

**Statement of The Honorable J. Brett Blanton
Architect of the Capitol**



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**Statement before the Committee on House Administration
United States House of Representatives**

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Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to join my colleagues on the Capitol Police Board (Board) to discuss the January 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol Building breach.

The events of January 6 were difficult to witness for the American people and extremely hard for all of us on campus to experience. As we continue to deal with the shock and disappointment of the actions of those who chose to attack the U.S. Capitol Building, I remain proud of and encouraged by the professionalism displayed by the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) team in the face of this dangerous and stressful event.

On January 6, members of my team were preparing the grounds and the presidential inauguration stage. Our artists and trades teams were excited to finish painting the stands a bright white with a deep blue edging on the main stage of the platform. As crowds began to appear on the West Front at about mid-day, my staff was moved indoors or sent home. Shockingly, over the course of a couple of hours, the hard work of our team was destroyed. The platform was wrecked, there was broken glass and other debris littering the grounds, sound systems and photography equipment were damaged beyond repair or stolen, two historic Olmsted lanterns were ripped from the ground, and the blue paint — we had so painstakingly worked on all morning — was tracked all over the historic stone balustrades and Capitol Building hallways.

As the crowd began crashing through windows and prying open doors, my staff undertook several amazing actions in support of Congress. AOC employees sheltered congressional staff in their work shops to protect them from the crowd, other members of my team raced to the roof to reverse the airflows within the building to help clear the air of chemical irritants, like bear repellents and pepper spray. Additional team members rushed bottles of water and eye wash stations to the U.S. Capitol Police (USCP) officers in need of assistance.

As an agency, we served as a shining light of hope that day and in the days following the insurrection. As soon as security officials cleared the building breach, AOC employees worked tirelessly to cleanup and begin repair work. Carpenters covered open windows and doors with plywood to help secure the building, laborers began sweeping up glass and broken furniture to enable Congress to continue its work, and our groundskeepers cleared a small mountain of debris left behind on the West and East Fronts. Moreover, our decorative painters carefully returned the platform to its glory. We were committed to, and ensured that, the Electoral College certification process could continue on January 6th. Furthermore, we were sharply focused on getting the campus prepared for the presidential inauguration without interruption to signal our nation's determination to support a peaceful transition of power. All of this was done while the agency was still handling pandemic-related responsibilities campus-wide under increased risk of exposure since many of my employees did not have the opportunity or access to be vaccinated.

At this time, our teams also began to carefully assess the damage to the historic building and grounds. The initial assessment is that most of the damage — in areas maintained by the AOC — on the interior and envelope of the building consisted of broken glass, broken doors and graffiti. Statues, murals, historic benches and original shutters also suffered varying degrees of damage. This damage to our precious artwork and statues requires expert cleaning and conservation.

Though much work remains to be done, I am also mindful of the stress that the event has had on my employees. Common reactions to situations such as these include stress, anxiety and depression. The safety and personal health of AOC employees is my highest priority.

I am committed to making sure the agency continues to provide the necessary support services through our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which is free, voluntary and confidential. Employees have access to trained staff counselors through EAP. They can also use TalkNow which offers AOC employees immediate, 24/7 telephonic access to confidential, in-the-moment counseling support delivered by qualified behavioral health professionals, with no appointment necessary. In addition, many of the resources from the House Wellness Center and the House Office of Employee Assistance are available to AOC employees. This service includes a variety of professional support services and resources to address the needs of individual employees and their family members, as well as the concerns of the greater organization and its managers.

Looking ahead, there will be many discussions about the security of the Capitol campus. The AOC has assembled a team of highly specialized professionals to treat and maintain the Capitol's historic fabric and artworks. The Appropriations Committees approved a transfer request of \$30,000,000 that addressed the AOC's initial expenses incurred, including funding for the temporary perimeter fencing requested by the USCP.

Since January 6, the AOC has ensured that all available security-related resources be used to support the required emergency security costs, including temporary perimeter fencing and support for the National Guard. While this transfer addressed some of the immediate needs, expenses that we know are forthcoming are unfunded. That is why I pushed for congressional support of a comprehensive, campus-wide facility assessment.

This assessment is underway and we should be seeing initial recommendations in the coming weeks. Over the next six months, the assessment team will evaluate physical security options, and the engineering requirements necessary to accomplish those options, in order to provide Congress with budget-level details needed to make decisions about potential project and resource needs. The assessment is critical to making informed decisions about the overall safety of the Capitol campus facilities, and ultimately, the safety of Members of Congress and their staffs. I appreciate the support the AOC has received for this effort. I look forward to working with you to identify necessary security upgrades to the facilities and infrastructure on Capitol Hill.

As a member of the Capitol Police Board, I advise my colleagues on the impacts to physical infrastructure of any security considerations being debated. My team plans, designs and constructs physical security infrastructure as approved by the Capitol Police Board and authorized by Congress.

The events of January 6 were stark reminders that institutional biases, priorities and actions taken out-of-sync with actionable data yield poor decisions. If we do not learn from these mistakes, the Capitol campus will continue to remain vulnerable to unknown and unexpected threats. History teaches us that project costs for replacements and repairs beyond in-kind improvements across campus will be considerable and beyond the scope of the current budgetary environment. The

agency's facility security assessment is a pre-requisite to considering any new project work. We owe it to taxpayers to accurately and adequately address the needs of the Capitol campus in coordination with all appropriate entities as proposed in the assessment.

In addition to the assessment, the agency is undergoing a reorganization following a six-month review that identified gaps in service and support. We are restructuring the agency to empower staff to make decisions, take appropriate risks and shine in service to others. In October 2020, I consolidated all AOC security and emergency service functions under a new position called the Chief Security Officer. The Office of the Chief Security Officer is staffed with highly skilled professionals that enables the AOC to incorporate a holistic approach for emergency management that focuses on both natural and man-made incidents.

Many of you have asked about what did I know, as a Capitol Police Board member, about the events of January 6. Leading up to January 6th, I participated in a "Law Enforcement Partners Inauguration Briefing" hosted by Chief Steven Sund, USCP. During the inauguration briefing, then-Chief Sund mentioned the expected rally near the White House but there were no actionable intelligence or credible threats shared at that meeting. In terms of support for USCP, as I have shared previously, then-chief Sund did not reach out to me or my staff with a request for an emergency declaration or interest seeking National Guard support in advance of the breach. Then-Chief Sund confirmed in his February 1, 2021 letter to Speaker Pelosi that he engaged in conversations with other members of the Board (the House and Senate Sergeants at Arms), but no such conversation occurred with me or any AOC employee involved in Board matters. In addition, the AOC has no record of the January 3 intel briefing cited in the media and by Acting Chief Pittman.

Moving forward, how do we ensure nothing like this happens again? First, I do believe the Board is necessary. There needs to be an organization that can make security decisions outside of politics between the two Chambers or the two parties.

But I personally believe that there needs to be more transparency and accountability of the Board. We have a problem in my summation of overclassifying items that do not need to be classified. Congress has given the President the authority to classify and delegate classifications down throughout the executive branch. There is no entity on the legislative branch with that authority. As a result, information is often defaulted to a higher level of classification than needs to be in many cases. The transparency aspect is even more troubling because when everything is classified, one can not enter into a logical discussion with leadership and oversight on Board proposals because of the limited number of individuals who have appropriate clearances.

Second, the Board needs a dedicated staff to be responsive to Members of Congress, USCP and other law enforcement entities. Currently, the Board is supported by staff who work for the AOC and the House and Senate Sergeants at Arms. Often this staff is charged with Board duties in addition to their day-to-day portfolios. Establishing a staff specific to the Board will enable us to develop a strategic plan for the Capitol campus.

Third, from my background in the military, I believe we need to fundamentally change the role of the USCP from a law enforcement entity to a force protection entity. This is similar to what you would see at the Pentagon force protection agency. The difference between the two is law enforcement is reactive and responding to a stimulus. A force protection agency is proactive and has the job of protection of fixed facilities and the occupants of those facilities.

Fourth, there needs to be better coordination and training for emergency exercises on campus. As the events of January 6th demonstrated, real, live emergency events impact all organizations on campus. When exercises are limited to a small number of participants or organizations, we run the risk of confusion by Members, staff and support personnel during a true emergency.

Further, I am pleased that the USCP has begun working on formalized agreements of mutual aid from external law enforcement entities. Once formalized, the agreements would serve as a mechanism that allows USCP to directly seek support from any other law enforcement entity within the National Capital Region if they need in an emergent situation. In addition, I fully support the reconstitution of a Military Police battalion within the D.C. National Guard that provides dedicated support for the Capitol campus. A dedicated unit will enable the USCP to train with the battalion so both sides know exactly what the other side's tactics, techniques and procedures are when an event happens.

Finally, as it relates to the overall safety of the Capitol campus, I would be remiss if I did not mention our commitment toward ensuring that adequate measures are taken to mitigate the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic across the Capitol campus. In the spirit of full-transparency, I have worked with the Committee on House Administration and the House Committee on Appropriations to provide accurate cost updates to continue our COVID-19 response efforts. Other than our initial installment of funding, which is fully obligated, the AOC has been forced to use our critical infrastructure and security project funding to support Congress at a service level required for enhanced cleaning and personal protective equipment. I ask for your support for our requested security and COVID-19 funding.

Since becoming the Architect of the Capitol, I have continually been impressed and inspired by the great work of this agency. We have been in pandemic operations for nearly a year, we supported four lying in state and honor ceremonies and successfully facilitated a presidential inauguration. I am honored to lead a team whose extraordinary efforts on January 6, and the days that followed, helped Americans of all walks of life take solace in seeing order restored to the U.S. Capitol. We would appreciate your support to ensure that we are positioned to address the ongoing and future facility needs, in addition to the health and wellness of our incredible employees.