

U.S. Capitol Police investigating 35 officers for roles in riot

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Tear gas is released into a crowd of protesters, with one wielding a Confederate flag, during clashes with Capitol Police on January 6, 2021 [File: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters]

Washington, February 21 (RHC)-- Thirty-five U.S. Capitol Police officers are being investigated for their actions during the January 6 riot at the Capitol, and six of those have been suspended with pay, the police department said in a statement.

“Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman has directed that any member of her department whose behaviour is not in keeping with the department’s rules of conduct will face appropriate discipline,” spokesman John

Stolnis said in the statement.

Five people, including a Capitol Police officer, died in the violence that ensued last month when throngs of former President Donald Trump's supporters attacked the Capitol, overpowering security forces.

The rioters went to the seat of the U.S. Congress, temporarily blocking lawmakers from formally certifying President Joe Biden's victory in the November 3, 2020 presidential election, following repeated attempts by Trump to reverse that outcome.

The right-wing protesters went to Capitol Hill shortly after Trump addressed a crowd near the White House, telling them: "We fight. We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country any more."

Investigators have been looking into the response by the Capitol Police officers and whether any of the officers may have aided the rioters, according to congressional aides and some lawmakers. Just days after the attack, it was disclosed that two officers had been suspended, according to Democratic Representative Tim Ryan. One had taken a selfie with a protester, while another wore a Trump-supporting hat and was directing protesters around the building, Ryan told reporters.

The rioters saw numerous current and former police officers and military members involved, according to charging documents filed. The Associated Press found on January 15 at least 21 US Army and law enforcement personnel were present at the riot.

Two Virginia police officers were also charged with violent entry and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds. They were suspended and later fired.

The far right has long made overtures to law enforcement and military members. Alleged leaders of the Oath Keepers, an anti-government paramilitary group that believes a shadowy conspiracy is working to strip US citizens of their rights, have been charged with conspiracy in relation to the riot.

The group claims "tens of thousands of present and former law enforcement officials and military veterans as members," the Southern Poverty Law Center says, though it is difficult to confirm the Oath Keeper's claims.

An August 27th report from the Brennan Center for Justice claims steps taken by law enforcement to reduce bias and racism have done too little to address the far right inside of police departments.

It was unclear whether the two suspended officers Ryan spoke of were among the 35 now being investigated or whether they were trying to quell the crowd by establishing personal contact with rioters. One week after the riot, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives impeached Trump on a charge of inciting an insurrection, his second impeachment.

The Senate failed to convict him when most Republicans voted for an acquittal. The vote saw 57 lawmakers – 50 Democrats and 7 Republicans – voting to convict, but 43 Republicans voted to exonerate. A two-thirds majority is required to convict. The seven Republican votes mark the most ever to convict a president of the same party.

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