

Opening Statement of Chairman Gary Peters (D-MI)
Joint Full Committee Hearing: Examining the January 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol
February 23, 2021

It has been just over six weeks since our nation watched with horror as our Capitol building was breached by domestic terrorists who sought to use violence and intimidation to overturn the results of a free and fair election.

This was a shocking assault on our democracy, and marked one of our nation's darkest days. The United States has stood as a beacon for the world, showing how democracy can thrive. On January 6th, we saw just how fragile many of our most valued democratic principles are, including the peaceful transfer of power.

It's hard to express how deeply grateful we are for the actions our Capitol Police, Sergeants at Arms, and other law enforcement agencies do to keep us safe every day, and especially on that day. Too many of our officers were gravely injured, or tragically killed, as they bravely fought back the attackers.

Chief Contee, we are also indebted to the DC Metropolitan Police Department for their valiant efforts to thwart the attack. DC Police often provide support to help secure the Capitol, but the officers under your command did not hesitate to come to our aid. We are thankful for the heroic actions of so many who ensured this direct attack on our democracy failed.

But there is no question that there were colossal breakdowns in the intelligence gathering and security preparations leading up to the events of January 6th, as well as during the coordination and response efforts once the attack was underway.

Our goal today is to begin to understand where those breakdowns and failures occurred, and to determine if there are policy and structural changes Congress must make to prevent a future attack of this nature.

In my role on the Homeland Security Committee, I've worked to draw attention to the rising threat of domestic terrorism, including the rise of insidious ideologies of white supremacy, anti-government militias, and now even QAnon conspiracies.

These ideologies are intertwined in numerous ways, and on January 6th we saw just how quickly they can shift from online communities to committing organized, violent attacks in the real world.

But the warning signs were there. Just a few months earlier, in my home state of Michigan, law enforcement successfully stopped a plot by anti-government militias to kidnap our state's governor.

We've seen an increase in violent crimes over the last decade that are driven by hateful ideologies.

And we saw the deadly and tragic consequences on January 6th when this domestic terrorist threat was not taken as seriously as it should have been.

That is a systemic and leadership failure on the part of our security officials, from the FBI and Department of Homeland Security, to the security leadership on the ground at the Capitol, and it must be addressed.

Domestic terrorism is not a new threat, but it is an urgent threat. It will require a serious focus to ensure we are doing everything we can to protect the safety and security of all Americans.

I'd like to take a moment to remind my colleagues that every Senator here today took an oath to protect and defend the constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

As the committees charged with oversight, strengthening homeland security and maintaining Capitol operations, we have a solemn duty to thoroughly examine the security breakdowns and make needed reforms. I am hopeful we will be able to work together and carry out this responsibility in a serious and nonpartisan way.

Finally, while today's hearing is our first on the January 6th attack, it will not be our last. We will continue to seek testimony and information from a range of agencies and officials who were involved in preparing for and responding to the events of the day for the U.S. Capitol and the entire region.

The attack on January 6th was an extraordinary event that requires exhaustive consideration. The American people deserve answers on why their Capitol was breached. I look forward to having a productive discussion with our witnesses in order to provide the American people with those answers.