

THOMPSON, CHENEY, & AGUILAR OPENING STATEMENTS AT SELECT COMMITTEE HEARING

Jun 16, 2022

- As Delivered -

Chairman Thompson: “Good afternoon.

“There is almost no idea more un-American than the notion that any one person could choose the American president.’

“No idea more un-American.

“I agree with that -- which is unusual -- because former Vice President Mike Pence and I don’t agree on much.

“These are his words, spoken a few months ago about Donald Trump’s attempt to pressure the former Vice President—pressure him into going along with an unlawful and unconstitutional scheme to overturn the 2020 election and give Donald Trump a second term in office that he did not win.

“Today, the Select Committee is going to reveal the details of that pressure campaign.

“But what does the Vice President of the United States even have to do with a presidential election?

“The Constitution says that the Vice President of the United States oversees the process of counting the Electoral College votes—a process that took place on January 6th, 2021. Donald Trump wanted Mike Pence to do something no other Vice President has ever done.

“The former President wanted Pence to reject the votes and either declare Trump the winner or send the votes back to the states to be counted again. Mike Pence said no.

“He resisted the pressure. He knew it was illegal. He knew it was wrong.

“We’re fortunate for Mr. Pence’s courage on January 6th. Our democracy came dangerously close to catastrophe.

“That courage put him in tremendous danger. When Mike Pence made it clear that he wouldn’t give in to Donald Trump’s scheme, Donald Trump turned the mob on him. A mob that was chanting ‘Hang Mike Pence.’ A mob that had built a hangman’s gallows just outside the Capitol.

“Thanks in part to Mike Pence, our democracy withstood Donald Trump’s scheme and the violence of January 6th. But the danger hasn’t receded.

“Led by my colleague Mr. Aguilar, today we’ll lay out the facts for the American people. But first, I’ll recognize my colleague from Wyoming, Ms. Cheney, for any opening statement she’d care to offer.

* * *

Vice Chair Cheney: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

“Let me take a few minutes today to put the topic of hearing in a broader context. In our last hearing, we heard unequivocal testimony that President Trump was told his election fraud allegations were complete nonsense.

“We heard this from members of the Trump campaign. We heard this from President Trump’s campaign lawyers. We heard this from President Trump’s former Attorney General Bill Barr. We heard this from President Trump’s former Acting Attorney General, Jeff Rosen.

“And we heard this from President Trump’s former Acting Deputy Attorney General, Richard Donoghue. We heard from members of President Trump’s White House staff as well.

“Today, we are focusing on President Trump’s relentless effort to pressure Mike Pence to refuse to count electoral votes on January 6th.

“Here, again, is how the former Vice President phrased it in a speech before the Federalist Society, a group of conservative lawyers.

[multimedia]

“What the President wanted the Vice President to do was not just wrong. It was illegal and unconstitutional.

“We will hear many details in today’s hearing, but please consider these two points.

“First, President Trump was told repeatedly that Mike Pence lacked the Constitutional and legal authority to do what President Trump was demanding he do. This is testimony from Marc Short, the Vice President’s Chief of Staff, who served in the Trump administration in multiple positions over four years.

[multimedia]

“But President Trump plotted with a lawyer named John Eastman to pressure Pence to do so anyway. As a federal court has explained, ‘based on the evidence, the Court finds that it is more likely than not that President Trump and Dr. Eastman dishonestly conspired to obstruct the Joint Session of Congress on January 6, 2021.’

“When exactly did President Trump know that it would be illegal for Mike Pence to refuse to count electoral votes? Here is one sample of testimony given by one of the witnesses before us today, the Vice President’s General Counsel.

[multimedia]

“That was January 4th, two days before the attack on Congress.

“A second point. Please listen to testimony today about all of the ways that President Trump attempted to pressure Vice President, including Donald Trump’s tweet at 2:24 p.m. condemning Mike Pence – when Trump already knew a violent riot was underway at the Capitol.

“In future hearings, you will hear from witnesses who were present inside the White House, who were present inside the West Wing, on that day. But today, we focus on the earnest efforts of Mike Pence, who was determined to abide by his oath of office.

“As Mike Pence prepared a statement on January 5th and 6th explaining that he would not illegally refuse to count electoral votes, he said this to his staff.

[multimedia]

“You will hear today that President Trump’s White House Counsel believed that Mike Pence did exactly the right thing on January 6th. As did others in the White House. As did Fox News Host, Sean Hannity.

“Vice President Pence understood that his oath of office was more important than his loyalty to Donald Trump. He did his duty. President Trump unequivocally did not.

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.”

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Chairman Thompson: “Without objection, I recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. Aguilar, for an opening statement.”

* * *

Representative Aguilar: “Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

“Today, we intend to show the American people that January 6th was not an isolated incident. In the culminating weeks culminating before, there was a legal scheme and deception.

“We’ve already learned that President Trump knew he lost the 2020 election.

“Shortly after, he began to look for a way to circumvent our country’s most fundamental civic tradition: the peaceful transfer of power.

“The President latched on to a dangerous theory and would not let go because he was convinced it would keep him in office.

“We witnessed firsthand what happened when the President of the United States weaponized this theory.

“The Capitol was overrun. Police officers lost their lives. And the Vice President was taken to a secure location because his safety was in jeopardy.

“Let’s take a look at the effect of Donald Trump’s words and actions. I want to warn our audience that the video contains explicit content:

[multimedia]

“How did we get to this point?

“How did we get to the point where President Trump’s most radical supporters led a violent attack on the Capitol and threatened to hang President Trump’s own Vice President?

“You’ll hear from witnesses that Donald Trump pressured Mike Pence to adopt a legally and morally bankrupt idea that the Vice President could choose who the next President can be.

“You’ll hear about how the Vice President, the White House Counsel, and others told Donald Trump that the Vice President had no such authority.

“But President Trump would not listen.

“You’ll hear how Vice President Pence withstood an onslaught of pressure from President Trump both publicly and privately—a pressure campaign that built to a fever pitch with a heated phone call on January 6th.

“You’ll also hear that the President knew there was a violent mob at the Capitol when he tweeted at 2:24pm that the Vice President did not have the ‘courage’ to do what needed to be done.

“Let me be clear: Vice President Pence did the right thing that day; he stayed true to his oath to protect and defend the Constitution.

“I look forward to hearing from our witnesses this afternoon.

“Mr. Chairman, I yield back.”

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