

January 6 committee hearings resume with focus on ties between fascist groups and Trump camp

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The House Select Committee investigating the January 6, 2021 coup attempt by Donald Trump will resume public hearings this week after a 10-day break, on Tuesday afternoon. Another hearing, initially set for Thursday evening, has been put off until next week.

According to committee members who appeared on Sunday television interview programs, Tuesday's hearing will focus on the role of fascist groups like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, who acted as the spearhead of the attack on the U.S. Capitol. The goal was to shut down the certification of Democrat Joe Biden's victory in the Electoral College and enable Trump to remain in office as a dictator-president after his term expired on January 20.

Of the five Sunday television interview programs, only Fox News, predictably, did not have a guest from the House Select Committee and did not devote even a single minute to discussing the January 6 investigation. Each of the other four networks interviewed a member of the committee.

The two who will lead the questioning Tuesday, Jamie Raskin of Maryland and Stephanie Murphy of Florida, both Democrats, appeared on CBS and NBC respectively. Both emphasized the significance of Trump's December 19, 2020 tweet urging his supporters to come to Washington on January 6 and promising them that the event "will be wild," a pledge that was certainly fulfilled.

"People are going to hear the story of that tweet, and then the explosive effect it had in Trumpworld, and specifically among the domestic violent extremist groups, the most dangerous political extremists in the country at that point," Raskin said. Murphy called the tweet a "siren call" to these groups to join a "last

stand" to keep Trump in power.

Murphy said that the goal of the series of hearings was to establish a coherent narrative of the events from the election to the attack on the Capitol. "The overall message that we have been gathering out of all of these witnesses is that the president knew he had lost the election, or that his advisers had told him he had lost the election, and that he was casting about for ways in which he could retain power and remain the president, despite the fact that the democratic will of the American people was to have President Biden be the next elected," she said.

California Democrat Zoe Lofgren said on CNN that it was a "logical conclusion" to draw that Trump was aware of the role which groups like the Proud Boys would be playing. "We are going to be connecting the dots during these hearings between these groups and those who are trying in government circles to overturn the election," she said.

Thursday night's hearing, scheduled during prime time to draw a larger viewing audience but now postponed, was to lay out a minute-by-minute account of Trump's actions in the White House during January 6, including any contacts with congressional leaders trapped inside the Capitol and with aides who were in direct contact with the fascist groups, including his attorney Rudy Giuliani and Steve Bannon, the former White House political adviser.

Bannon has been defying subpoenas from the committee and was found in contempt of Congress. The U.S. Department of Justice decided to prosecute this charge, and Bannon has a hearing set for July 18 when a federal judge will consider his effort to postpone his trial until October. The timing suggests that the offer to

testify may be an effort to delay or forestall the trial.

Bannon has been claiming executive privilege, even though any discussions he held with then President Trump from September 2017 on, when he left his White House post, were as a private citizen, not as a presidential aide. On Saturday morning, Trump issued a statement releasing Bannon from any claim of executive privilege, a gesture that appeared to serve two purposes: allowing Bannon to drop his refusal to testify, and allowing Trump to maintain that executive privilege was still a valid claim, but one that he was waiving “voluntarily.”

It is not clear when, or even if, Bannon will appear before the committee in a closed session to give a deposition, but it is highly unlikely that he will appear at either public hearing this week, since these have been highly choreographed affairs relying mainly on pre-recorded testimony, with a handful of live witnesses whose testimony has been devastatingly unfavorable to Trump.

The other new high-profile witness is former White House counsel Pat Cipollone, who was the in-house lawyer for the president during the final two years of his term and led his defense in the trial of his first impeachment in early 2020, on charges relating to his efforts to use the government of Ukraine to gather political dirt on his likely Democratic opponent, Biden.

Cipollone had declined to be questioned by the committee on the record and under oath, citing executive privilege. But under increasing public pressure, particularly from the Republican vice chair of the committee, Liz Cheney, and after the testimony of Cassidy Hutchinson, a top aide to White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, depicting Cipollone as an opponent of the January 6 attack on the Capitol, he shifted his position.

On Friday, July 8, Cipollone sat for an eight-hour deposition behind closed doors. Few details of his testimony have leaked out, but House Select Committee members interviewed Sunday said that he did not contradict Hutchinson’s testimony about Trump’s determination to join and lead the mob in its attack on Congress. Portions of his testimony will be part of the material presented at future hearings, committee members said.

Tuesday’s hearing is also to examine a meeting held December 18, 2020 at the Willard Hotel, where several

top Trump allies involved in promoting the “stop the steal” lie campaign discussed extraordinary and illegal measures to block the congressional certification of the votes of the Electoral College. The members of the Electoral College elected November 3 had assembled in each state capital on December 14, as prescribed by law, and cast their ballots, giving Biden a victory over Trump by a margin of 332 to 206.

The December 18 meeting included, among others, attorneys Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell and retired general and former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn. One action they discussed was an executive order to seize voting machines in a number of key “battleground” states, including Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona and Nevada, to conduct either a recount or an entirely new election under military supervision.



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