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Pelosi Wants to Ignore the Kean-Hamilton 9/11 Commission Model

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It is universally acknowledged that the 9/11 Commission is the gold standard for after event investigatory panels, an example of what can be accomplished when partisan political considerations are cast aside and the search for truth is, in fact, a search for truth.

As the debate intensifies in Congress over creating a commission to examine the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi appears determined to turn the gold standard into fool's gold.

Her insistence that the proposed 11-member commission be dominated nearly 2 to 1 by Democratic appointees would seriously compromise the panel's credibility before it even began and would deepen the divide between those who hold conflicting views of the Jan. 6 events.

Pelosi's every decision is driven by ego, an obsession with wielding power and a lust for political advantage. Her approach to the proposed study commission is consistent with that pattern.

The public acceptance of the 9/11 commission report and the high degree of confidence in its findings was achieved by its bipartisan composition, including a former Republican governor, Thomas H. Kean of New Jersey, and a former Democratic Congressman, Lee Hamilton of Ohio, serving as co-chairs.

(Full disclosure: I served as Kean's press secretary during his two terms as governor. I had no involvement in the work of the 9/11 commission. Kean did, however, send me a signed copy from the first printing of the commission report.)

Kean and Hamilton wrote to President Biden and Congressional leaders, urging a bipartisan commission to assure the American people would have faith in its findings.

Pelosi wants to ignore the successful Kean/Hamilton model by placing seven Democratic appointees and four Republican ones on the commission as a hedge against any findings that differ from Congressional Democrats' preferred narrative that the riot was planned and executed by pro-Trump groups, egged on by the president to block Congressional acceptance of the Electoral College result.

As if to underscore Pelosi's plan for a desired outcome, Virginia Democratic Congressman Gerry Connolly proposed Republicans be denied commission membership altogether, alleging that their opposition to election certification disqualified them. If accepted, his suggestion would render the commission pointless — merely another time-consuming and expensive exercise — while Republicans will utilize it to de-legitimize the entire effort.

The commission would be armed with a wide-ranging mandate to determine the origins of the storming of the Capitol as well as provide answers for what seemed to be a remarkably ill-prepared law enforcement presence that allowed the building to be breached, property damaged, offices ransacked and members of Congress fleeing the chamber.

What occurred on Jan. 6 is not in question. Millions of stunned Americans watched in real time as a howling, flag and banner-waving mob scaled the Capitol facade, forced its way past overwhelmed security officers and into the building.

The assault followed a series of speeches, including by Trump and his attorney Rudy Giuliani, both of whom, Democrats claim, exhorted the crowd to violence.

While a good many protestors milled about peacefully in the park and streets adjacent to the Capitol and did not enter the building, the focus was on the many others who did. In the weeks since, some 300 individual have been charged with Federal crimes, many identified through video footage.

Not surprisingly, Pelosi's scheme to stack the commission drew a vigorous negative response from Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell who saw it as an attempt to quash dissent and guarantee a pre-determined conclusion.

A handful of Democrats shared McConnell's view, expressing concern that without equal representation, the commission's findings would invite skepticism and fail badly to win crucial public confidence that the truth behind the most serious civil assault on government in modern

history had been laid bare.

McConnell suggested the commission expand its purview and examine the unrest and protests which tore through American cities last summer.

Pelosi rejected it, insisting the focus remain exclusively on the storming of the Capitol and not be distracted by testimony or documentation of the violence, looting and arson which marked many of the protests in response to police misconduct and the deaths of Black men at the hands of law enforcement.

Should the creation of the commission be approved by Congress, Pelosi's demand for a narrower focus will likely carry the day.

Neither the Speaker nor most of the Democrats in Congress are eager to open a full-throated debate over the anti-police protests with which many of them sympathized. Moreover, they will argue a valid point that an insurrection against the seat of government is a far more serious matter than civil protests turned violent.

Should she remain adamant on the partisan tilt of the commission, though, Pelosi will be accused of torpedoing the idea before it gains broader acceptance, allowing the current narrative to stand — it was an insurrection abetted by Trump and carried out by an out of control mob of his supporters.

In her political calculation, she emerges victorious either way: The commission will validate her pre-determined outcome or, if there is no commission, the blame for the riot will be Trump's legacy.

Pelosi's reputation as a major leaguer in the sport of political hardball has been well-earned, even when it fails spectacularly as it did in 2020 when her party absorbed a serious beatdown in the Congressional elections, losing 15 House seats despite her persistent predictions of substantial Democratic gains.

Whether the horrific events of Jan. 6 are scrutinized by an independent commission is unclear at this point. In Pelosi's hands, though, it is certain her political benefit will take priority over the gold standard.

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