

Secret Service director resigns amid bipartisan demands that she step down following Trump assassination attempt

Barry Grey
23 July 2024

On Tuesday morning, it was announced that Kimberly Cheatle, director of the United States Secret Service, was resigning her post. Cheatle, appointed by President Biden in September 2022, had spent 29 years at the agency.

Cheatle resigned amidst demands by both Republicans and Democrats that she step down following the near-assassination of former president and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13. Those demands increased following her testimony Monday at a contentious four-hour hearing of the House Oversight Committee, during which she refused to answer questions about massive security lapses that allowed the 20-year-old shooter, Matthew Crooks, to graze Trump's ear with a bullet fired from a rooftop little more than 100 yards from the rally platform.

Crooks was able to fire off at least eight bullets, wounding Trump and two attendees and killing one attendee, before he was killed by a Secret Service sniper.

At the hearing, Cheatle acknowledged "colossal" problems with the security at the rally but rebuffed demands for her resignation, saying, "I think I am the best person to lead the Secret Service at this time." But in her resignation letter the following morning, she said the agency "fell short" of its mission "to protect the nation's leaders" at the July 13 rally, and that she did not want escalating calls for her resignation to distract Secret Service agents from their mission. This was an implicit allusion to the highly tense and potentially explosive and violent political situation in the US four months before the November elections.

Cheatle's resignation is the latest in a series of events in the space of less than two weeks that reflect the historic scale and depth of the political crisis in the US. Trump's near-assassination was followed by a four-day spectacle of fascistic reaction, backwardness and cultural depravity at the Republican National Convention, which marked the full takeover of the Republican Party by Trump's MAGA movement. This was followed three days later by the

withdrawal of President Biden as the Democratic presidential candidate and the subsequent overnight coronation of Vice President Kamala Harris as his replacement, with not even a pretense of democratic process in her selection.

Just a week ago, Biden and Alejandro Mayorkas, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, of which the Secret Service is a part, were defending Cheatle and rebuffing Republican demands that she resign or be fired. But in a statement Tuesday, Biden thanked Cheatle and praised her decision to step down, while promising to appoint a permanent successor "soon." Later that afternoon, Mayorkas designated current Deputy Director Ronald Rowe as the agency's acting director.

Later on Tuesday it was reported that the Secret Service had asked the Trump campaign to stop holding campaign rallies outdoors and to hold them indoors instead.

At Monday's House Oversight Committee hearing, Cheatle stonewalled and deflected specific questions about the timeline of events leading up to the shooting of Trump at 6:11 p.m. on July 13. "I'm not going to get into specifics of the day," Cheatle testified, citing an "ongoing investigation." She repeatedly parried questions with responses such as, "There was a plan in place to provide overwatch, and we are still looking into responsibilities." That internal review, she said, would take 60 days, and until then she would not speak about specifics.

Questions she refused to answer included:

- Why was the building from which the gunman fired, which offered an unobstructed view of the rally platform, not included in the Secret Service's security perimeter, and why was no law enforcement officer placed on the building's roof?

- Why was Trump allowed to take the stage of the rally when law enforcement had identified someone with a rangefinder who was milling around the outskirts of the rally site, when they had labeled that person "suspicious," and

when state and local police had alerted the Secret Service that they were looking for him as the event began?

Several congressional members cited reports from NBC and other major news outlets confirming that local police photographed the would-be assassin over an hour before the shooting took place.

Video was played during the hearing showing rally-goers warning police two minutes before the shooting that there was a person on the roof with a gun.

Democratic Representative Melanie Stansbury laid out a timeline that the FBI previously discussed with lawmakers behind closed doors. Stansbury noted that, according to the FBI, Thomas Crooks conducted online searches for Trump and the Democratic National Convention on July 6, and on July 7 he visited the Butler rally site.

On July 13, the day of the rally, Crooks conducted another reconnaissance mission with a drone and then proceeded to purchase 50 rounds of ammunition. He then grabbed his father's AR-15 and returned to the venue.

By 5:00 p.m., Crooks had already been identified by local police as "suspicious," and at 5:20 p.m. local police confirmed he was using a rangefinder to scope out the stage and the building he would use as a sniper perch. According to the FBI report, at 5:45 p.m., the Beaver County Emergency Services Unit noticed Crooks on the roof and photographed him.

Rep. Stansbury said that by 5:51 p.m., 20 minutes before Trump was shot, local police notified the Secret Service of the same suspicious person.

At 6:03 p.m. Trump took the stage. A social media video posted at 6:09 p.m. shows multiple rally goers pointing to the roof, where Crooks was crawling on his belly, while shouting, "He's got a gun." Two minutes later, Trump and three other people were shot.

At the hearing, virtually every Republican representative demanded Cheate's resignation. They were joined by leading Democrats, including Ro Khanna of California, a top figure in the Biden campaign, and the ranking Democrat on the committee, Jamie Raskin of Maryland. Hours after the hearing, Raskin and committee chair James Comer (Republican of Kentucky) sent a joint letter to Cheate demanding that she resign.

Multiple Republicans used the hearing as a platform to incite Trump supporters by placing the blame for the shooting directly at the feet of the Biden administration and the Democratic Party. Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene bluntly asked Cheate if there was a deliberate security stand-down. "Was there a stand-down? Was there a conspiracy to kill President Trump?" she demanded.

The Democrats, in typical fashion, seized on the hearing to proclaim their horror over the shooting of Trump and deep

concern for his health, to denounce all violence, to declare their patriotic concern for "national security" and commitment to uphold the state police agencies and to insist on "bipartisan unity."

New York Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, said, "It has been 10 days since an assassination attempt on a former president of the United States, regardless of party. There need to be answers." She warned that violence "could break out in this political moment regardless of party in the event of someone getting hurt," which constituted "a national security threat to the entire country."

California Democratic Representative Robert Garcia, a member of both the House Oversight Committee and the House Homeland Security Committee, was interviewed on MSNBC Tuesday after news broke of Cheate's resignation. "What I want to make very clear," he stressed, "is that this is bipartisan, both Republicans and Democrats have united."

The moderator then cited Trump's response to the news of Cheate's resignation on his Truth Social platform: "The Biden-Harris administration did not properly protect me, and I was forced to take a bullet for democracy. It was my great honor to do so."

To which Garcia replied, "That is shameful. It is not helpful. ... Donald Trump and his allies should not be politicizing this and trying to put blame on the president or the vice president."

He went on to say, "No question that many of our law enforcement agencies need more support."

Also on Tuesday, House Speaker Mike Johnson and Representative Hakeem Jeffries, the Minority leader, announced an agreement to form a bipartisan task force to head up congressional investigations into the assassination attempt. The task force will be nearly evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats.

It should be recalled that the entire Republican leadership boycotted the committee set up by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to investigate Trump's attempted coup of January 6, 2021 and denounced it as a witch-hunt. They thereby signaled their support for Trump's "stolen election" lie and the attempted coup itself, in which fascist insurrectionists who invaded the Capitol in an attempt to block the certification of Biden's election victory made Pelosi their top target for mob violence.



To contact the WWSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wwsws.org/contact