

Cassidy Hutchinson, Trump White House aide, now in spotlight

BY NOMAAN MERCHANT
AND ERIC TUCKER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A year and a half after the deadly U.S. Capitol insurrection, the most memorable recounting of former President Donald Trump’s behavior that day came from a young woman who had graduated from college just a few years earlier.

Cassidy Hutchinson gave two hours of testimony on national television that cast Trump as enraged by efforts to keep his armed supporters from attending his speech before many marched to the Capitol and her boss at the time, chief of staff Mark Meadows, as unwilling to confront Trump and staring unresponsively at his cellphone during key moments.

Having once shed tears of joy after getting a White House internship, Hutchinson, now in her mid-20s, described how she grew disgusted by Trump’s refusal to stop the rioters. And in a single afternoon, she went from being a former junior White

House staffer, to high-profile star witness, with the scrutiny that comes with it.

“We were watching the Capitol building get defaced over a lie,” she said.

The testimony helped fill in several key gaps about Trump’s level of direct involvement that day, and placed Meadows and other key Trump officials at the center of events critical to investigations by the House committee and the Justice Department.

It amplified calls for Meadows to drop his fight against the committee’s subpoena and raised new questions about whether officials around Trump could face criminal charges.

“I knew her testimony would be damning,” tweeted Alyssa Farah Griffin, a former White House communications official who said she was friends with Hutchinson. “I had no idea it’d be THIS damning. I am so grateful for her courage & integrity.”

Hutchinson showed her familiarity with better-known

officials in the White House, referring at times to Meadows, security official Tony Ornato, and national security adviser Robert O’Brien by their first names. Meadows, in turn, called her “Cass,” in her retelling of one story.

Her voice never broke as she recounted quotes from Trump and Meadows in her video depositions and under questioning from the committee’s Republican vice chairman, Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming. Both women embraced after the hearing.

Allies of Trump and Meadows questioned some details of her testimony, which included stories she said she heard second-hand. One story that drew pushback was her allegation that Trump lunged for the steering wheel and assaulted a Secret Service agent when his detail wouldn’t take him to the Capitol on Jan. 6.

Meadows’ attorney, George Terwilliger, told The Associated Press that Hutchinson’s testimony “could not withstand even five minutes of



Jacquelyn Martin/AP

Cassidy Hutchinson, former aide to Trump White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, is sworn in to testify Tuesday as the House Select Committee Investigating the Jan. 6 Attack on the United States Capitol continues to reveal its findings of a year-long investigation.

fundamental cross-examination.”

“Most of it is based on hearsay, lack of first-hand knowledge and even just pure speculation as to what others were thinking, said or did,” he said.

Several high-profile Republicans said Tuesday that Hutchinson was known to be close to Meadows and often accompanied him in meetings. The committee early in her testimony showed photos of her with Trump and other top officials.

Mick Mulvaney, who preceded Meadows as Trump’s

chief of staff, tweeted during the hearing that “things just got a lot more interesting.” He added that “if the President knew the protesters had weapons, and still encouraged them to go to the Capitol, that is a serious problem.”

Hutchinson saw the aftermath of Trump’s rage at Attorney General Bill Barr for telling The Associated Press that there was no evidence of widespread election fraud. Entering a private dining room, she saw a valet cleaning up a mess after Trump smashed a plate and the remains of his lunch

on a wall. “There was ketchup dripping down the wall, and there was a shattered porcelain plate on the floor,” she said Tuesday.

“The valet had articulated that the president was extremely angry at the attorney general’s AP interview and had thrown his lunch against the wall.”

She grabbed a towel to help the valet clean up, she said.

There was no widespread election fraud.

Trump lost more than 60 court cases attempting to prove wrongdoing.

Jan. 6

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The testimony came as the Justice Department expands its investigation into the insurrection and deepened, but did not resolve, questions about whether Trump himself could face criminal charges for his conduct. Though Attorney General Merrick Garland has given no hint about whether his department will bring a criminal case against Trump, some legal experts said Hutchinson’s testimony could give prosecutors additional facts to pursue.

Potentially problematic for Trump could be his reaction on the morning of Jan. 6 to news that guns, knives and other weapons were being confiscated from security screenings as crowds of supporters gathered for a rally in front of the White House. Angry that not everyone could get in to see him, Trump, according to Hutchinson, said words to the effect of, “I don’t care that they have weapons. They are not here to hurt me. Take the f’ing mags away and they can march to the Capi-

tol.” “Mags” is a reference to magnetometers.

“A congressional hearing is not a court of law, but if this isn’t powerful evidence that he wasn’t just aware of the possibility of violence on the 6th but that he actively wanted to encourage it, I’m not sure what is,” said Stephen Vladeck, a University of Texas law professor.

Whatever any outcome related to a criminal proceeding, the disclosures come as Trump is laying the groundwork for another presidential run in 2024.

Aides have been debating the merits of when he should announce his intentions, with some arguing he should do so as soon as this summer to maximize leverage and stave off a crowd of likely challengers and others maintaining he should follow tradition and wait until after November’s midterm elections.

Looking to blunt negative publicity surrounding Tuesday’s testimony, Trump issued a statement on his social media platform denying that he had ever complained about the crowd size or had sought to “make room for



House Select Committee via AP

This exhibit from video released by the House select committee shows a photo of former President Donald Trump talking to his chief of staff Mark Meadows before Trump spoke at the rally on the Ellipse on Jan 6, 2021. The exhibit was displayed Tuesday at a hearing by the House Select Committee Investigating the Jan. 6 Attack on the United States Capitol.

people with guns to watch my speech.”

Trump is well-practiced at marginalizing his critics and accusers, but Hutchinson’s well-calibrated testimony will test that power anew.

Tuesday’s hearing, the sixth by the House committee investigating the insurrection, was accompanied by suspense even before it began. It was hastily announced on Monday, but the committee did not reveal the identity of the witness until Hutchinson entered

the room.

Where prior hearings have involved clusters of witnesses who have recounted pressure campaigns on the Justice Department, or on local election officials, to overturn the election results, Tuesday’s hearing involved a singular narrator with an easy-to-follow tale sprinkled with had-to-be-there color. Some anecdotes she witnessed herself. Others she heard from fellow staffers.

She recalled, for instance,

being in the White House on the afternoon of Dec. 1, 2020, when she heard a sudden noise. Trump, it turned out, had just learned of an interview Attorney General William Barr had given to The Associated Press in which Barr said the Justice Department had not found widespread fraud that could alter the outcome of the election.

Inside the dining room was a shattered porcelain plate on the floor, apparently thrown in dismay by the president. Ketchup streamed down the wall. Hutchinson grabbed a towel to wipe it off.

She later heard about a separate episode on the afternoon of Jan. 6 when Trump tried to grab control of the steering wheel of the presidential vehicle so that it would take him to the Capitol and not to the White House. He was, he said, “the f’ing president.” Trump was directed to take his hand off the wheel.

In that instance and others, according to the testimony, the president’s will did not always prevail and Hutchinson detailed aides’ best efforts to rein in Trump’s worst impulses. The morning of Jan.

6, for instance, White House counsel Pat Cipollone cautioned Hutchinson that if Trump did go to the Capitol to intervene in the certification of the election, “We’re going to get charged with every crime imaginable.”

Whether the Justice Department thinks it has a case against the president, especially one that could further divide an already polarized nation, remains an open question. But there’s also no doubt that the investigation is expanding far beyond the rioters themselves, with law enforcement officials last week serving a wave of subpoenas across the country to state elections officials.

“When you have witnesses who are in these conversations, who are in these rooms, who are actively participating in the high-level discussions of Jan. 6, it seems to me that one of two things has to be true: either they’re lying or President Trump and a lot of people close to him are in serious jeopardy,” Vladeck said.

Associated Press writer Jill Colvin in New York contributed to this report.

Youth

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Administrators hope these programs will help improve student interest in college and help youths get a head start on their college credits. In addition, the college says the programs are intended to help students who fell behind academically during the pandemic.

“I hope that it can create enthusiasm around attending college and show students that college doesn’t have to be expensive,” said Amy Ward, the director of the college’s Redmond campus.

The funds will go toward Youth Camp programs for middle schoolers, including free programs at COCC’s campuses in Madras and Prineville; a weeklong symposium for Latino, Native American and Black high schoolers on the COCC Bend campus will also receive funding; and a weeklong science program and courses that give students career help. The college also plans to use the funds to purchase equipment and pay for instructors to grow the programs.

The 31 Youth Camps on the college’s four campuses will include drone technology, junior police academy, writing and culinary courses. In Madras and Prineville, there will be courses on manga drawing and theater arts, photography,

drone technology and visual arts.

Stephanie Goetsch, the college’s community education coordinator, said 337 students are enrolled in the courses. She said the programs can help students who generally lack the means to afford higher educations in rural communities like Prineville and Madras. The college stated in its grant application that “nearly 22%” of people in Prineville and Madras live in poverty. Goetsch said 155 students will be attending the programs for free in those two communities.

The programs come at a time when some students, particularly in rural areas of Central Oregon, are second-guessing their interests in college after pandemic schooling diminished interest among some youths and increased economic hardship among families.

“Their educational experience over the last few years has been all over the board,” said Goetsch, who added she hopes the free and low cost programs will help improve student interest in college.

Goetsch said students who attend the programs will receive guidance from experienced educators. She added: “It’s not just high-level babysitting.”

■ Reporter: 541-660-9844, bdole@bendbulletin.com

Johnson

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Her statements appeared in a newsletter Tuesday that explored Oregon’s political landscape as a barometer of potential Democratic losses nationwide. The newsletter included an interview with Johnson.

“You can see the deterioration of the beautiful City of Roses, now the city of roaches,” Johnson was quoted as saying, riffing on Portland’s moniker.

Johnson, who plans to run as a candidate not affiliated with any party, is one of many candidates zeroing in on Portland as an example of failed policies or action.

“Betsy made a quip about the city of Portland which resonates with a lot of people,” Jennifer Sitton, Johnson’s communications director, told Pamplin Media Group on Tuesday. “What Betsy has been saying for months is that Oregon cannot succeed if Portland fails and, as detailed in the NYT piece, only 8% of residents think that Portland is on the right track.”

In a campaign speech on her website, Johnson accuses Gov. Kate Brown, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler and Johnson’s Democratic opponent, Tina Kotek, of bridging the urban-rural divide by unifying Oregonians in “mutual frustration with their



Pamplin Media Group file photo

Former state Sen. Betsy Johnson, who is running for governor as an independent candidate, made controversial statements in a newsletter Tuesday.

“You can see the deterioration of the beautiful City of Roses, now the city of roaches.”

— Betsy Johnson, independent candidate for Oregon governor, statement in a newsletter

leaders and their government.”

“Right now, Portland is failing,” Johnson said. “I don’t think any problem demonstrates the need better to change Oregon’s politics than the failure to solve homelessness on our streets.”

She stressed getting unhoused people into shelters utilizing police, addiction treatment services and mental health services. “Demo-

crats are right that we need compassion, services and housing,” Johnson said in a campaign video. “But Republicans are also right that we need more personal responsibility, accountability, and no more tent cities.”

But critics say Johnson’s latest remark about Portland was callous, equating unhoused people with vermin that need to be cleaned up, rather than humans in crisis.

“Unfortunately her comments are very reminiscent and in some cases identical to comments we’ve heard that dehumanize whole sets of people,” Marisa Zapata, director of Portland State University’s Homelessness Research and Action Collaborative. “It goes beyond an oversimplification, but it completely erases their humanity. It’s deeply upsetting to have somebody using that language to describe people who are living their lives the best they can. It’s especially upsetting to have someone who’s been in a position of leadership in our state talk about future constituents this way.”

Zapata noted that the term “cockroaches” has been used historically to demonize marginalized groups in society.

The city of Portland, along with economic and tourism groups, has been actively involved in campaigns to bring shoppers and tourists back to downtown Portland and help businesses crippled by the pandemic and repeated vandalism.

They say Johnson’s comments aren’t helping.

“It’s easy to articulate the challenges Portland is facing,” Mayor Ted Wheeler said. “We need a governor who will partner with us to help find solutions and fight for Portland — not disparage and write us off.”