

Thank you, Leader Jeffries, Representative Thompson, and my former colleagues from the Select Committee. I'm grateful to be back in the Capitol. Unfortunately what brings us together today is the somber remembrance that five years ago the Capitol and our democratic process were under attack by a mob summoned and incited by President Donald Trump.

As a retired naval officer who served two decades in uniform, I first took the oath to "support and defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic" at the age of 17, entering the US Naval Academy as a midshipman, and again as a Member of Congress. My service has been to this country and the Constitution.

My focus this morning will be what the Select Committee exposed about President Trump's failure to uphold his oath "*to the best of [his] Ability, [to] preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States*" and his dereliction of duty as Commander in Chief and how this has persisted during his second term in office.

President Trump's failure to act to end the violence that day, his rewriting and whitewashing of history, and his mass pardons of January 6 rioters, literally transforming hundreds of convicted criminals into political martyrs and folk heroes, has served to undercut the rule of law and in turn weakened our democratic institutions.

Veterans of our armed forces know firsthand the leadership that's required in a time of crisis, urgent and decisive action that puts duty and country first. But on January 6th, when lives and our democracy hung in the balance, President Trump, as Commander in Chief, refused to act because of his selfish desire to stay in power.

Think about what we saw on Jan 6: undeniable violence at the Capitol. The Vice President being evacuated to safety by the Secret Service. Senators running through the hallways of the Senate to get away from the mob. Law enforcement valiantly defending the Capitol against brutal attack.

As the Commander in Chief, President Trump was oath and duty bound to protect the Capitol. But for over 3 hours (187

minutes) he disregarded the advice and pleading from his closest staff and even his family to take action; to simply speak the words necessary to stop the violence and send the rioters home. And furthermore, when he spoke, he addressed those who instigated the violence with words of solidarity: “*I know your pain, I know you're hurt.*” Doubled down on the stolen election claims: “*We had an election that was stolen from us*” and finally, concluding with another sentiment of understanding said: “*I know how you feel, but go home and go home in peace.*”

President Trump also bears responsibility for the extreme delay in the D.C. National Guard’s arrival at the Capitol, until after the violence had largely subsided. The D.C. National Guard is unique; it answers directly to the President. Senior Guard leaders have since testified that President Trump could have expedited the Guard’s deployment with a single phone call. Instead, the Guard waited for hours, despite being positioned mere blocks away at the D.C. Armory.

Rather than act, President Trump watched the chaos unfold on television from his private West Wing dining room. He made no call to deploy the Guard. Instead, he tweeted attacks on Vice President Pence. When told that Vice President Pence had been forced to evacuate for his own safety, President Trump responded, “So what?”¹ Later, he justified the mob’s “Hang Mike Pence” chants as “common sense.”

The Guard arrived three hours and nineteen minutes after being requested—well after the worst of the violence had already occurred. We’ll never know how many law enforcement officers might have been spared brutal injuries, or how many lives might have been saved had the commander-in-chief done his duty in the moment it mattered most. What we do know is that this was an outrageous dereliction of duty and a profound violation of the President’s oath of office.

President Trump has rescripted the norms of government service to require personal loyalty over loyalty to the Constitution. Our military leadership has resisted this and has

held firm despite his ever increasing pressure, yet President Trump continues to blur the lines between the duty of the military to the Constitution and his political aims.

Days after losing the 2020 presidential election, President Trump fired Secretary of Defense Mark Esper for this very reason: insufficient personal loyalty. This was an extraordinary action by a lame-duck president during a presidential transition period that alarmed national security professionals across the political spectrum. Secretary Esper had resisted the President's efforts to use active-duty military forces for domestic political purposes. He opposed invoking the Insurrection Act to deploy troops to American streets during protests, and he counseled against Trump's suggestion that troops should "just shoot" protesters.

Since reassuming office, President Trump has again politicized the armed forces, opening a baseless investigation into former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley. He and his Administration purged senior military leadership for political reasons and fired the service branches' top lawyers because

they were deemed “roadblocks.” He threatened to recall a sitting senator to active duty to be tried for treason under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice. This is an extraordinary step to weaponize DoD against a member of the legislative branch. He has described fellow Americans as “the enemy within,” suggested the military “straighten out” American cities, and even proposed using American communities as military “training grounds.” These statements coincided with troop deployments to American cities over the objections of state and local leaders, and with a systematic effort to muzzle Pentagon reporting by restricting press access unless coverage is pre-approved by the Administration.

As someone who served more than two decades in uniform, I find this vision for our military deeply un-American.

President Trump did not only attack this building or our democracy. He attacked the fundamental idea that the military serves the Constitution—not a man, not a party, and not a political agenda. This trend has only accelerated since his explicit display of dereliction of duty on January 6 and should

stand as a warning to all Americans that living in a free democracy is not self-executing. It depends on leaders and citizens choosing to uphold our values. We owe it to the law enforcement officers who defended this Capitol, those serving in uniform today, and the generations to come to lead that fight.

It is one I will never abandon.

Thank you.