticipated but expected. According to the head of intelligence at a Washington Homeland Security office, the threat was focused on a particular time and place — 1:00 p.m. on January 6 at the U.S. Capitol. More than a mere possibility, the danger was sharply defined and “blinking red.”

January 5, 2021 was a day of increasing tension and activity in D.C. On that morning a bus was stopped near the U.S. Capitol. Painted “Hippies for Trump” in the manner recalling the druggy activism of the ’60s — an era that included its own attack on the Capitol, in that case a bombing — the bus contained various weapons, including a pink Ruger rifle. Nine people were apprehended.

Later that day, Ray Epps, a controversial figure, still un-arrested and unprosecuted by the FBI, was seen in a video along with many who entered the Capitol the next day. “Tomorrow we go *in* to the Capitol, *in* to the Capitol,” Epps roared to a crowd of Trump supporters. Those who surrounded Epps seemed to take it as an absurd suggestion. Their collective response of “Fed! Fed! Fed!” alluded to the phenomenon of *agents provocateurs* akin to those who goaded the Michigan militiamen toward criminality and self-destruction.

That evening, and in one of the crucial mysteries of the event, still unidentified individuals left pipe bombs at the headquarters of both the Democratic and Republican National Committees. Despite the aggressive prosecution and investigation of those involved in the attack on the Capitol, the individual or individuals responsible for the building and planting of those bombs have yet to be identified or brought to justice.

The morning of January 6 began peacefully in D.C., with videos from the morning showing a relatively



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calm crowd gathered at The Ellipse, approximately two miles from the Capitol. The Save America rally, as it was called, though a precursor to the attack on the Capitol, was a relatively placid affair. Several Trump loyalists began the morning with speeches. The president was scheduled to address the audience at noon.

At approximately 12:50 p.m., some of the first violence occurred more than a mile away, as a crowd near the Capitol first confronted police and overturned barriers. Ray Epps, a participant in that initial thrust, can be seen clearly in video of the confrontation. As that group made their initial breach into an off-limits area, the Capitol riot had formally begun.

Videos of Ray Epps taken earlier in the morning show him standing against the current of foot traffic, repeating “As soon as President Trump is finished speaking we are going to the Capitol,” pointing, “It’s that direction.” Notably, Donald Trump spoke later than planned at the Save America rally, and it was *while* Donald Trump was speaking, not after, that Ray Epps and others took the opportunity to begin their push.

Much occurred in a relatively small window of time. It was at 12:49 p.m. that the U.S. Capitol Police (USCP) responded to the pipe bombs discovered at the RNC headquarters. At 1:07 the bomb placed at the DNC was found. According to most accounts, only *one minute* separated the discovery of the bomb placed at the RNC and the first breach of the off-limits area of the Capitol grounds. Steven Sund, chief of the Capitol Police on the 6th, remarking on pipe bombs planted “right at the edge of [the Capitol Police’s] perimeter,” testified before Congress that the devices were designed “to draw resources away.” The serendipity that the bombs planted the night before were found at virtually the same minute the barrier was breached, effectively maximizing their purpose of thinning the response to the initial push toward the Capitol, is notable indeed.

It took roughly two hours for the crowd to progress from that initial breach of the Capitol grounds to the initial entry of the building, a violent struggle that resulted in the deaths of three protesters: Kevin D. Greeson, Benjamin Philips, and Roseanne Boyland, whose death, though officially attributed to Adderall use, was particularly violent.

Making possible a successful drive from the edge of the grounds to the interior of the building were two central factors: the lack of adequate human resistance, and the intensity and focus of outlier figures who seemed determined to lead the protesters to their doom.

Ray Epps has become a familiar figure to many on the Right, but Darren Beattie’s tireless reportage gathered on Revolver News has additionally revealed several lesser-known *agent provocateur*-like figures, such as the individual declared “Scaffold Commander.” Some highlighted by Beattie appeared more organized and tactical than other participants. Some of those figures have yet to be identified. Steven Sund, describing the vanguard of the riot, observed, “a number of them were wearing radio earpieces indicating a high level of coordination.” In many cases, some of the more deliberative and strategic of those participating were in possession of bullhorns, seemingly of similar make and model.

The ultimate cumulative effect of these more purposeful figures, whose behavior showed signs of coordination, was clear: to direct a pliable crowd *into* the Capitol, just as Ray Epps predicted would occur not even 24 hours earlier.

Among the most glaring irregularities about that day was the minimal and inadequate police presence in place to repel the protesters. The antidote to this would have been the installation of the National



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Guard to protect the Capitol, an idea that was being proffered by Donald Trump's administration well prior to January 6.

Kash Patel, chief of staff at the Department of Defense in January 2021, has gone on record saying that Trump attempted to authorize the use of National Guard troops ahead of January 6. Patel attributes the lack of will in posting the Guard at the Capitol ahead of the 6th to Nancy Pelosi and D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser. Retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Keith Kellogg has specified that Trump contacted the Defense Department on January 3 asking for Guard deployment for the 6th.

In the 845-page Thompson/Cheney report, "optics" was a common explanation by government officials when questioned on the limited role of the Guard on the 6th. This was the worry that after the violent riots of 2020 the presence of the National Guard would seem an erosion of the constitutional right to protest. This unconvincing explanation falls apart completely when one considers that it was not just prior to, but *during* the riot that those responsible for directing the Guard were reluctant to use them.

In a *New York Times* piece published on January 4, 2021, a different strategic calculus on the part of officials was revealed: There was fear in Washington that Donald Trump would use the Guard to interrupt election certification in a manner benefiting his political ambitions. It may have primarily been this anxiety, and not a central concern of "optics," that prevented senior leaders from directing the National Guard to the Capitol. A comprehensive analysis of this question published on [justsecurity.org](#), a national security blog, puts it bluntly: "Evidence is mounting that the most senior defense officials did not want to send troops to the Capitol because they harbored concerns that President Donald Trump might utilize the forces' presence in an attempt to hold onto power."

It was not a spontaneously arising concern that Trump would use the National Guard in the transitional period, but rather, in what one of the strangest episodes from the period demonstrates, Washington had been long concerned about the contingency of Trump using the National Guard to launch a military coup in the period surrounding election certification.

Beginning in June 2020, the Transition Integrity Project gathered in Washington to "identify risks to a free, fair, and peaceful 2020 election." The project brought together more than 100 government officials, academics, and media figures. Part of their endeavor involved "war games," creating fictive scenarios in which Trump wins or loses, in addition to ambiguous outcomes resulting from too-close-to-call tallies. The war games accurately predicted many elements of the post-Election Day social environment, such as vote totals being finalized well after the 3rd, with the authors even writing, "The concept of 'election night', is no longer accurate and indeed is dangerous.... The winner may not, and we assess likely will not, be known on 'election night' as officials count mail-in ballots."

On the topic of Trump and the Insurrection Act and National Guard, a point the document returned to more than once was speculation that "partisan actors (including President Trump himself) may seek to deploy law enforcement, national guard troops and potentially active duty military (under the Insurrection Act) to 'restore order' in a manner that primarily benefits one candidate, or to participate in efforts that interrupt the process to count ballots."

Clearly, concerns about the use of the National Guard on the 6th had long extended beyond a question of pure "optics."

Whatever the motivation, the resolute refusal to use the Guard at the Capitol was a consequential and likely deadly choice. As the record makes evident, the lack of will to send reinforcements was



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deliberative and steadfast, even as the severity of the disaster was clear.

Steven Sund asked the House Sergeant at Arms and Senate Sergeant at Arms to declare an emergency and call for use of the Guard at 12:58. This request was ignored. Sund is also on record requesting the Guard at 1:05, 1:28, 1:34, 1:39, 1:45, and 1:49. At 2:12, rioters began to stream into the Capitol. Fourteen minutes later, Sund again requested Guard support, stating, “I am making urgent, urgent, immediate request for National Guard assistance.” At 2:42, Ashli Babbitt was fatally shot by Capitol Police.

It was not until 3:04 that Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller authorized the use of the D.C. National Guard, though another half-hour passed before an operational plan was finalized and approved. It was not until 5:20 p.m. that the first Guard troops arrived at the Capitol.

Who was ultimately responsible for this failure?

The Thompson/Cheney report declared that President Trump “had authority and responsibility to direct deployment of the National Guard in the District of Columbia, but never gave any order to deploy the National Guard on January 6th or on any other day.”

An investigative report by a handful of Republican lawmakers depicted the situation differently, its authors revealing, “In the lead-up to the Joint Session, General Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and then-Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy restricted the process for approving changes to National Guard missions, limiting the authority to approve such changes to ‘senior Pentagon leaders.’”

This change, according to the GOP report, “led to delays in the National Guard’s response to the attack on the Capitol.”

The Rise of the Capitol Police

Without the National Guard, the force left to guard the Capitol on January 6 was the Capitol Police, a unique agency described as “secretive” by *Politico*. Its declared mission is rather limited, and primarily concerned with guarding a handful of blocks surrounding the Capitol. Given its current funding allotment of \$734.6 million (raised in December’s omnibus bill spending bonanza), it may represent the world’s most well-funded police force relative to the size of the area it is tasked with protecting.

The Capitol Police was largely the subject of an alternative report prepared on the topic of January 6, released within days of the Thompson/Cheney report. Prepared by Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) and four additional GOP congressmen, its primary interest was in determining why the Capitol was “unprepared” for unrest on the 6th, given that the USCP “had obtained sufficient information from an array of channels to anticipate and prepare for the violence that occurred.”

The key findings of the report included the following:

- House Sergeant at Arms Paul Irving “was compromised by politics and did not adequately prepare for violence at the Capitol.” Furthermore, Irving was accused of excluding Republicans from critical conversations related to the security of the Capitol.
- Depicting the Capitol Police as under the sway of partisanship, the authors of the report determined that the speaker of the House and Democratic leaders were “closely involved in security decisions in the lead-up to and on January 6, 2021.”



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- The equipment and training provided to Capitol Police officers were inadequate to their challenge. Putting it bluntly, the authors of the report declared, “The USCP was set up to fail.”

The report touched on another controversy explored more fully in a *Politico* article from January 2022. Capitol Police had been launching background checks of constituents who meet with conservative lawmakers. Even within the Capitol Police this tactic was controversial, as the reporters on the story found that “several” intelligence workers declared their concerns about this practice with supervisors. Analysts were even responsible for studying the real-estate and tax records of individuals whom GOP legislators met with outside of D.C.

Congressman Troy Nehls (R-Texas) accused Capitol Police of entering his office without authorization and photographing documents and a whiteboard. Capitol Police accused him of being in possession of “suspicious writings,” which triggered the investigation of Nehls and his office. Investigations such as this appear to have been directed only at Republicans.

Additionally, in 2021 the Capitol Police announced that they would be expanding their national footprint, establishing field offices in California and Florida. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, their spokesperson stated that “other regional offices were expected.”

This fast-growing force — perhaps the one police department Capitol Hill Democrats will unreservedly fund — is now planting roots throughout the country, as its growing intelligence division collects information on American citizens despite bearing evidence of partisanship and bias.



A modern Praetorian Guard? Capitol Police funding has reached unprecedented heights, and GOP lawmakers have accumulated evidence of intimidation and bias. (AP Images)

An Unresolved Legacy

Arrests began during the events of January 6, 2021 and have continued to the present day, according to the “Capitol Breach” cases page on the Justice Department’s website. According to Julie Kelly, arrests stemming from January 6 may drag on “for years,” with as many as 2,000 individuals ultimately facing criminal charges. From a legal perspective, the Capitol riot saga has barely begun, especially for the men and women who participated and whose lives have been forever changed by that day.

Furthermore, the culture of voting in America, and political culture more broadly, may have been



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forever altered by the events of January 6, 2021. Just as Islamic worship was conflated with terroristic sympathies in the post 9/11 era, those who questioned the legitimacy of elections in 2020 are accused of pushing “The Big Lie,” and are viewed by some as in rank with those who stormed the Capitol.

The utility of 1/6 as a cudgel against oversight was apparent in a *New York Times* article from December 26, 2022. Titled “Democrats, Feeling New Strength, Plan to Go on Offense on Voting Rights,” it detailed plans from Democrats such as “putting forward a long list of proposals that include creating automatic voter registration systems, preregistering teenagers to vote before they turn 18, returning the franchise to felons released from prison and criminalizing election misinformation.”

The mandate for this wide-reaching push can be found in the last paragraph of the piece, in which Katie Hobbs, the governor-elect of Arizona (and whose race in 2022 was marred by irregularities), declared a lack of optimism of finding common ground with Republicans, stating, “These people are claiming fraud when there is none, these people mounted an insurrection on the Capitol, they’re the ones who have broken the trust.... You can’t coddle these people that have been misled by the people they have upheld as leaders.”

Before we allow the emotions surrounding January 6 to usher us into a new political paradigm, the American public should seek to adopt a shared understanding of what occurred on the 6th. To do so, a number of outstanding questions still need to be answered, including:

- Why did Ray Epps declare to *The New York Times* that he traveled from Arizona to D.C. to see the president speak, if rather than watching the president at The Ellipse, he appeared with the vanguard of the breach? Why did the FBI take Ray Epps off its Most Wanted list? Why, given that Ray Epps sent a text message in which he stated “I also orchestrated it,” has he not been charged with any crime?
- Will the public be permitted to view the roughly 14,000 hours of surveillance video captured by Capitol Police security cameras on January 6 deemed “extremely sensitive information”?
- Why did Capitol Police let protesters into the building? Who left pipe bombs at the DNC and RNC?

These questions are complex and disturbing. A question that is easier to answer is, “Who benefits from the events of January 6?” The Trump movement did not. A federal government that has long been eager to end Trump’s political ambitions clearly did.

In the elections of 2022, the House was retaken by the Republicans, who now have an opportunity to get to the bottom of these questions, in addition to many others.

Perhaps the most critical open question, two years after the events of January 6, 2021, is whether or not they will.



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