

**Senator Dick Durbin**  
**Opening Statement**  
**Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: the January 6 Insurrection, Domestic**  
**Terrorism, and Other Threats**  
**March 2, 2021**

Today, the Senate is holding its first oversight hearing of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) since July 2019. This is also FBI Director Wray's first appearance on Capitol Hill since the January 6 insurrection. Director Wray, welcome back.

At the outset, I want to extend my condolences for loss of FBI Special Agents Daniel Alfin and Lauren Schwartzenberger, who were killed last month in the line of duty in South Florida.

Tomorrow marks eight weeks since an armed mob stormed the U.S. Capitol—incited by former President Trump and determined to subvert our democracy by disrupting the Electoral College count. As Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said, “There is no question, none, that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the event of that day.”

While these efforts to overturn a free and fair election were ultimately unsuccessful, the trauma of that tragic, harrowing day lingers on. This timeless symbol of our democracy still bears the scars of the attack.

The attack caused the senseless deaths of Capitol Police Officers Brian Sicknick and Howard Liebengood and D.C. Police Officer Jeffrey Smith.

Countless police officers, staff, journalists, and Members of Congress remain haunted by the sights and sounds of the day: the neo-Nazi symbols and Confederate flags paraded through the hallowed halls of the Capitol... a noose and gallows constructed on the grounds outside the Capitol... the sinister shouts of “Hang Mike Pence” and “Where’s Nancy?”... the extremists carrying zipties and clad in tactical gear ... and, worst of all, the violent assaults on the U.S. Capitol Police and D.C. Metropolitan Police Department officers who bravely sought to protect us from the siege.

And the FBI has warned us that the insurrection could be a “significant driver of violence” in the future, along with, “the shared false narrative of a ‘stolen’ election.”

So, we must not forget the horrors of the January 6 attack, or allow revisionists to rewrite what happened that day. I would like to turn to a video to demonstrate the scale of the violence and hate we witnessed that day.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

The hate on display that terrible day is not a new phenomenon in the United States.

America's first domestic terrorist organization – the Ku Klux Klan – was born in the aftermath of the Civil War to terrorize formerly-enslaved African Americans.

As Judge Garland noted at his nomination hearing, the Department of Justice (DOJ) was founded during Reconstruction to “secure the civil rights promised by the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments.”

He went on to note that the first Attorney General appointed by President Grant led “a concerted battle to protect black voting rights from the violence of white supremacists, successfully prosecuting hundreds of cases against members of the Ku Klux Klan.”

The insurrectionists who stormed the Capitol on January 6 did not wear white robes and hoods. They might as well have. They are the latest incarnation of a violent white supremacist movement that has terrorized fellow Americans on the basis of their race, religion, and national origin for more than 150 years.

Let me be clear: as I have said on many occasions, I condemn all violence, regardless of ideology.

But I’d like to hear my Republican colleagues join me today in acknowledging – as DHS found last October – that violent white supremacy is “the most persistent and lethal threat in the homeland.”

And I’d like to hear my Republican colleagues today unequivocally condemn the “Big Lie” that the election was stolen, a falsehood which Donald Trump continues to spread, which helped provoke the January 6 Insurrection, and which threatens to incite future terrorist attacks.

As the January 6th attack on the Capitol demonstrated, for far too long our federal government has failed to address the growing terrorist menace in our own backyard.

I have been sounding the alarm about this threat for years. In 2012, I held a hearing on hate crimes and domestic extremism, following the horrific massacre of six worshippers at a Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, perpetrated by a white supremacist.

And in early 2017, I first introduced the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act with Congressman Brad Schneider—a bill that would enhance the federal government’s efforts to prevent domestic terrorism.

During the Trump Administration, I led multiple letters to former Attorney General Barr and you, Director Wray, asking what steps DOJ and the FBI were taking to combat the growing threat of white supremacist violence. I asked why the Bureau made the inexplicable decision to stop tracking white supremacist incidents as a separate category of domestic terrorism—and I have still not received an adequate response to that question.

Meanwhile, the threat posed by domestic terrorists—and, in particular, white supremacists and other far-right extremists—has only continued to grow.

The 2015 mass shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where a white supremacist killed nine members of the church.

The 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where a white supremacist killed 11 members of the congregation.

The 2019 mass shooting at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, where a white supremacist targeting Latinos killed 23 people.

And many more. Far too many Americans—particularly people of color and religious minorities—worry whether their community will be the next devastated by such a tragedy.

Despite the scope of the violent white supremacist threat, former President Trump and his Administration spent four years downplaying the threat posed by white supremacists.

The Trump Administration never set up a task force to combat the numerous incidents of deadly terrorist violence from white supremacists and other far-right-wing extremists—it was only after Black Lives Matter activists protested last summer against police misconduct that the administration found the need to establish a task force to address “anti-government extremists.”

And a recent report in the New York Times detailed how the Trump Administration’s baseless efforts to paint the far-left as the real domestic terrorism threat “divert[ed] key portions of the federal law enforcement and domestic security agencies at a time when the threat from the far right was building ominously.

I join my Republican colleagues in condemning left-wing violence, but let’s stop pretending that the threat of Antifa is equal to the white supremacist threat. Vandalizing a federal courthouse in Portland is a crime and it should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, but it is not equivalent to a violent attempt to overturn the results of our elections, nor is it equivalent to mass shootings targeting minority communities.

This false equivalency is an insult to the brave police officers who were injured or lost their lives on January 6, as well as dozens of others who have been murdered in white supremacist attacks in recent years.

We need to be abundantly clear that white supremacists and other far-right extremists are the most significant domestic terrorism threat facing the United States today. I hope that everyone in this room can look at the facts and acknowledge this, and that we can come together on a bipartisan basis to defeat this threat.