

Top Trump Homeland Security officials deleted January 6 messages

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On Friday, the *Washington Post* reported that text messages sent by former leaders of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the lead-up to and during the January 6 coup are missing.

Citing “four people briefed on the matter” as well as internal emails, *Post* reporters Carol Leonnig and Maria Sacchetti revealed that Trump’s acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf and his acting Deputy Secretary Ken Cuccinelli did not turn over text messages to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari as requested, apparently claiming they were “missing.”

Wolf and Cuccinelli both served in the Trump administration in an acting capacity beginning in November 2019. Trump preferred that the two remain in an acting status so he could ensure their loyalty while circumventing congressional oversight.

In August 2020, the Government Accountability Office found that both Wolf and Cuccinelli were ineligible to serve in their roles due to an “invalid order of succession.” However, this did not stop the two men from leading the department through Trump’s coup.

Text messages have also been reported missing for former acting Undersecretary of Management Randolph D. “Tex” Alles. Prior to working at DHS beginning in July 2019, Alles was the director of the United States Secret Service from April 2017 through May 2019. It was revealed earlier this month that dozens of Secret Service agents also failed to preserve their text messages from the lead-up to and during the coup, despite the agency having been explicitly instructed to do so.

Prior to the January 6, 2021 attack on Congress, then President Donald Trump leaned on both Wolf and Cuccinelli to support his bogus claims that the election was stolen. Trump tried to enlist the DHS in a plot to

seize voting machines, particularly those manufactured by Dominion Voting Systems, and “re-run the election.” There is little doubt that text messages were exchanged between Cuccinelli and Trump coup lawyer Rudy Giuliani about the feasibility of such a plan in December 2020.

In a statement sent to the *Post*, the chair of both the House Homeland Security Committee and the House Select Committee on January 6, Bennie Thompson (Democrat-Mississippi), wrote: “It is extremely troubling that the issue of deleted text messages related to the January 6 attack on the Capitol is not limited to the Secret Service, but also includes Chad Wolf and Ken Cuccinelli, who were running DHS at the time.”

As acting secretary of the DHS, Wolf led the federal police occupation of Portland, Oregon, in the summer of 2020, during mass protests that swept the country following the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. In July 2020, Wolf deployed US Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC) police to Portland, despite protests from Democratic Mayor Ted Wheeler, to harass, beat and kidnap protesters.

Wolf, like Trump and the rest of his Republican accomplices, continues to build and cultivate a far-right movement within the Republican Party focused on installing Trump as president-dictator. Wolf is the executive director of the America First Policy Institute (AFPI), which hosted Trump as its headline speaker in Washington D.C. earlier this week.

In his speech to the AFPI conference, Trump outlined his envisioned police state should he come to power in 2024. He called for mass deportations, the forced removal of homeless persons to “tent cities” on the outskirts of urban centers, the death penalty for drug traffickers and the unilateral right of the president to fire federal employees. He also called for the National

Guard to be federalized so the president could unilaterally dispatch the military to cities, such as Chicago, to crush any working class or left-wing opposition to the dictatorial plans of the financial oligarchy.

According to the *Post*, citing documents obtained by the Project on Government Oversight, DHS Inspector General Cuffari became aware that the text messages were missing in late February 2022, but he did not inform the House Select Committee or the House and Senate Homeland Security Committees until early July, nearly five months later.

Referring to the DHS messages, Thompson acknowledged that it “appears that the DHS inspector general has known about these deleted texts for months but failed to notify Congress. If the inspector general had informed Congress, we may have been able to get better records from senior administration officials regarding one of the most tragic days in our democracy’s history.”

CNN also reported on Friday that Cuffari became aware that the Secret Service had deleted its records in May 2021, not December 2021 as he previously indicated.

Joining Thompson in denouncing Cuffari was Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (Democrat-Illinois). In a statement issued Friday, Durbin said: “The destruction of evidence that could be relevant to the investigation of the deadly attack on our Capitol is an extremely serious matter. Inspector General Cuffari’s failure to take immediate action upon learning that these text messages had been deleted makes clear that he should no longer be entrusted with this investigation. That’s why I’m sending a letter today to Attorney General Garland asking him to step in and get to the bottom of what happened to these text messages and hold accountable those who are responsible.”

There is no innocent explanation for the deletion of text messages of officials at DHS as well as agents of the Secret Service, which is an agency of the Department of Homeland Security. The same applies to Cuffari’s failure to immediately inform Congress and the House January 6 Committee.

On January 16, 2021, four congressional committees—Intelligence, Homeland Security, Oversight and Reform, and Judiciary—sent a letter to FBI Director Christopher Wray; Joseph Maher, a senior

official at DHS; Steven Vanech, acting director of the National Counterterrorism Center; and John Ratcliffe, director of national intelligence, instructing them to preserve all records related to January 6.

According to Leonnig, co-author of the *Post* article, upon learning in February 2022 that the DHS had no records of any communications from its top leadership in the lead-up to and during the attack on the Capitol, Cuffari was more than ambivalent. Leonnig said in an interview with Lawrence O’Donnell on Thursday that Cuffari did not “probe more deeply, ask for more of an explanation.”

That text messages from the entire leadership charged with “defending the homeland” from “extremist terror,” both “foreign and domestic,” have gone missing points to the scale of Trump’s coup plot. These messages undoubtedly deal with security measures taken, or not taken, at the Capitol as Congress and Vice President Mike Pence were being hunted by Trump’s right-wing mob, riddled with Proud Boy and Oath Keeper fascists, some of whom are admitted government informants.

These developments underscore that the attack on the Capitol was not simply, as the January 6 Select Committee asserts, the work of Donald Trump and a few right-wing lawyers, isolated from the broader Republican Party and the agencies of the state. That the Capitol was left undefended even though far-right elements and Trump himself named January 6 as the date to “Stop the Steal” underscores the coordination between the domestic intelligence agencies, the police and the military apparatus in Trump’s coup.



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