



How Wednesday's Capitol riot came to fruition and who made it happen

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The congressional endeavor of certifying the presidential winner in the Electoral College is typically a banal ritual.

But on Wednesday after weeks of mounting emotions, lawsuits to overturn the results, and an insistence from President Trump and his supporters that the election was stolen, the ceremonial duty became a jaw-dropping event pockmarked by a raid of the Capitol, shots ringing out, tear gas and lives lost.

So what happened?

According to one U.S. military veteran heavily involved in the planning of Wednesday's protests, attendees came from across the country.

"Whether it was Veterans for Trump or Bikers for Trump or Latinos for Trump, we were all there together. We came together by action and the call of our president," the source, who spoke on background, told Fox News. "Our commander-in-chief had requested our assistance, and any veteran with honor listens to the commander-in-chief. That is the spirit in which we live."

In the days leading up to Wednesday, Trump supporters started "pouring in," the source said.

"Everything was booked; you couldn't get a room. People were camping out in the cold," the organizer said, explaining that buses brought supporters from out-of-state. "It was a call to action. We knew this was going to be a big day and an important point in time."

Jan. 6, the date for certification of the Electoral College, began with small crowds of Trump supporters filtering into designated areas around the Ellipse for permit-approved rallies.

Around 10 a.m., in bone-chilling cold, Trump's sons and his longtime lawyer spoke to the growing crowds, and after the president's speech, in which he said he would never concede, thousands marched toward the Capitol after he suggested that they should.

"We're going to walk down to the Capitol and we're going to cheer on our brave senators and Congressmen and women," Trump said.

Meanwhile, many more protesters accumulated by the White House lawn.

But shortly after 1 p.m., demonstrators started clashing with law enforcement on the steps of the Capitol. Less than 30 minutes later, representatives inside the building were being evacuated amid reports of a bomb outside. And at about 2:10 p.m., rioters managed to blow past police lines and scale the walls around the building.

Within another 40 minutes, the barricades ruptured and thousands headed into the chambers with anger, exhilaration, determination and confusion. After the initial scuffle and breach, word spread quickly through social media forums and scores followed each others' footsteps inside.

From the one insider's point-of-view, the "doors were already open to them, and the barricades had been pulled down already." People simply "wanted to be heard in the chambers," they "wanted their voices heard," and were "sick and tired of what had been going on."

Trump eventually urged backers to protest "peacefully and patriotically," but the chaos continued.

But whether or not detailed plans to overrun the federal building had been set in motion earlier was subject to debate. One Washington security employee connected to the White House told Fox News that it's likely 95% of the attendees were there to protest non-violently. Still, there was likely a sub-section of attendees with more violent intentions.

"Many of the attackers appeared dressed for a riot – suggesting some element of planning," said Jordan Strauss, managing director of business intelligence and investigations at Kroll, a division of New York-based risk consultancy Duff & Phelps. "But I suspect that it was a combination, with some individuals having announced themselves as having come to storm the Capitol or incite some sort of revolution. It would surprise me if some otherwise peaceful protesters were not swept up in the fever of the moment and decided to cross the threshold from peaceful protesters to criminals on the spot."

Nonetheless, the drawing in of MAGA devotees and Trump loyalists for the coveted date had long been in the works, mostly through Facebook pages and online groups – many of which are above-board, registered non-profit 501c3s.

According to a number of those who attended Wednesday's events, the big push began after Trump tweeted on Dec. 19: "Big protest in D.C. on January 6. Be there, be wild!"

Flyers, pinpointing three locations to meet, quickly appeared under the headline "Trump Wants to See You in D.C." Open-source discussions about flight costs and places to stay grew. Some prepared to bring bulletproof clothing and weapons for protection, expressing concern over countering Antifa activists.

"There's often little sophistication to how these events are planned," said Ryan Schonfeld, founder & CEO, RAS Security Group. "The ability to respond in a coordinated manner is possible with the right combination of people and technology making sense of the available data. An exacerbating factor is misinformation, often spread through the use of fake social media and online accounts and profiles."

Momentum, augmented heavily by Trump's rhetoric, continued to gather as the reckoning day to "stop the steal" neared. Several already well-established contingencies supporting the president

continued to encourage backers to show up, and new Facebook groups echoing the rallying cry surfaced. While less-regulated social media sites such as Gab and Parler have become common platforms for protest discussions, several of those involved told Fox News that most communication was not underground or via encryption, but open-source.

"We augment and push out our events through social media messaging, and we have direct coordinators and influencers (with large followings) who help in letting our supporters know event times and locations," the source continued. "The point was to be there for the president. All of these patriot groups wanted to be there. We don't want to see the theft of America or a banana republic."

Last Friday, the first day of 2021, after a surprise early departure from his Florida's Mar-a-Lago residence before ringing in the New Year with his most ardent donors, Trump tweeted that the "BIG Protest Rally" would begin at 11 a.m. on Jan. 6.

The rally was set against a backdrop of failed lawsuits advocated by Lin Wood, Sidney Powell and others to overturn Joe Biden's November victory. And Trump supporters' hopes that he would remain in the White House were revived by the Jan. 2 declaration by 12 Republican senators including Josh Hawley of Missouri and Texas' Ted Cruz to lodge objections to the Electoral College certification.

But how and why the Capitol was so easily breached remains a sore point many security experts are piecing together. Officials have contended that despite weeks of planning between federal and local law enforcement agencies, which also entailed social media monitoring, there was no intelligence to indicate the historic chaos.

The "lack of intel" line sparked further conspiracies by those at the rally.

Some involved in Wednesday's breach still maintain that it was never their intention -- and rather, that anti-Trump agitators initiated it.

Another pro-Trump activist vowed that there were "different anarchists involved," some of whom took advantage of "trying to get patriotic, emotionally charged people to do something stupid" -- like following the leader into the Capitol.

Nonetheless, the whole episode shook the Washington security apparatus to the core.

As Chris Edwards, director of Tax Policy Studies at the libertarian-leaning CATO Institute, said it would be hard for the Capitol Police to complain about underfunding.

"The force has 2,300 officers and a \$516 million budget to defend two square miles," Edwards said.

Spending on the police force increased from \$115 million in 2000 to an estimated \$516 million for 2021, he said.

"That equals an annual average growth rate of 7.4 percent, much faster than the 2.1 percent average annual inflation over the period, Edwards said. "The Capitol Police budget is more than the police budgets of Atlanta and Detroit."

In the end, at least five people -- including a police officer defending the Capitol, and military veteran and Trump adherent Ashli Babbitt, who was shot as she entered through a window -

- died. So far, police have made more than 68 arrests, 41 of them on Capitol turf and only one identified as Washington resident, authorities have said.

And yet, for many Americans who still stand by the unfounded notion of a fraudulent 2020 election, in the aftermath of Wednesday's bloodshed and with Biden's inauguration just 12 days away, they are still firmly committed to the pro-Trump cause.

One on-the-ground, pro-Trump leader who is in the process of gathering video and content to dispel the "false narratives that (they) are the terrorists or insurgents."

"People were being funneled into one direction; how do we know it wasn't a deliberate tactic to target us?" the supporter said. "An unarmed combat veteran was shot. Police could have easily used a non-lethal tactic. "We will always honor our fallen, and we are not going to go away. We want to follow our commander-in-chief, and we are watching and waiting for his next action."