

Day 3 of Trump impeachment trial

Democrats conclude case in impeachment trial over January 6 Trump coup attempt

Jacob Crosse
12 February 2021

After roughly four hours of argument on Thursday, the Democratic House impeachment managers concluded their opening presentation in the Senate trial of former President Donald Trump. In what was mainly a review of a mountain of evidence, the Democrats connected the actions of the fascist mob on January 6 to years of incitement and approval of violence by Trump.

Throughout the three days of the Senate trial, the Democrats brought forward damning evidence of Trump's personal guilt, while seeking to conceal the role of the Republican Party as a whole, including a majority of the Senate Republican "jurors" who will decide Trump's fate. And for the most part, they sought to downplay the implications of the attempted coup, although for the first time, one impeachment manager posed the question of what would have happened if Trump had been successful.

The Democrats started their presentation by replaying videos from Trump's 2016 campaign rallies in which he urged his supporters to "knock the hell" out of protesters. This was followed by his response to the fascist show of strength in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, in which Trump whitewashed the murder of anti-racist activist Heather Heyer by a neo-Nazi, arguing that there were "fine people" on "both sides."

Then came Trump's sanctioning of the April 30, 2020 storming of the state capitol in Lansing, Michigan, by heavily armed far-right anti-lockdown militia members, some of whom would go on to be arrested for their role in the kidnapping/assassination plot of Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Lead House manager Jamie Raskin effectively drew the parallels between the Lansing attack and the January 6 siege of Capitol Hill, cutting back and forth between images of the two events.

As photos from each day were displayed, Raskin noted, "This Trump-inspired mob may indeed look familiar to you. Confederate battle flags, MAGA hats, weapons, camo Army gear—just like the insurrectionists, who showed up and

invaded the chamber on January 6. The siege of the Michigan Capitol was effectively a state-level dress rehearsal for the siege of the U.S. Capitol that Trump incited on January 6."

It is true that events in Michigan presaged the assault on the Capitol. However, in both cases, the Democrats did their best to conceal the true extent of the fascist threat. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden never pressed the issue of the plots against Whitmer, and in the Senate trial, the Democratic managers were doing their best to conceal the true extent of the fascist threat in order to shield their "Republican colleagues" from further exposure, chloroform the working class and keep the unprecedented political crisis confined within the ruling class and the state.

The House managers showed that the January 6 attackers were not acting randomly but on Trump's orders. They cited numerous tweets, videos and criminal affidavits from some of those arrested on January 6 in which they plainly stated they were following Trump's directives.

Colorado Representative Diana DeGette argued from the perspective of the "insurrectionist themselves," saying their statements, "before, during and after the attack make clear the attack was done for Donald Trump at his instruction and to fulfill his wishes." DeGette pointed out that the crowd was summoned to D.C. "at the president's orders, and we know that because they said so."

DeGette played a video from Trump's Ellipse speech the morning of January 6. The video showed the crowd reacting positively to Trump's directives to "show strength," with replies from the crowd of "storm the Capitol" and "invade the Capitol building." She played another video taken by neo-Nazi Tim Ginoet (alias Baked Alaska) from inside the building as the siege was underway, in which Ginoet beams, "He [Trump] will be happy. We're fighting for Trump."

While not cited by impeachment managers, a memorandum filed by federal prosecutors on Thursday morning against Ohio Oath Keeper leader, 38-year-old

Army veteran Jessica Watkins, is indicative of the mindset of those who spearheaded the coup on the Capitol. In arguing for Watkins to remain in pre-trial detention, prosecutors wrote, “as the inauguration grew near, Watkins indicated that she was awaiting direction from President Trump.”

However, the Democrats continued to limit the scope of their case to just Trump himself, leaving out his co-conspirators within the police, military, intelligence agencies and the Republican Party, some of whom were sitting as jurors. They could have easily pointed to the contempt shown by key Trump supporters in the Senate during the entire process—at one point, reporters were counting as many as 18 of the 50 Republican senators absent from their desks. Other Republican senators were spotted by reporters doodling on their notepads or scrolling through their phones as the Democrats presented their case.

The contradiction between the dimensions of the fascist plot and the Democrats’ efforts to focus only on Trump’s role was revealed most clearly in the presentation by Representative David Cicilline of Rhode Island, who ended his remarks by posing the question of questions: What if Trump had been successful?

Cicilline noted that an attack on the Capitol had not happened even during the American Civil War. “For the first time ever in our history a sitting president actively instigated his supporters to violently disrupt the process that provides for the peaceful transfer of power from one president to the next. Think about that for a moment. What if President Trump had been successful? What if he had succeeded in overturning the will of the people and our constitutional processes? Who among us is willing to risk that outcome by letting Trump’s constitutional crimes go unanswered?”

No other impeachment manager sought to pursue this question, nor was it discussed among the media pundits following the conclusion of the day’s session. That is predictable, because the question raises a central issue: Who would have been Trump’s collaborators in the event of a successful seizure of power? He would not have ruled alone. The bulk of the Republican Party would have rallied to his side, declared the insurrection to be the voice of the people outraged by supposed election fraud, and there are doubtless many Democrats who would under those circumstances have made their peace with the would-be dictator.

Rather than press this point, the impeachment managers called impeachment necessary to prevent the danger of Trump carrying out similar actions in 2024—running again, losing again, inciting violence again. This grossly understates the real danger of fascist violence, when the same thugs who were mobilized on January 6 are capable of taking action now, as soon as Trump or other enablers in the

ruling elite feel it is advantageous to do so. The same network of fascist sympathizers in high places, in Congress, in the military-intelligence apparatus, remains in place.

In their closing remarks, the House managers sought to rebut in advance the issues that Trump’s lawyers might raise in the session that begins on Friday. Trump’s lawyers have already lost their claim that the impeachment trial is unconstitutional because Trump is no longer president. The Senate rejected this claim on Tuesday, by a 56-44 vote. Raskin warned them explicitly against raising the same claim again, seeming to suggest it might be ruled out of order by Senator Patrick Leahy, who presides over the trial.

Raskin also demolished the claim by Trump’s advocates that his First Amendment rights were under attack because he is accused of inciting the mob attack in the speech he delivered to the crowd assembled at the White House January 6. Raskin pointed out that government officials take an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution, and a speech contrary to that oath is not protected by the First Amendment. He also noted acidly that Trump’s speech was actually aimed at destroying First Amendment rights, not only of the congressmen who were forced to flee the Capitol, but of the tens of millions of people who voted in the election and would have had their votes suppressed if Trump had been successful.

One other appeal made by the House managers is worth noting, because it was so explicitly reactionary. Texas Democrat Joaquin Castro pointed to the reactions around the world from “great power” competitors such as Russia and China, citing an intelligence report which said, “Since the incident at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, Russian, Iranian and Chinese influence actors have seized the opportunity to amplify narratives in furtherance of their policy interest amid the presidential transition.”

Castro urged his Republican colleagues to vote to convict Trump in order to strengthen the world position of American imperialism against its foreign rivals. This was an echo of the bogus anti-Russia campaign conducted by the Democratic Party throughout Trump’s presidency, through which they attempted to divert all popular opposition to Trump’s vicious, anti-working class policies into a right-wing direction, to support a more aggressive US foreign policy in the Middle East and more generally.



To contact the WWSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact