

As Delivered - Opening Statement
Joint HSGAC-Rules Hearing: “Examining the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol”
Tuesday, February 23

Thank you very much Chairman Peters and good morning. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today for this first joint hearing of the Rules Committee and the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, as we work to conduct oversight into what happened in the lead-up to and during the horrific events on January 6th.

Thank you to Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman, as well as my good friend Ranking Member Blunt, who I look forward to continuing working with on the Rules Committee in this Congress.

I think it's important to note that we planned this entire hearing on a bipartisan basis -that's because the stakes are so high -- and we want this -and I say this to our witnesses, as well, who are all appearing here voluntarily — I think it's important for the members to know that and we thank them for doing that - we want this to be as constructive as possible because in order to figure out the solutions so this doesn't happen again, we must have the facts and the answers are in this room.

When an angry violent mob staged an insurrection on January 6th and desecrated our Capitol -- the temple of our democracy -- it was not just an attack on the building, it was an attack on our Republic itself.

We are here today to better understand what was known in advance, what steps were taken to secure the Capitol, and what occurred that day because we want to ensure that nothing like this happens again.

Each of our witnesses held a leadership role at the time of the attack: Acting Chief Robert Contee of the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia; Mr. Steven Sund, former chief of the U.S. Capitol Police, who is here with us in person today; Mr. Michael Stenger, former Senate Sergeant at Arms; and Mr. Paul Irving, former House Sergeant at Arms. The other witnesses are here, as many of our witnesses do, via video. To our witnesses: your testimony is vital and thank you again for coming.

At the same time, this is certainly not the last hearing that we will have regarding this attack. Next week, we will hear from witnesses from federal agencies - including the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Defense - that are critical to our understanding.

The insurrection at the Capitol was more than an assault on democracy, it was an actual life or death situation for the many brave law enforcement officers who show up here to do their work every day. At the beginning of this testimony we will hear from one of them.

We will never forget the haunting shrieks of the police officer pinned in between the doors at the hands of the rioters, pleading for help.

We will never forget Officer Harry Dunn, who fought against the violent mob for hours, and after it was over, broke down in tears telling fellow officers he'd been called the N-Word fifteen times that day. He asked: "Is this America?"

Or Officer Eugene Goodman, who after saving Senator Romney - who is here with us today, thank you Senator Romney- from walking directly into the mob, ran - by himself - to take on a group of rioters, and then Eugene Goodman diverted that mob away from the Senate chamber, allowing us to safely depart.

Tragically, the attack on the Capitol also cost the life of three brave officers, including Officer Brian Sicknick who died from injuries sustained while engaging with protestors.

Two other officers died by suicide following the events of January 6th: D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer Jeffrey Smith and U.S. Capitol Police Officer Howard Liebengood.

Officer Liebengood, or "Howie" to those who knew him, worked the Delaware Avenue door of the Russell Senate office building, someone who I have seen at that doorway and who always greeted me and everyone with a warm smile.

It has been reported that 140 U.S. Capitol Police officers sustained injuries from defending the Capitol.

The courage of these officers will be remembered forever. But there are still many voices that we haven't heard in the stories of January 6th--including the many staff who make sure we have food in our cafeteria and water and heat in our building.

One janitorial worker hid during the attack in a closet. Another custodial staff member reflected on how terrible he felt when he had to clean up feces that had been smeared on the wall, saying "I felt bad. I felt degraded."

These dedicated workers were here too when the Capitol was attacked, as were many committed journalists who report on our work to the American people.

To make this place safe going forward, we must answer some key questions.

First and foremost on many of our minds is what took so long to deploy the National Guard that day, both because of decisions made in the Capitol complex but also by others in the federal government.

We must find out what was known about the potential for violence before the attack, and how that intelligence was shared with law enforcement partners--including the officials responsible for protecting the Capitol. There are also important questions to be asked about how information concerning those threats was communicated to rank and file officers.

And it's vital that we explore necessary reforms to the structure of the Capitol Police Board, which I know we will hear more about today.

We owe it to the 140 Capitol Police officers injured and to all those at the Capitol who continue to suffer the repercussions.

We owe it to the officer beaten by the violent rioters because he literally placed his body in a doorway to protect us.

We owe it to officers who lost their lives.

We owe it to the American people -- to figure out how the United States Capitol, the preeminent symbol of democracy around the world, could be overtaken by an angry, violent mob.

And we owe it to ourselves, colleagues, to believe enough in our Democracy and the U.S. Senate -- that despite our political differences -- we will be constructive in this hearing today, not just here to make political hay, but be constructive today to figure out what went wrong and what changes we can make to ensure the Capitol is safe for us and the public going forward.

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Blunt, Ranking Member Portman, and colleagues, for me the bottom line is that we must get the answers and those answers are what will give us our solutions. Thank you very much.