

US Capitol police chief says far-right militias planning to bomb Capitol

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In the third congressional hearing held this week on the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, acting US Capitol Police Chief Yogananda Pittman and Acting House Sergeant at Arms Timothy Blodgett testified before a House Appropriations subcommittee.

The hearing, chaired by Ohio Democrat Tim Ryan, was the latest to interrogate the leadership of the various police agencies about their failure to maintain the security of the Capitol. Members raised questions about how and why, despite receiving numerous intelligence reports warning of the assault, little or no action was taken to prevent it.

The two police officials answered in generalities, dodged responsibility or sought to blame “the process” rather than providing direct answers about the course of events on January 6.

There was one significant revelation when Pittman was asked how long the enhanced security measures, which include over 5,000 National Guard soldiers and a ring of secure fencing around the Capitol complex, would continue. She alluded to the ongoing threat of fascistic terrorist violence, warning that “militia groups that were present on January 6 have stated their desires to blow up the Capitol and kill as many members as possible.”

In other words, the fascists who attacked the Capitol on January 6 are still an ongoing concern. Pittman indicated that their threats were directed against an upcoming address by President Biden to a joint session of Congress, originally proposed for late February, but now pushed back. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said recently that the date for the address would be determined in part by security concerns.

One question posed by the hearing, but not asked there, was how many of the anti-democratic and pro-Trump forces that aided the January 6 attack are still

employed within the police and the military-intelligence apparatus. This might well include the higher echelons of the Capitol Police force itself.

The hearing raised new questions about the breakdown in communications between the police leadership and the rank-and-file on the ground in the Capitol, and why there seemed to be a general stand-down of police forces even as the Capitol was under siege.

The ranking Republican on the subcommittee, Jaime Herrera Beutler, who was one of 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump, pressed Pittman on the lack of communication from police leadership during the siege. She recounted “standing next to officers... as the insurrection was happening, it was very clear... that they were getting no actual real communication, no leadership, no direction, no coordination and you could see the fear in their eyes.”

In response, Pittman offered a meandering explanation of the Incident Command System, which she said “failed.” Herrera Beutler directly asked her again why “you and the leaders didn’t gain command of the communication system?”

Pittman responded it was a “multi-tiered failure,” to which Herrera Beutler responded, “I’m hearing a lot of process and explaining why there was a problem... Each of these officers had to make a decision with no information, had no idea what you guys were doing.”

The congresswoman went on to cite a recent poll of police union members on their leadership. Ninety-two percent of eligible members voted “no confidence” in six leaders of the Capitol Police department, which included Pittman and former Chief Steven Sund.

While Democrats, Republicans and the leadership of the various police agencies charged with protecting the Capitol and its members have all offered some

variation on the claim of an “intelligence failure” to explain the breach of the building by right-wing militias, white supremacists and Trump supporters, Pittman’s testimony undermined this narrative.

Pittman confirmed that a January 3 special Capitol Police assessment, which warned that “militia members, white supremacists, and other extremists groups” were “targeting Congress and the joint certification process,” which they viewed as the “last opportunity to overturn the election,” was distributed throughout the department via email down to the level of sergeants and above prior to January 6.

Despite her department producing the assessment warning of an attack on members of Congress, Pittman, who was then assistant chief for protective and intelligence operations, claimed that her department did not “ignore intelligence” and that there was “no intelligence” of a “credible threat of that magnitude.”

Pittman also acknowledged that the police had received a memo from the Norfolk FBI office warning that militia groups were planning for “war,” along with sharing maps of the tunnels under the Capitol complex. Despite allegedly not seeing this memo, Pittman said that even had she been aware of it, it would not have changed the response of the police.

Several representatives questioned the slow response of the National Guard, and specifically why the Police Board, which controls the deployment of the Guard on Capitol grounds in conjunction with the Department of Defense, did not authorize their deployment prior to January 6 and during that day.

Pittman testified that Chief Sund had asked for the deployment on the Guard prior to January 6, but was opposed by House Sergeant-at-Arms Paul Irving. Previous reporting by the *Washington Post* claimed that Irving didn’t like the “optics” of thousands of soldiers surrounding the Capitol.

Before resigning following the attack on the Capitol, Irving had been sergeant-at-arms since 2012, when he was appointed by Republican John Boehner, who was then House speaker. Irving spent decades in the Secret Service before retiring in 2008 and joining the Command Consulting Group, an international security and intelligence consulting firm, in 2009.

In testimony earlier this week, Irving claimed to have “no recollection” of a phone call between him and Sund on January 6 discussing the deployment of the

Guard to the Capitol prior to 1:28 p.m. He claimed no request was made until 2:10 p.m.

Pittman testified she pulled the phone records of Sund showing that he called Irving at 12:58 p.m., followed by a call to the Senate sergeant-at-arms, Michael Stenger, at 1:05 p.m., also to request Guard support. Pittman testified that Sund again reached out to Irving at 1:28 p.m., 1:34 p.m. and 1:45 p.m. The request to deploy the Guard was finally approved and relayed to the Department of Defense at 2:10 p.m. Troops would not arrive on the grounds until roughly 6:00 p.m., well after the siege had ended, largely through the efforts of the Washington Metropolitan Police.

Representative Jennifer Wexton, Democrat of Virginia, questioned Pittman at the seeming lack of police deployed on the grounds on January 6. Pittman acknowledged that on a typical day when Congress is in session, a little over 1,000 police are on the grounds, yet on the day of the Electoral College certification, only 200 more, about 1,200 police, were deployed at noon.

This is despite the presence of the entire Congress in one room, together with the three highest-ranking officials in the chain of succession to the presidency, Vice President Pence, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Grassley, president pro tempore of the Senate.



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