Republicans step up efforts to disrupt January 6 investigation

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House Republicans have taken a number of steps this week aimed at disrupting the work of the House Select Committee established to investigate the January 6 attack on Congress, including the role of President Trump and other top Republican leaders in preparing and directing the assault.

The latest actions were touched off by letters sent Monday to at least 30 telecommunications and social media companies, including Apple, AT&T, Facebook, Parler and Verizon, asking them to preserve records that might be sought for the investigation into the January 6 coup attempt.

The letter, co-signed by chairman Bennie Thompson (D-Mississippi) and vice chair Liz Cheney (R-Wyoming), cited records from April 1, 2020 through January 31, 2021, indicating that at least some of these records will be subpoenaed by the committee. The list of individuals covered by the request has not been made public, but it reportedly includes at least a dozen Republican members of Congress.

The information sought would not include the content of the communications, but rather who called whom—connections that could be quite revealing, particularly in the days leading up the assault on Congress and on January 6 itself.

A group of ultra-right Republicans, including Lauren Boebert of Colorado, Andy Biggs and Paul Gosar of Arizona, Louie Gohmert of Texas, Mo Brooks of Alabama, Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and Matt Gaetz of Florida, were in regular touch with fascist groups like the Proud Boys and the Oathkeepers during months between the election and January 6, when the results of the Electoral College vote were to be certified by Congress.

There were reports of representatives giving guided tours of the Capitol a few days beforehand to people later arrested on January 6—essentially helping them carry out reconnaissance for the upcoming attack.

During the attack itself, Boebert was live-tweeting the movements of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, one of the main targets of the attackers, who stormed her offices, chanting “Nancy, Nancy,” while her staff barricaded a conference room in terror.

If any Republican representatives were in direct communication with the rioters during the attack, they could face felony conspiracy charges, as well as expulsion from their seats in the House.

That no doubt accounts for the vehemence with which McCarthy responded to threat of subpoenas. He issued a denunciation Tuesday of what he called “attempts to strong-arm private companies to turn over individuals’ private data.” He told the tech companies not to cooperate with any requests for information from the House Select Committee, warning that otherwise a future Republican House majority, perhaps after the 2022 elections, “would not forget.”

This was a direct attempt to block the functioning of a committee established by a majority vote in the House of Representatives. McCarthy had previously sought to prevent the committee from functioning by naming die-hard Trump supporters like Jim Jordan of Ohio to serve on it. When Pelosi rejected Jordan and Jim Banks of Indiana, McCarthy responded by pulling all Republicans off it, except for the anti-Trump Republican Cheney and Adam Kinzinger, selected by Pelosi.

The Select Committee issued statement in response to McCarthy’s threat, saying, “We’ve asked companies not to destroy records that may help answer questions for the American people. The committee’s efforts won’t be deterred by those who want to whitewash or cover up the events of January 6th, or obstruct our

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investigation.”

Congressional committees regularly subpoena private data held by telecommunications and social media companies. The only difference in this case is that the request includes data relating to members of Congress. It also includes data of executive branch officials in the Trump administration, including Trump himself, who was in regular contact with the fascist groups, either directly or through intermediaries like his long-time political crony Roger Stone.

In a follow-up action, McCarthy and other top Republican leaders are discussing the expulsion of Cheney and Kinzinger from the Republican caucus. Cheney was actually the chair of that caucus, the number three position in the leadership, until earlier this year, but she was voted out and replaced with Elaine Stefanik of New York as a result of her public condemnation of Trump over the January 6 coup attempt.

On Thursday, McCarthy gave an interview to a local television station in his California district, in which he claimed that investigations by the FBI and the Senate had already cleared Trump of any responsibility for the January 6 attack.

This is a declaration of unmatched cynicism, since McCarthy himself stood on the floor of the House of Representatives January 13, during the debate on Trump’s second impeachment, and said that Trump bore responsibility for the attack but that impeachment was the wrong remedy.

Since then, however, McCarthy has abased himself before Trump and his fascist acolytes and tried to demonstrate his abject loyalty to the would-be dictator.

His statement Thursday only had one fig leaf—he cited the bipartisan report of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, headed by Democrat Amy Klobuchar, which limited its examination of January 6 to the security failures at the Capitol and did not address the role of Trump at all, thanks to Klobuchar’s cave-in to the Republicans on the committee.

As for the FBI, no report has actually been issued, only a leak to Reuters which claims that the FBI exonerated Trump, without addressing any of the factual questions involved. There is no indication that Trump has ever been interviewed by any federal agency about his actions on January 6, when he addressed a rally of thousands of supporters outside the White House, directed them to the Capitol, then watched with satisfaction as they broke into the building and sought to block certification of his election defeat.

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