

Chaos erupts as protesters storm Capitol

Lawmakers evacuated amid Electoral College vote count

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WASHINGTON

Angry supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday in a chaotic protest aimed at thwarting a peaceful transfer of power, forcing lawmakers to be rushed from the building and interrupting challenges to President-elect Joe Biden's Electoral College victory.

In a video message, Trump urged supporters to "go home" but is also keeping up false attacks about the presidential election.

The video was issued more than two hours after protesters began storming the Capitol. Trump had earlier egged them on to march to the Capitol before issuing a call for peace.

Trump opened his video, saying, "I know your pain. I know your hurt. But you have to go home now."

He also went on to call the supporters "very special." He also said, "we can't play into the hands of these people. We have to have peace. So go home. We love you. You're very special."

Wednesday's ordinarily mundane procedure of Congress certifying a new president was always going to be extraordinary, with Republican supporters of Trump vowing to protest results of an election that they have baselessly insisted was reversed by fraud. But even the unusual deliberations, which included the Republican vice president and Senate majority leader defying Trump's demands, were quickly overtaken.

In a raucous, out-of-control scene, protesters fought past police and breached the building, shouting and waving Trump and American flags as they marched through the halls. A woman who was shot inside the Capitol during the protest has died.

The protesters abruptly interrupted the congressional proceedings in an eerie scene that featured official warnings directing people to duck under their seats for cover and put on gas masks after tear gas was used in the Capitol Rotunda.

With the crowds showing no signs of abating, Trump tweeted, "Please support our Capitol Police and Law Enforcement. They are truly on the side of our Country. Stay peaceful!"

Biden has called the violent protests on the Capitol "an assault on the most sacred of American undertakings: the doing of the people's business."

In a tweet Wednesday afternoon, Vice President Mike Pence said, "This attack on our Capitol will not be tolerated and those involved will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

The Pentagon said about 1,100 D.C. National Guard members were being mobilized to help support law enforcement at the Capitol.

Senators were being evacuated. Some House lawmakers tweeted they were sheltering in place in their offices.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, all Oregon Democrats, said they were safe on Wednesday after the Trump supporters stormed the Capitol.

In a statement, Wyden said, "What's happening today in our nation's Capitol is a direct assault on democracy, a riot by insurrectionists that caps off four years of Donald Trump fanning the flames of fanaticism. Every Republican lawmaker who supported his efforts to overturn a legitimate election shares responsibility for the violence at the heart of



Julio Cortez/AP Photo

Supporters of President Donald Trump clash with police outside the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday.



Andrew Harnik/AP Photo

People shelter in the House gallery as protesters try to break into the House Chamber at the Capitol.



J. Scott Applewhite/AP photo

Police with guns drawn watch as protesters try to break into the House Chamber at the Capitol.

'THE VOTERS, THE COURTS AND THE STATES ALL HAVE SPOKEN.'

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell

our democracy.

"All Americans must be able to elect House and Senate members safe in the knowledge that their views will be represented in civil debate here in Congress without mob rule ever squelching that discussion."

Demonstrators fought with Capitol Police and then forced their way into the building, not long after a huge rally near the White House during which Trump egged them on to march to Capitol Hill.

Lawmakers had convened for an extraordinary joint session to confirm the Electoral College results.

Though fellow Republicans were behind the challenge to Biden's 306-232 Electoral College victory, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell sought to lower tensions and argued against it. He warned the country "cannot keep drifting apart into two separate tribes" with "separate facts."

McConnell declared, "The voters, the courts and the states all have spoken."

But other Republicans,

including House GOP leaders among Trump's allies, were acting out the pleas of supporters at his huge Wednesday rally up Pennsylvania Avenue outside the White House to "fight for Trump."

"We have to fix this," said Rep. Steve Scalise, of Louisiana, the GOP whip.

The last-gasp effort is all but certain to fail, defeated by bipartisan majorities in Congress prepared to accept the November results. Biden is to be inaugurated Jan. 20.

Still, Trump vowed he would "never concede" and urged the massive crowd to march to the Capitol where hundreds had already gathered under tight security.

"We will never give up," Trump told his noontime rally.

Pence was closely watched as he stepped onto the dais to preside over the joint session in the House chamber.

Pence has a largely ceremonial role, opening the sealed envelopes from the states after they are carried in mahogany boxes used

for the occasion, and reading the results aloud. But he was under growing pressure from Trump to overturn the will of the voters and tip the results in the president's favor, despite having no legal power to affect the outcome.

"Do it Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!" Trump tweeted Wednesday.

But Pence, in a statement shortly before presiding, defied Trump, saying he could not claim "unilateral authority" to reject the electoral votes that make Biden president.

Despite Trump's repeated claims of voter fraud, election officials and his own former attorney general have said there were no problems on a scale that would change the outcome. All the states have certified their results as fair and accurate, by Republican and Democratic officials alike.

Arizona was the first of several states facing objections from the Republicans as Congress took an alphabetical reading of the election results. Then the chaos erupted.

Associated Press writers Andrew Taylor, Jill Colvin and Kevin Freking in Washington and Bill Barrow in Atlanta contributed to this report.

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