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FEATURED

GOP State Committee member warns Trump is 'dangerous;' political experts call riot unprecedented

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Fencing is placed around the exterior of the Capitol grounds, Thursday, Jan. 7, 2021 in Washington. The House and Senate certified the Democrat's electoral college win early Thursday after a violent throng of pro-Trump rioters spent hours Wednesday running rampant through the Capitol. A woman was fatally shot, windows were bashed and the mob forced shaken lawmakers and aides to flee the building, shielded by Capitol Police.

John Minchillo



Republican State Committee member Pat Saylor said President Donald Trump bears the blame for the "outrageous" events that occurred at the Capitol Wednesday and should be removed from office.

"Enough is enough," said Saylor, of Beavertown.

She supports Trump's removal from office before President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration on Jan. 20 to keep further disruption from happening.

Trump "is dangerous," said Saylor. "I think he's become unglued. He believes his own lies."

It's a frank statement from a party stalwart who has been involved in politics for 50 years but Saylor said she's been watching the current administration with a wary eye.

On Sunday, she called U.S. Rep. Fred Keller and told him to be careful on Wednesday when the House was scheduled to assemble at the U.S. Capitol Building to certify the presidential votes.

"I told him the Trumpers are going to try and stop it and just be careful," Saylor said, adding that Keller said he planned not to walk from his car to the Capitol as usual and would take a different route to avoid the anticipated crowd.

There really is no historical precedent for this, said Nick Clark, professor of political science, Susquehanna University, on Thursday, reflecting on Wednesday's chaos in the Capital.

"It was an attack on the government and it is not a coincidence that it was timed to when Congress was certifying the electors from the 2020 election. I think, for the majority of Americans, the significance of the act is far more than just a riot or property damage — this was an effort to intimidate our representatives into overturning the results of a democratic election."

It highlights the need to try to increase the legitimacy of the election somehow or improve the quality of elections for the future, Clark said.

"Senator Romney said it best when he argued on the floor of the Senate that nothing will convince the President's supporters that the election was legitimate absent the President's victory," Clark said. "At this point, if we were to reschedule and have the election again and it produced the same outcome, the President would likely only charge fraud again and his supporters would likely fall in line."

In a statement posted on Susquehanna University's website, President Jonathan Green referred to the rioters as "terrorists deluding themselves to be patriots" who were compelled to act "not merely by corrupt dogma, but a commitment to a patently false set of 'facts.'"

"This is a moment when we need to recognize that many of the issues in front of us are not right and left, but right and wrong, and we must commit to do what is right," Green wrote.

"As a party, we need to find a way to rededicate ourselves to ideas, rather than a person," said Republican John Meckley, of Milton. "As a party, we really need to recommit ourselves to the truth. Finding the truth and speaking the truth and challenging places where the truth is being distorted or hidden. The first amendment rights that we all enjoy are rights we need to exercise with responsibility, and so we need to support newspapers that are helping us find the truth. We cannot align ourselves with those who are consumed by conspiracy theories.

"Our party will be much better served if we return ourselves to core Republican values and ideas and away from what many see as simply blindly following the ambitions of one politician," he added. "I think about where we go from here is not about parties, Republicans or Democrats. We as a people need to rededicate ourselves to re-engaging as a community, on a personal level. Re-engaging with our neighbors, on a community basis, whether in church or through organizations. Where we see each other as people and not as defenders of different tribes."

Kassie Gelnett, a 19-year-old Selinsgrove resident who voted by mail in November and has no issue with the voting process, watched with dismay as the riots played out on television.

"Both sides need to be listened to. Without that, nobody is going to agree," she said of the need for meaningful conversation. "I think this will blow over. Eventually, normal life will come back."

The immediate impact of the riots will be "extreme" security on Capitol Hill, said Robert Speel, professor of political science, Penn State, The Behrend College. "This is sad for people who visit the national capital."

"My concerns are that millions of Americans who voted for Trump continue to read and listen to nonsensical conspiracy theories online or on right-wing radio and television and continue to believe falsely that more people voted for Trump," Speel said. "There was scattered fraud and misadministration in last November's election, as there is in every election, but not enough to make any difference in the outcome."

A potential positive outcome, he said, is that the Trump supporters who were appalled by the violations of law and order will help diminish talk of overturning legal election results.

"That might give politics in Washington a chance to return to semi-civil discussions for a while," Speel said. "But I fear that online social media has amplified the voices of demagogues happy to spread disinformation, and the proliferation of cell phone cameras has caused more people to take part in actions simply to post their idiocy online for others to see and to cheer.

"Responsible political leaders would be discouraging such behavior, not encouraging it," he said.

Jacob Hoover, of Selinsgrove, was shocked to see how easily the mob breached the Capitol Building and questioned the effectiveness of Homeland Security.

"We just have to get beyond this because nothing is going to work otherwise," the 19-year-old said. "Biden needs to unite people."

Hoover's mother, Monica Hoover, also of Selinsgrove, said respect for the office of the presidency and faith in God is needed to get the country back on track.

"I really hope we can but I feel like it's going to take a long time to get past all of this. Right now, we're the States of America, not the United States," she said.

Clark is at a loss on how to unite the country.

"I don't know how we move beyond this," he said. "The reality is that the political center has been significantly weakened within the country. And the center is the foundation for generating trust between the two sides. Those on the left and the right live different lives and have little contact with one another.

"As a country, we cannot move past this until we start to build connections across the aisle again," he said. "But that just does not seem likely to happen in the years ahead."

Saylor is looking toward the future with the hope that Biden can turn the tide and put an end to the unrest and division across the country.

"I'm a strong Republican. But I hope Biden gets vaccine rolling and we get back to normal," she said. "The first thing we need to get back is confidence."

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