

Mr. President, Today is the fifth anniversary of the attack on this Capitol.

On this extraordinary building that we love so dear.

I believe this Capitol is the most beautiful building in the country. It is the physical manifestation of Article 1 of our Constitution.

To defile and disgrace this building is to defile and disgrace the Constitution.

It should be the easiest thing for all of us, across the political spectrum, to say that this building is sacred ground.

I'm speaking here in the Senate chamber where rioters broke into.

Regardless of our political affiliation, we should be able to say that happened, that was wrong, that should never happen again.

Mr. President, five years does not seem like a lot of time.

But as anyone with young children knows all too well, time moves quickly.

I remember two days after January 6 I drove back home to New Jersey and drove straight to my kids' day care. They were only 3 and 5 years old.

My older son walked out slowly and came up to me and asked "Are you ok?"

I glanced up towards my wife who shrugged her shoulders as we specifically agreed not mention anything to them yet about what happened.

"What do you mean?" I asked back

"Did something bad happen at work?" He asked back.

He didn't know exactly what happened, but he knew something did. He knew something not right happened.

A 5 year old child can grasp that fundamental fact about January 6th. That we don't use the means of violence against one another, especially to determine the results of our democracy.

If a 5 year old can grasp that, why is it so difficult for so many here in the Capitol to do the same? Why do so many pretend nothing happened or seek to downplay the events of that day?

This purposeful amnesia, 5 years out, is so much more damaging to our democracy than the shattered windows.

This is the storm after the storm.

Here's an example of the extent to which Congressional Republicans are trying to erase history.

In 2022, the year after the January 6th attack, Congress passed a law that mandated a plaque be placed on the western front of the Capitol to allow visitors to this building to remember.

The plaque, itself is pretty simple – an image of the Capitol with a few lines of text:

“On behalf of a grateful Congress, this plaque honors the extraordinary individuals who bravely protected and defended this symbol of democracy

on January 6, 2021. Their heroism will never be forgotten.”

Beneath that text, are the various law enforcement entities that responded are listed.

A simple message of remembrance – for those brave individuals who acted and for the democracy they defended.

Mr. President, we should be able to walk out of this Chamber today and view that plaque.

In fact, it was supposed to be installed by March of 2023.

But instead, nearly three years after it was mandated to be made public to remember...

Five years after the events it was meant to commemorate...

That plaque is missing. It is absent at the direction of Speaker Johnson.

As of last night, it's not just absent, it is being explicitly denied because of Speaker Johnson, who

is still refusing to do the simple thing – the right thing – and displaying it for the American people to see.

That absence and denial is part of a broader effort by Speaker Johnson, President Trump, and so many others to prevent us from remembering – to encourage us to forget.

They've done this by gaslighting us, downplaying the events of that day.

Speaker Johnson directed his conference to blur the faces of rioters in publicly released images so they couldn't be "charged by the Department of Justice."

A member of his House conference referred to January 6th as resembling a "normal tourist visit."

President Trump called that day a "day of love". He called the rioters "patriots" and he pardoned more than 1,500 rioters on his first day in office last year – signing an executive order directing the Department of Justice to drop pending cases against those suspected of taking part in this attack.

But we know better. We know the truth.

I haven't found the words yet to fully tell my boys what happened 5 years ago. I never fully answered my boy's question?

Are you ok?

Did something bad happen at my work?

I've avoided it for 5 years because I didn't want to confront the full implications.

I think I was waiting for some moment when I could say with assurance that things are better now. That I could say a horrible thing happened in the past but we are beyond that now and things aren't going to be bad again.

But that day hasn't come. And now 5 years in, I am faced with the reality that I don't know if that day will come for quite some time. In fact, I can't say for certain that we will get there.

When I look at today compared to 5 years ago, yes our Capitol is secure. Yes, our own security here is more assured. But I can't say that about our country.

I believe we are even more divided now than we were 5 years ago.

I believe our democracy is even more fragile than it was 5 years ago.

The future threats to our democracy may not come in the form of rioters storming our halls. But that doesn't mean the threats aren't here.

So after I'm done here today, I will have a conversation with my boys. I will tell them about the divisions we faced and continue to face. About the cowardice of hiding the truth.

But what I will tell my boys will not just be about the broken windows and the fighting... It will be about the courage of those who kept us safe.

Of the Capitol Police officers. About a man from our state of New Jersey named Brian Sicknick.

About those who are willing to stand up for our Capitol and our democracy.

Mr. President, what I hope to be able to tell my boys is that we can heal this country.

I hope that we can tell them that we are taking steps to mend the wounds of that day and of the days since that have driven us further apart as Americans.

That work can start right here – right now.

I stand ready to heal this country – ready to make it okay.

Thank you and I yield back.

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