

Coup Attempt in Washington

By Don Sutherland

Wednesday, January 6, 2021 was as dark and distressing a day that the United States has ever known. Although it cost far fewer lives than either the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor or the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, it was no less consequential in the annals of American history. That it was incited by an American President and amplified by the seditious conduct of several U.S. Senators, and directed at its representative government makes it far more consequential.

On January 6, the nation experienced the first coup attempt in its history. Not once since it adopted its Constitution on September 17, 1787 had it suffered such an assault on its democratic government. The coup quickly failed when those who stormed the U.S. Capitol, disrupted Congress' quadrennial count of the electoral votes, and ransacked the building garnered no popular support. By evening, the U.S. Capitol had been cleared. At 8 pm, Congress resumed its work and at 3:45 am it had completed its business. For many, it would be tempting to dismiss the gravity of yesterday's events as something worse than a bad day but much less serious than an attempt to topple the nation's democracy.

Doing so would be dangerous. It would lead law enforcement to treat those responsible overly lightly. It would ignore the conduct of those who incited or encouraged the effort—President Donald Trump, Senator Josh Hawley, and Senator Ted Cruz in particular. The lessons of the first foreshock, symptom, or early warning of the increasing fragility of the nation's republican framework would be lost. The underlying causes and a toxic illiberal far-right movement would continue to metastasize. At some time in the future, a more ruthless demagogue or better organized movement would then have a greater chance at succeeding with its autocratic designs.

In the immediate aftermath of the failed Putsch, President Trump should be removed from office either via impeachment and conviction or the 25th Amendment. Later, he should be held criminally responsible for all of the laws that were broken by the insurrection he inspired. He orchestrated the chain of events, calling for a "big protest" and promising, "Be there, will be wild!" In his address to the gathered crowd, he called on them to march to the Capitol, even promising to be there with them, a promise he subsequently broke. At the same time, he pushed misleading information that Vice President Mike Pence had it within his authority to unilaterally block the counting of electoral votes, even as the 12th Amendment provides no such express or implied authority. Upon learning that Vice President Pence would not pursue Trump's anti-democratic designs, the President tweeted his displeasure. By that time, an enraged mob had reached the grounds of the U.S. Capitol.

After more than 60 lawsuits filed by the Trump campaign and its allies aimed at disenfranchising millions of voters in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin failed for lack of evidence, lack of timeliness, and/or lack of standing, Senators Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz took it upon themselves to play a major role in trying to deny President-elect Joe Biden the electoral votes required to allow him to take office. These individuals, who from their position in the U.S. Senate, were intimately familiar with the reality that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris had

won a free, fair, and transparent election or ought to have known from their position, should also be held accountable for their conduct. They should be expelled from the Senate.

Those who broke into the Capitol should also be held accountable for their crimes. They should be given the severest penalties possible under the law with no leniency of any kind. Coup attempts are not light mistakes or mere accidents. They are not demonstrations of 'patriotism' as some are now spinning on right-wing social media. There was nothing honorable about the mob. These were not good people. Trump's declaration, "We love you, You're very special," changes nothing about the character of the mob and its awful intent.

This coup attempt was a serious matter. It was deadly. It was a direct attack on the nation, its laws, its Constitution, its democratic institutions, and its people.

The coup attempt is now over. The nation's historic record will forever be scarred by it. It's time to clean up the mess by sparing none of those who were involved. It is time to rebuild and fortify the foundations of the nation's democracy. The nation's democracy withstood its sternest test. As long as it is nurtured and prospers, the nation and its people enjoy a bright future.