



Insurrection By Fascists Is Not Protest, It's Insurrection

Statement from Maya K. van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper, leader of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network

It was shocking to watch the insurrection unfold at the U.S. Capitol yesterday. Fascists and white supremacists came to our Capitol with weapons, bombs, and a goal of intimidation and harm in an effort to overthrow the democratic election of the next U.S. President. They were not there to champion lives lost, votes stolen or people harmed. Quite the opposite, they were there with messages of hate and seeking to take from the American people their right to cast a valid ballot for the U.S. presidency. While I disagree with the misinformation and lies being spewed in the Senate Chamber about the 2020 election, what was happening there was per the Constitution and those legislators had the right to use the constitutional process to air their grievances. But what happened outside the chamber, in the lead up to the day, and even in the aftermath was illegitimate and in some respects criminal. It has been deeply disturbing to watch as the President, members of Congress, and recognized political leaders spent their days spreading lies about the validity of the election, fomenting hate and signaling, both directly and indirectly, the call for a violent overthrow of the U.S. government. And then to watch as the encouragement to rise up violently was undertaken was not a surprise but still a shock. What happened on January 6 was not a challenge to government action, not protected speech nor assembly nor protest; it was insurrection advanced by fascists.

I have been involved in, even organized, many peaceful protests to question and challenge concerning government decisions and actions in an effort to shift the outcome and long-term public policy. We have all witnessed, even participated in, protests to protect civil rights and ensure that the lives of Black, Brown and Indigenous people are respected as strongly as the lives of others. I know from first-hand experience that there is tremendous effort undertaken to ensure that protests deliver a compelling message of concern, and that there is great effort to ensure the protests remain peaceful. Participants in genuine protests are trained in how to engage in non-violent demonstrations of their concerns. Specially trained participants are assigned to the task of identifying and de-escalating tensions in order to avoid conflicts that inflict harm and undermine the message. Non-violent protest and civil disobedience have an important place in influencing our system of government to ensure the rights and needs of the people are heard and protected. Non-violent protest and civil disobedience are among the reasons we have secured strong civil rights, environmental rights, human rights and political rights protections here in the U.S.

The intentional and out-of-control events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021 was not protest; it was not an effort to influence, protect, or be heard. The events of January 6 were an effort to overthrow legitimate

democracy and government. And it is important that we all recognize the difference and see the events of January 6 for what they were – insurrection led by fascists designed to harm people and their rights.

As I watched the events unfold I, like so many, was struck by the *under*whelming law enforcement response in reaction to the insurrection. Just last year, peaceful protesters focused on delivering a message of concern and a call for equity, justice, change and systemic reform to protect lives and rights walked the streets of D.C. and other cities. They were met with swift and harsh response from police. We all witnessed as police, during a peaceful march of people, unnecessarily and violently pushed an elderly gentleman to the ground, his head hitting the hard pavement, and police walking over him and providing no concern or assistance. We watched as tear gas and rubber bullets and physical abuse were quickly unleashed on people peacefully marching, chanting, and singing to support the message that Black Lives Matter. It is striking in comparison to see how law enforcement all too often uses gentle response to intentional violence when it is led by white supremacists and fascists such as that seen on January 6. Again, it is so striking to me that when the protesters include a diversity of faces and skin color and the message is about protecting civil, environmental, human and political rights, they are met with a callous response and over-reaction; but when the message is carried forward by fascists seeking to inflict oppression and both support and advance violence, too often the reaction is for law enforcement officials to stand aside and let it happen.

Peaceful non-violent protest is just and right and protected in our nation.

A violent insurrection is wrong and not to be tolerated. Insurrection carried forth by fascists is what happened on January 6, 2021 in our nation's capital. It was wrong.