

Capitol siege raises scrutiny of Biden inaugural security plans

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Washington, January 9 (RHC)-- The violent insurrection at the United States Capitol is intensifying scrutiny over security at an inauguration ceremony for President-elect Joe Biden already reshaped by a pandemic and the prospect that his predecessor may not attend.

Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris will take the oath of office from the Capitol's West Front, one of the very locations where a violent mob overpowered police and stormed the building. They also scaled and occupied the scaffolding and bleachers in place for the ceremonies.

Inauguration plans were already scaled back because of the coronavirus pandemic. But the brazen attack raises new questions about preparedness for the event that welcomes the new administration after a bitter election. The congressional leaders responsible for coordinating the inauguration insisted Thursday night that events will move forward.

Security forces have already begun taking extra precautions in the wake of Wednesday's mayhem. Roughly 6,200 members of the National Guard from six states — Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland — will help support the Capitol Police and other law enforcement in Washington for the next 30 days. Inauguration Day road closures may be altered.

Crews also erected on the Capitol grounds tall, black metal fences designed to be impossible to climb. Similar structures have previously been used around the White House and in other cities that faced prolonged demonstrations.

Authorities will have the same military and civilian footprint to handle a crowd of more than a million people for an event expected to draw a fraction of that because of restrictions to combat the coronavirus, according to a person familiar with the security planning.

Those who have worked on previous inaugurations said that while this year's events will look different, the tradition of passing power from one administration to another will continue. "Is it as impactful? You don't have a photo of a million people lined up, so you don't have that sort of powerful image. But I think you will still have the feel there," said Bill Daley, a former Secretary of Commerce and White House chief of staff who helped organize President Barack Obama's first inauguration in 2009. "The aura of change will be there."

Outgoing President Donald Trump hasn't made that easy. He has falsely argued that the election was stolen, a claim that has been rejected by fellow Republicans in critical swing states and his recently departed attorney general. His many legal challenges were roundly dismissed as meritless, including by conservative judges he appointed.

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