

THURSDAY OPINION

DANA MILBANK
WASHINGTON SKETCH

For 199 minutes, Trump’s Pentagon stalled

Three hours and 19 minutes. That’s how long it took from the first, desperate pleas for help from the Capitol Police to the Trump Pentagon on Jan. 6 until the D.C. National Guard finally received permission to help put down the bloody insurrection.

During those 199 minutes, the mob sacked the Capitol. People died. Overwhelmed Capitol and D.C. police were beaten. Lawmakers’ lives were jeopardized. And violent extremists defiled the seat of government, temporarily halting the certification of Joe Biden’s victory.

“At 1:49 p.m., I received a frantic call from then-chief of United States Capitol Police, Steven Sund, where he informed me that the security perimeter of the United States Capitol had been breached by hostile rioters,” Maj. Gen. William J. Walker, commander of the D.C. Guard, testified Wednesday to a joint Senate committee investigating the attack on the Capitol. “Chief Sund, his voice cracking with emotion, indicated that there was a dire emergency at the Capitol, and he requested the immediate assistance of as many available national guardsmen that I could muster.”

Walker immediately alerted senior Army leadership — and then waited. And waited. Approval to mobilize the guard wouldn’t be received until 5:08 p.m.

At best, this was a catastrophic failure of government. At worst, political appointees and Trump loyalists at the Defense Department deliberately prevented the National Guard from defending the Capitol against a seditious mob.

The man ultimately responsible for the delay, Christopher Miller, had been a White House aide before Donald Trump installed him as acting defense secretary in November, as the president began his attempt to overturn his election defeat. Miller did Trump’s political bidding at another point during his 10-week tenure, forcing the National Security Agency to install a Republican political operative as chief counsel.

Also involved in the Pentagon delay was Lt. Gen. Charles Flynn, brother of disgraced former Trump adviser Michael Flynn, convicted (and pardoned) for lying to the FBI. Michael Flynn had suggested Trump declare martial law, and he helped to rile Trump supporters in Washington the day before the Capitol attack. The Pentagon had falsely denied to Post journalists that Charles Flynn was involved in the pivotal call on Jan. 6.

Representing the Pentagon on Wednesday fell to Robert Salesses, who haplessly tried to explain the delay. An hour and six minutes of the holdup was because then-Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy “was asking a lot of questions” about the mission. Another piece of the delay: The 36 minutes between when the Pentagon claims Miller authorized the action and when the D.C. Guard was informed of the decision. “That’s an issue,” Salesses allowed.

Curiously, the Pentagon claims Miller’s authorization came at 4:32 — 15 minutes after Trump told his “very special” insurrectionists to “go home in peace.” Was Miller waiting for Trump’s blessing before defending the Capitol?

The Pentagon’s 199-minute delay looks worse in light of a Jan. 4 memo Miller issued saying that without his “personal authorization” the D.C. Guard couldn’t “be issued weapons, ammunition, bayonets, batons or ballistic protection equipment such as helmets and body armor.”

The Army secretary added more restrictions the next day, saying in a memo that he would “withhold authority” for the D.C. Guard to deploy a “quick reaction force” and that he would “require a concept of operation” before allowing a quick reaction force to react. McCarthy even blocked the D.C. Guard in advance from redeploying to the Capitol guardsmen assigned to help the D.C. police elsewhere in Washington.

Without such restrictions, Walker, the D.C. Guard commander, could have dispatched nearly 200 guardsmen soon after the Capitol Police mayday call. “That number could have made a difference,” Walker testified.

Sen. Rob Portman, an Ohio Republican, was incredulous. “There are three unarmed national guardsmen who are helping with traffic control . . . and they were not permitted to move a block away without getting permission from the secretary of the Army?”

“That’s correct,” Walker replied.

Miller “required the personal approval of the secretary of defense for the National Guard to be issued riot gear?” Portman asked.

“That’s correct,” Walker replied. “Normally for a safety and force-protection matter, a commander would be able to authorize his guardsmen to protect themselves.”

But this was not normal. The Pentagon claims the restrictions were in response to criticism of the heavy-handed deployment of the National Guard in Washington during racial justice protests last summer. Maybe so. But Walker testified that when the police chiefs “passionately pleaded” for the Guard’s help on Jan. 6, senior Army officials on the call said it wouldn’t be “a good optic.” They thought “it could incite the crowd” and advised against it.

During this moment of crisis — an attempted coup in the Capitol — the defense secretary and the Army secretary were “not available,” Walker testified.

The nation deserves to know why.

Twitter: @Milbank



CHELSEA CHARLES FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Offices that miss women

BY SIAN BEILOCK

Before covid-19 shut my office, I didn’t pay much attention to one of my most important workplace benefits. But nearly a year later, it’s a perk I can’t stop daydreaming about. Eight precious hours, five days a week, when I could forget the unfolded laundry, unemptied dishwasher and kid-related clutter from one end of the apartment to the other. In short, the luxury of being able to focus on my work.

With vaccination rates rising, many businesses are making plans to reopen. And in the wake of this mandatory nationwide experiment in working from home, there’s plenty of talk about the new normal of a post-covid workplace. Hybrid or all-remote schedules make powerful recruiting tools and look great on paper — carrying the promise of improved equity by giving employees the flexibility to better juggle work and life.

But as the head of a women’s college and a cognitive scientist, I have some serious reservations.

Ample pre-pandemic evidence from Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development time-use studies showed working women in heterosexual partnerships did the majority of child care and domestic work. Women also carried heavier mental loads, volunteering their brain space to remember doctor’s appointments, child-care sign-ups, birthday RSVPs and all the other logistics that keep a family going. In my field, we call this “cognitive labor,” and the disparity in women’s responsibilities vs. men’s is a known source of marital conflict and stress.

After covid-19 cloistered white-collar parents at home, men increased their domestic contributions — but women continued to do more of the chores and shoulder more of the responsibility for overall manage-

ment of the household.

The expectation that women will serve as primary caregivers is a major reason for their exodus from the workforce. All of which raises the question: If remote work is here to stay, will the proposed flexibility actually result in greater equity, employee satisfaction and retention — let alone provide the mental health benefits women need to do our jobs well?

Smart policies — whether in the public or private sector — are those that consider intended *and* unintended consequences. After all, strong research shows that even policies explicitly designed to support women do not help all women equitably — usually leaving Black women, other women of color and those with low incomes behind.

Workplace flexibility, which is supposed to help all working people with caregiving roles, is no different. If male partners feel less responsibility for domestic labor, they will be less likely to exercise the option for remote work. I see this already, even at the women’s college I run: The majority of workers are women, but a lot of the ones who show up at the office these days are men.

As we should all know by now, representation and the cues we get about it matter. A well-known study from the University of Washington found that when a computer science classroom was decorated with stereotypically man-cave trappings such as sci-fi posters and electronic equipment, college women who entered reported less interest in computer science than those who entered the same classroom when it featured more neutral decor. In short, feeling as though we don’t belong has a direct effect on our relationship to our work.

If female professionals become scarcer at the office, more women will feel as though they don’t belong and opt to work remotely. So women will

be even scarcer. This is a potentially dangerous cycle that threatens the strides in gender equity at the office that have been made in the past several decades. Women will miss out on the connections, networking and mentorship that lead to advancement. Meanwhile, they will experience increased loneliness and the stress that comes from feeling that the division between their work and their home life has eroded.

So what should well-intentioned companies and managers do? If you think flexible work will boost equity, especially for parents, it is critical to consider what other policies and practices must be in place to advance this goal. Providing paid family and parental leave — as opposed to just maternity leave — and encouraging employees to take it is one example. Ensuring managers do not favor in-person employees for mentorships, in evaluations or for other opportunities is another.

Also, consider having rotating days in the office. Not only does it provide flexibility and potentially save money through the sharing of desks and other facilities, it also equalizes the playing field with respect to the in-person face time men and women get.

Pay transparency, support for back-up child or elder care, and employee assistance programs that can help with stress or burnout should all be on the table as part of this current “future of the office” conversation. Because without a comprehensive approach to closing gender-based gaps in the workplace, flexibility alone might widen them. And as just about any working mother would tell you right now: We can’t afford to ignore what Vice President Harris has so rightly identified as a national emergency facing female workers.

The writer is president of Barnard College at Columbia University.

ALYSSA ROSENBERG

The Great Dr. Seuss Hysteria of 2021

Now that beloved children’s book author Dr. Seuss is an “outlaw,” per House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), and conservative pundit Ben Shapiro is stockpiling strategic reserves of “If I Ran the Zoo,” parents across the land face a desperate conundrum. What can they possibly read to their children?

If that paragraph makes no sense, good for you: The Great Seuss Hysteria of 2021 is a faux controversy if there ever were one, worth following only for what it reveals about children’s literature and the limits of adults’ imaginations.

The short, sensible summary is as follows. Dr. Seuss Enterprises, which controls Theodor Geisel’s copyrights, decided not to print more copies of six works that contain racist imagery. This ought to be relatively uncontroversial. The books won’t be pulled from public consumption, as Disney did with “Song of the South,” or edited to comport with different values. No one proposes treating Dr. Seuss like Woody Allen, a figure whose alleged transgressions render his work untouchable. Everyone seems comfortable with the other 90 percent of Dr. Seuss’s books. But because conservatives don’t do much except fight the culture wars these days, they inflated an act of corporate image-burnishing into a catastrophic book-burning, and the rest of the story is predictable.

Amid this thicket of dishonest outrage, however, it’s useful to recognize two things that are actually true. First, some Dr. Seuss books for children contain depictions of people of color that, like his cartoons of Japanese people during World War II, are repulsive. Second, insisting that Dr. Seuss

books are the alpha and omega of children’s literature shows a tiresome lack of imagination.

As the parent of a toddler, I’ve been recently reacquainted with the Seussian canon: “Green Eggs and Ham” and “Happy Birthday to You!” are in heavy rotation in our home — and their limitations are clear.

The wordplay can be fun, but its cleverness is undercut by Geisel’s penchant for invented words, which is a kind of cheat. Anyone can stick a rhyme scheme or invent a clever rhythm if they don’t confine themselves to the English language. Political fables like “The Lorax” and “Yertle the Turtle” are all well and good, if a little dated in their scolding tone. And the Cat in the Hat, perhaps Seuss’s most famous character, is more frenetic than emotionally engaging.

Were I to assemble a canonical list of children’s-book authors, Dr. Seuss would rank below, say, Peter Spier, the Dutch-American illustrator whose gorgeous picture books were a staple of my childhood and now are vital reading again a generation later.

“People,” his compendium of the variety of human society, is a lovely introduction to the world for any young person; it is also proof that even 40 years ago artists could look at difference with excitement, not viciousness. “Bored — Nothing to Do,” about two brothers who occupy themselves by building a propeller plane, and “Oh, Were They Ever Happy!,” which follows three children as they decide to paint the house while their parents are out, are charming tributes to youthful ingenuity and imagination.

I’d also list the husband-and-wife team of Alice and Martin Provensen,

and the writer and illustrator Barbara Cooney. Among the former’s accomplishments are “Our Animal Friends at Maple Hill Farm” and “A Year at Maple Hill Farm,” which depict a world that is more bravely engaged with the realities of life, death and idiosyncrasy than the one Dr. Seuss’s characters occupied. And in books such as “Miss Rumphius” and “Hattie and the Wild Waves,” Cooney offered readers, particularly girls, glimpses of life that are unconventional but graspable.

And at risk of letting a list of past masters dominate this column, let us turn to the present. What a gift it is to have Mo Willems’s help in probing the complex emotions and everyday dilemmas of childhood in, among other books, his Elephant & Piggie series. During a year of isolation, Raúl the Third’s Little Lobo books have transported our family to the markets and lucha libre rings of a Mexican border town. And as much as “Please, Baby, Please” has inspired our child to new heights of misbehavior, it’s a pure delight to have an artist as remarkable as Kadir Nelson making work for the very youngest readers.

Cooney famously said, “Children in this country need a more robust literary diet than they are getting. . . . It does not hurt them to read about good and evil, love and hate, life and death. Nor do I think they should read only about things that they understand. . . . a man’s reach should exceed his grasp. So should a child’s.”

No, Dr. Seuss has not been canceled. But if the only author we think to reach for is Dr. Seuss, our children’s literary worlds will be smaller and poorer for our lack of curiosity.

Twitter: @AlyssaRosenberg

E.J. DIONNE JR.

Things are about to get a lot harder for Joe Biden

President Biden has had a great start. When he can act by himself, or when the majority can rule in Congress, he can get a lot done. But a crisis is lurking. The Democrats’ thin-as-thin-can-be majority in the Senate combined with the filibuster rule and other arcane procedural restrictions means that everything will get a lot harder very quickly.

Let’s start with the good news. Biden’s \$1.9 trillion economic rescue and stimulus package is on its way to enactment. It passed the House and can get through the Senate with 50 Democratic votes, plus Vice President Harris’s tiebreaker, because the Senate’s “reconciliation” rule essentially allows money bills to pass on a simple majority.

Yes, there are some differences among Democrats that are being ironed out — how exactly to structure the \$1,400 checks, for example, and whether to move some money from one program to another. But these are part of a normal give-and-take.

And the president had a good day on Tuesday when he announced a White House-brokered deal in which the big pharmaceutical company Merck will help manufacture Johnson & Johnson’s one-shot vaccine. Biden was thus able to announce that there would be enough vaccines “for every adult in America by the end of May.”

But the limits placed on legislating by what Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) has rightly called the Senate’s “incredibly obtuse and undemocratic rules” have already opened a rift in the party over the minimum wage. And the big showdown will come when the pro-voting rights, pro-democracy political reform bill the House is expected to pass hits the Senate floor.

The House included a minimum-wage increase to \$15 by 2025 in its version of Biden’s economic rescue plan. But the Senate parliamentarian ruled that the wage provision didn’t fit under reconciliation rules. Senate Democrats seem likely to knock it out of the bill rather than overrule the parliamentarian.

I’m for \$15, since it’s hardly radical to phase it in over four years. And there would be nothing wrong with the usual legislative jockeying over whether the “right” number might be \$12 or \$14. But what’s absurd is that a core and very popular Biden promise should be held hostage to rules that even a gifted Talmudic scholar would have trouble explaining.

Still, let’s assume the Democrats manage to push a minimum-wage increase through by tacking it on to a defense bill or some other measure Republicans feel they must vote for. The inescapable confrontation will come over the For the People Act, and, later, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

Right before our eyes, Republicans in states such as Georgia and Arizona are engaging in blatant voter suppression. They’re rolling back mail voting, Sunday voting and other measures that made it easier for everyone to vote in 2020. As former president Donald Trump made clear in his coming-out rant last Sunday, Republicans think they can’t win if too many people vote — i.e., if democracy functions properly. Oh, yes, and Republicans also hope to gerrymander their way back to a House majority.

Among other things, the For the People Act would end partisan gerrymanders. It would also require states to offer at least 15 days of early voting, access to no-excuse and postage-free mail ballots, and drop boxes to make casting a vote easier. In other words: voter expansion, not suppression.

If Democrats who continue to defend the filibuster, notably Sens. Joe Manchin III (W.Va.) and Kyrsten Sinema (Ariz.), don’t accept lifting it on behalf of political reform, they will be asking their party to commit political suicide in the face of the GOP’s discriminatory, anti-voter drive. They will be maiming democracy, too.

It will eventually fall to Biden to have a heart-to-heart with Manchin, Sinema and other senators reluctant to part with the old rules. As a Senate warhorse himself, Biden will have special credibility if he says it’s time for change.

A key point is that the filibuster is *not* even what it used to be. For most of our history, it did not routinely require 60 Senate votes to pass most legislation. The escalating use and abuse of the filibuster can be measured, imperfectly but revealingly, by the number of cloture motions filed over the years to shut down filibusters.

In the entire span from 1917 and 1970 (53 years), there were only 58 cloture motions. From 1971 to 2006 (35 years), there were 928 cloture motions. Since 2007 (less than 14 years), there have been 1,307.

Something is wrong. This is not about “tradition” or “bipartisanship.” This is a choice between obstruction and majority rule — in the Senate, yes, but also in our elections. If Biden wants to build on the success he has enjoyed so far, he needs to defuse the crisis that awaits him.

Twitter: @EJDionne