

January 6 Committee subpoenas Secret Service to turn over deleted text messages

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17 July 2022

Late Friday, the House Select Committee investigating the January 6 coup issued a subpoena to the United States Secret Service demanding that the agency turn over text messages between its agents sent on January 5 and January 6, 2021.

The subpoena followed a letter sent July 13 by the inspector general of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the parent organization of the Secret Service, to the House and Senate Homeland Security Committees informing them of the Secret Service's efforts to obstruct his investigation into the role of the DHS and its agencies in then-President Donald Trump's attempted overthrow of the 2020 election.

In the letter, first reported by the *Intercept*, DHS Inspector General Joseph Cuffari said the Secret Service had deleted agents' text messages after his office had requested all electronic communications on those days. He also raised that Secret Service personnel, citing orders from agency tops, were refusing to provide records to his office until DHS lawyers had reviewed them. The process was, he said, causing "weekslong delays" and "confusion."

Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi quickly released a statement admitting that the agency had deleted text messages from the days before and during the mob attack on the US Capitol. But he presented the deletions as the entirely innocent result of a "system migration" process previously planned to begin in January 2021. The statement said that the agency had "lost" data on "some phones," but that no texts relevant to the inquiry "had been lost in the migration."

Representative Bennie Thompson (Democrat from Mississippi), who chairs both the House Homeland Security Committee and the House Committee on January 6, released a statement Thursday saying the January 6 Committee would respond to the "extraordinarily troubling destruction of records." On Friday, Cuffari met with the committee in closed session, and later that day the committee issued its subpoena, ordering the Secret Service to retrieve and turn over the text messages by Tuesday, July 19.

The Secret Service's claim that there was no "malicious" intent in deleting the messages is absurd. We are evidently to believe that the federal police agency charged with guarding the president, vice president and other top government officials has never heard of backing up devices, or is unaware that

preservation of government documents is required by law.

It is trebly absurd to claim there could be an innocent explanation for failing to preserve records of the Secret Service's actions during an unprecedented, bloody and nearly successful attempt to overthrow the Constitution and establish a presidential dictatorship, carried out by fascist paramilitaries backed by the defeated but still sitting president and his political party.

Moreover, it is well known that the Secret Service played a critical role in the attempted coup. Along with the Republican Party, the leadership of the Defense Department, substantial sections of the police and intelligence agencies and Supreme Court justices, it supported the attempt to establish Trump as dictator-president.

Testimony at a number of the public hearings of the January 6 Committee has revealed that Trump reacted to Vice President Mike Pence's reluctant refusal to illegally reject the elector slates from battleground states that voted for Biden by targeting Pence for assassination at the hands of his fascist insurrectionists. His first tweet after the mob broke into the Capitol, decked out with nooses bearing signs saying, "Hang Mike Pence," was issued at 2:24 p.m. In it he denounced Pence for lacking the "courage" to overturn the election.

At that point, Pence's Secret Service detail ordered him to leave the Capitol and get into an armored limousine headed for Andrews Air Force Base. Pence refused, knowing that if he was removed from the Capitol, the time limit for congressional certification of Biden's victory laid down in the Electoral Count Act of 1887 would be missed.

That would give Trump the pretext for throwing the election into the Supreme Court, where Trump allies Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas were prepared to intervene on his behalf, or back to Republican-controlled state legislatures, or into the House of Representatives, where the Republicans controlled the majority of state delegations.

They were confident, with good reason, that President-elect Biden and the Democrats would capitulate, just as they had capitulated to the stolen election of 2000. Outside of calling on Trump to call off his own coup, Biden said nothing throughout the hours-long storming of the Capitol, while Democratic lawmakers cowered under their desks. There was no appeal for

the population to mobilize and stop the coup, because the Democrats feared above all igniting a mass movement that could threaten capitalist rule.

According to the *Intercept* article, Pence's national security adviser Keith Kellogg told Tony Ornato, a top Secret Service official and Trump's deputy White House chief of staff for operations, "You can't do that, Tony. Leave him where he's at. He's got a job to do. I know you guys too well. You'll fly him to Alaska if you have a chance."

In the same article, author Ken Klippenstein cited a "congressional official not authorized to speak publicly," who said, "People need to understand that if Pence had listened to the Secret Service and fled the Capitol, this could have turned out a whole lot worse. It could've been a successful coup, not just an attempted one."

Carol Leonnig, a *Washington Post* reporter and author of the 2021 book *Zero Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Secret Service*, appeared on the Rachel Maddow show on MSNBC the night after last month's explosive testimony by Cassidy Hutchinson, a former aide to Trump's White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows. Hutchinson told the January 6 Committee that Trump knew some of the insurgents he called on to storm the Capitol were armed, and that Trump said Pence "deserved" to be killed. She also said Trump intended to march on Congress at the head of the mob and was enraged when Ornato and the head of his Secret Service detail prevented him from doing so on the grounds that it was too dangerous.

Leonnig told Maddow that many members of Trump's Secret Service detail "took to their personal media accounts to cheer on the insurrection and the individuals riding up to the Capitol as patriots."

Ornato, who has denied aspects of Hutchinson's account and the reported statement of Pence's national security adviser Keith Kellogg, exemplifies the role of key state operatives elevated by Trump in preparation for the coup that unfolded on January 6.

Ornato served for three years as Secret Service deputy assistant director in charge of Trump's Secret Service detail. In December 2019, Trump took the unprecedented step of naming Ornato, still an officer in the Secret Service, to become deputy White House chief of staff in charge of operations. This was part of Trump's effort to turn the Secret Service and other police agencies, such as the Border Patrol, into his private Praetorian Guard.

This is how Wikipedia describes Ornato's new position:

With this shift Ornato left his role as protective agent to become a manager responsible for all aspects of security, travel, information technology, military operations, scheduling and operational logistics required in support of the President, managing a budget of approximately \$800 million and leading a workforce of

over 5,000 persons.

He and his team provided management and administration services, human resources support, financial oversight, and medical support. He managed the Residence staff assigned to the president and the Executive Office of the President complex. Ornato also had responsibility for a variety of offices related to the White House, including Camp David, the Presidential Airlift Group, the Presidential Marine Helicopter Squadron, the White House Communications Agency. He was also responsible for the "Presidential Continuity Policy, Plans and Requirements."

As deputy chief of staff in charge of operations, Ornato played a central role in organizing Trump's June 1, 2020 photo op in front of St. John's Church. That "Der Führer" moment followed Trump's threat to invoke the Insurrection Act and mobilize the military across the country to crush ongoing protests against the police murder of George Floyd, and his deployment of federal police to violently clear out peaceful demonstrators protesting across from the White House.

Like all of his fellow coup accomplices, Ornato has not been prosecuted. He remains to this day the assistant director of the United States Secret Service Office of Training.

The Biden administration and congressional Democrats have been aware for months of the role of the Secret Service in supporting the coup attempt and seeking to undermine the DHS inspector general's investigation. They have done nothing and told the public nothing.

CNN reported that Inspector General Cuffari told the January 6 Committee on Friday that he had repeatedly complained to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas about the Secret Service's refusal to turn over agents' electronic correspondence related to the January 6 events, but "could not get anywhere within DHS with his concerns." Cuffari also raised the issue in the last two semi-annual reports his office issued to Congress.



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