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D.C. National Guard commander says Pentagon delayed deployment of troops to protect US Capitol on January 6

In the second joint hearing held by the Senate Rules and Homeland Security committees on the January 6 siege of the US Capitol by pro-Trump insurrectionists, D.C. National Guard Commander William Walker confirmed that senior leadership at the Department of Defense refused for hours to approve urgent requests from Walker and D.C. police to deploy National Guard troops to protect Congress from the mob.

In his opening statement, Walker said he asked Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller and Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy for approval to deploy National Guard troops at 1:49 p.m., but was not given the go-ahead until 5:08 p.m. Walker testified that the three hour and 19 minute delay left him “stunned and frustrated.”



Army Maj. Gen. William Walker, Commanding General of the District of Columbia National Guard speaks during a Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and Senate Committee on Rules and Administration joint hearing Wednesday, March 3, 2021, examining the January 6, attack on the U.S. Capitol in Washington. (Greg Nash/Pool via AP)

He told the panel that he had “about 155” soldiers fully equipped and ready to deploy, and their dispatch to the Capitol could have “secured the perimeter” and “made a difference.”

Walker’s statements coincide with testimony given last week by D.C. Metro Police Chief Robert Contee and former Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund. Both police chiefs testified that they were “stunned” at the lack of response from Pentagon officials when they pleaded for reinforcements, even as the Capitol was being overrun by far-right forces whom Trump had called on to halt congressional certification of the Electoral College vote.

Just hours after the Senate hearing, which also took testimony from FBI, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Defense Department officials, the FBI and DHS issued a bulletin citing social media chatter and warning of possible attacks on the Capitol on March 4 by fascistic groups that adhere to the Republican lie of a “stolen election” and refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the Biden administration.

The official warning said that elements linked to the QAnon fascist conspiracy theory were pledging to storm the Capitol and “remove” Democratic lawmakers. In response, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer announced that the House had canceled its sessions for the remainder of the week.

The decision to shut down the House of Representatives, despite the ongoing deployment of 5,200 National Guard troops to safeguard the Capitol, is an indication of the intensity of the political crisis that continues to grip the American state in the aftermath of the January 6 coup attempt.

Major revelations that emerged from Walker’s testimony include:

- Following a “frantic” phone call from Capitol Police Chief Sund at 1:49 p.m. requesting Guard support, Walker spoke by phone with senior Army leadership,

including Lt. Gen. Walter Piatt and Lt. General Charles Flynn. They refused to approve Walker's request for approval to dispatch his troops, citing the negative "optics" of stationing uniformed troops at the Capitol and concerns about further "inciting the crowd."

- Charles Flynn's brother is retired Gen. Michael Flynn, Trump's one-time national security adviser, who was convicted of lying in the Mueller investigation and pardoned by Trump. In the run-up to January 6, Michael Flynn made public statements calling on Trump to declare martial law and hold new elections at gunpoint in key swing states won by Biden.
- On the eve of the January 6 "Save America" rally called by Trump to overturn the 2020 election, Acting Defense Secretary Miller and Army Secretary McCarthy, both Trump appointees, stripped Walker of his normal unilateral authority to deploy troops under his command. Walker testified about the contents of two memos that severely limited his ability to use a 340-person detail that had been authorized to assist D.C. police with traffic control on January 5 and 6.

Walker testified that an "unusual" January 4 memo was unlike any other directive he had received in the course of his military career. "It required me to seek authorization from the secretary of the Army and secretary of defense to essentially even protect my Guardsmen," he told the senators.

- Another memo issued by Miller the subsequent day added further restrictions on the contingent of soldiers. Miller warned Walker that he would "withhold authority" from him to deploy the "quick reaction force" without a "concept of operation" submitted beforehand.
- Walker testified to the stark difference between the Pentagon's handling of the peaceful protests last June against police violence and the violent attack on the Capitol on January 6. Walker said that during the summer protests, Secretary of the Army McCarthy was "right by my side," which allowed the "six-step process" to deploy the D.C. National Guard on Capitol grounds to be completed in "minutes," whereas McCarthy was "unavailable" when Walker sought approval on January 6.

- Contradicting claims made the day before the hearing by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Mark Milley, that the Pentagon moved at “sprint speed” to approve police requests for Guard support on January 6, Walker said he had troops “waiting on buses” less than 20 minutes outside the Capitol that could have been deployed shortly after 2:00 p.m.
- The hearing also revealed that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) failed to declare the January 6 joint session of Congress called to certify the electoral vote a National Special Security Event (NSSE), despite the multitude of threats tracked by the FBI, DHS and other state agencies against the lawmakers and Vice President Mike Pence who were gathered in one building. This revelation followed testimony from FBI Director Christopher Wray on Tuesday admitting that the FBI had failed to issue a threat assessment in advance of the joint session of Congress.

The designation of an event as an NSSE places the US Secret Service in charge of coordinating, planning and implementing a security plan, while the FBI is charged with collecting intelligence and implementing counterterrorism measures. Previous examples of NSSE events include the two major party political conventions, State of the Union addresses and even Super Bowl 36.

Democratic Senator Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire questioned witness Melissa Smislova, a senior official with the DHS, as to why, given the threats and the political significance of what was occurring on January 6, an NSSE declaration was not issued. Smislova admitted that no one at DHS even considered making January 6 an NSSE.

To date, the hearings called by House and Senate committees on the lack of security on January 6 have highlighted glaring failures for which no innocent explanation appears plausible. But the Democratic Party, which controls both houses of Congress, has refused to even subpoena the Trump officials who were in charge of the Pentagon and the DHS at the time.

These include Secretary Miller, who was installed by Trump after the November 2020 election as part of a purge of Pentagon officials who had resisted his attempt in June to invoke the Insurrection Act and mobilize active-duty troops to crush the nationwide protests against police violence. They also include Chad Wolf, who, as acting DHS chief,

had presided over the mass incarceration of immigrants at the border as well as the use of federal police forces to terrorize left-wing protesters in Seattle and Portland.

Instead, Wednesday's hearing once again featured repeated invocations by the Democrats of the need for bipartisan "unity" with "Republican colleagues" who continue to question the legitimacy of the 2020 election and overwhelmingly support Trump.

This was underscored by the publication Wednesday of an op-ed column by former Vice President Pence reiterating the lie of "significant voting irregularities" and calling a Democratic-backed bill to protect mail-in ballots an "unconstitutional power grab." Pence, who supported Trump's claims of a stolen election, only weeks ago was being praised by Biden and the Democratic leadership as a model of patriotism and fidelity to democratic principles after he refused to illegally reject the Electoral College vote on January 6.

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