

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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January 21, 2021

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Director Wray:

I am writing to request that as part of its comprehensive investigation of the January 6 assault on the Capitol, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) conduct a robust examination of the role that the social media site Parler played in the assault, including as a potential facilitator of planning and incitement related to the violence, as a repository of key evidence posted by users on its site, and as a potential conduit for foreign governments who may be financing civil unrest in the United States.

In the days and weeks leading up to the siege, press reports detailed the rise of violent threats on Parler against state elected officials for their role in certifying the election results, and later, against Congress and its constitutional role in counting electoral votes. According to one report published the day before the attacks, references “to guns and potential violence” had become “routine” on the site. One post reportedly stated: “To all our enemies high and low you want a war? Well your [sic] asking for one.” It added: “To the American people on the ground in DC today and all over this great nation, be prepared for anything. ... Now we are here. Now they get what they want.”¹

In fact, the leader of the white nationalist group Proud Boys pledged on Parler that there would be a thousand “boots on the ground” and that its members would “turn out in record numbers on Jan. 6.”²

¹ *Pro-Trump Forums Erupt with Violent Threats Ahead of Wednesday’s Rally Against the 2020 Election*, Washington Post (Jan. 5, 2021) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/01/05/parler-telegram-violence-dc-protests/).

² *Proud Boys, Seizing Trump’s Call to Washington, Helped Lead Capitol Attack*, Wall Street Journal (Jan. 17, 2021) (online at www.wsj.com/articles/proud-boys-seizing-trumps-call-to-washington-helped-lead-capitol-attack-11610911596).

Numerous Parler users have been arrested and charged with threatening violence against elected officials or for their role in participating directly in the January 6 attacks.³ For example, in a recently unsealed complaint, the Department of Justice alleged that one conspirator in the insurrection posted a message on Parler that read:

Headed to D.C. to give the GOP some back bone—to let them know this is their last chance to Stop The Steal—or they are going to have bigger problems than these coddled Antifa burning down their safe spaces. DC announced it is “banning guns” when we storm the Capitol tomorrow. Very illegal. Whether the police can enforce their gun laws depends on how many armed Patriots show up. Ironically, in the long list of firearms and weapons banned by the DC ordinance, tomahawks are not mentioned, meaning there is no prohibition against carrying a tomahawk as long as it is not used offensively! The tomahawk revolution—real 1776.⁴

On January 15, the Department of Justice charged a Texas man with additional threats made on Parler, including that he and others would return to the Capitol on January 19, and that he would “hunt these cowards down like the Traitors that each of them are.”⁵

It is clear that Parler houses additional evidence critical to investigations of the attack on the Capitol. One commentator has already used geolocation data associated with Parler to track 1,200 videos that were uploaded in Washington, D.C. on January 6.⁶

Questions have also been raised about Parler’s financing and its ties to Russia, which the Intelligence Community has warned is continuing to use social media and other measures to sow discord in the United States and interfere with our democracy.⁷ For example, posters on Parler have reportedly been traced back to Russian disinformation campaigns.⁸ The company was founded by John Matze shortly after he traveled in Russia with his wife, who is Russian and

³ See, e.g., *United States v. William McCall Calhoun, Jr.*, Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant (Jan. 12, 2021) (online at www.justice.gov/opa/page/file/1356036/download).

⁴ *United States v. William McCall Calhoun, Jr.*, Affidavit in Support of Criminal Complaint and Arrest Warrant (Jan. 12, 2021) (online at www.justice.gov/opa/page/file/1356036/download).

⁵ Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia, *Texas Man Arrested and Charged with Making Threats Regarding Events at the U.S. Capitol* (Jan. 15, 2021) (online at www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/texas-man-arrested-and-charged-making-threats-regarding-events-us-capitol).

⁶ *The FBI Investigated Parler User’s Call for Proud Boys to Violently Attack Government Officials—Three Weeks Before the Capitol Hill Siege*, Forbes (Jan. 14, 2021) (online at www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2021/01/14/weeks-before-the-siege-the-fbi-was-investigating-parler-users-call-for-proud-boys-violence-on-capitol-hill/?sh=57185c5f6a0c).

⁷ *Putin Most Likely Directing Election Interference to Aid Trump, C.I.A. Says*, New York Times (Sept. 22, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/09/22/us/politics/cia-russian-election-interference.html).

⁸ *Parler and Gab, Two Conservative Social Media Sites, Keep Alleged Russian Disinformation Up, Despite Report*, Washington Post (Oct. 7, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/10/07/russian-trolls-graphika-parler-gab/).

whose family reportedly has ties to the Russian government.⁹ Concerns about the company's connections to Russia have grown since the company re-emerged on a Russian hosting service, DDos-Guard, after being denied services by Amazon Web Services. DDos-Guard has ties to the Russian government and hosts the websites of other far-right extremist groups, as well as the terrorist group Hamas.¹⁰ According to another recent report, "DDoS-Guard's other clients include the Russian ministry of defence, as well as media organisations in Moscow."¹¹

Given these concerns, we ask that the FBI undertake a robust review of the role played by Parler in the January 6 attacks, including (1) as a potential facilitator of planning and incitement related to the attacks, (2) as a repository of key evidence posted by users on its site, and (3) as potential conduit for foreign governments who may be financing civil unrest in the United States. In addition, as the Committee conducts its own investigation of these matters to inform its oversight and legislative efforts, I request a meeting with appropriate FBI officials on the status and scope of its review, consistent with protecting the integrity of law enforcement efforts on this front.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to this request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman

cc: The Honorable James R. Comer, Ranking Member

⁹ *How Parler CEO John Matze Married 'Russian He Met During Her US Road Trip' Before Founding 'Free-Speech' Platform That Is Now Bankrolled by Conservative Donor Rebekah Mercer and Used by MAGA Fans*, DailyMail.com (Jan. 10, 2021) (online at www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9132371/How-libertarian-Parler-CEO-married-Russian-met-road-trip-founding-platform.html); *Russian Wedding: Who Is John Matze's Wife Alina Mukhutdinova*, The U.S. Sun (Jan. 11, 2021) (online at www.the-sun.com/news/2118059/john-matzes-wife-alina-mukhutdinova-parler-maga/).

¹⁰ *What Is DDos-Guard? Parler Website Back Thanks to Russian Tech Company*, Newsweek (Jan. 19, 2021) (online at www.newsweek.com/ddos-guard-parler-website-back-online-russia-servers-hosting-1562507).

¹¹ *Parler Website Partially Returns with Support from Russian-Owned Technology Firm*, The Guardian (Jan. 18, 2021) (online at www.theguardian.com/media/2021/jan/19/parler-website-partially-returns-with-support-from-russian-owned-technology-firm).