

CASSIDY HUTCHINSON’S TESTIMONY SHOULD BE THE END OF DONALD TRUMP

Regardless of the legal obstacles to convicting the former President, Hutchinson’s testimony reconfirmed that he must never again be allowed anywhere near power.

 **By John Cassidy**
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Hutchinson described an unbinged President who, on January 6, 2021, was so determined to join his supporters on Capitol Hill that he tried grab the steering wheel of his Presidential S.U.V. Photograph by Brandon Bell / Getty

On Tuesday morning, Hunter Biden started trending on social media—a surefire sign that the right was worried about the upcoming testimony of the former Trump White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson, which was scheduled to begin at 1 P.M. Although the twenty-six-year-old Hutchinson, who worked for Mark Meadows, Trump’s chief of staff, wasn’t yet a public figure, it was known that she had spoken extensively to the January 6th committee—and there had even been stories suggesting she could turn out to be the John Dean of the Trump Administration.

In fact, there were no historical precedents for the testimony that Hutchinson delivered in an astonishing two hours of television after Bennie Thompson, the Democratic co-chair of the committee, swore her in. Answering questions from the co-chair, the Republican Liz Cheney, Hutchinson calmly described an utterly unhinged President who, on January 6, 2021, was so determined to join his supporters—many of them armed and, he knew well, intent on causing trouble—in their march on Capitol Hill that he tried to grab the steering wheel of his Presidential S.U.V., yelling “I’m the fucking President. Take me up to the Capitol now!” When the head of his Secret Service detail grabbed his arm and ordered Trump to return to the White House, he allegedly lunged at the agent’s throat.

Hutchinson’s testimony appeared to strengthen the criminal case against Trump. One of her revelations was that, a few days before January 6th, Pat Cipollone, the White House counsel, had explicitly warned that if Trump did go to Capitol Hill on January 6th he could potentially be implicated in the crimes of obstructing justice and obstructing the electoral count. “This would be legally a terrible idea for us,” Hutchinson recounted Cipollone saying. She also testified that, on January 5th, Trump told Meadows to speak with Michael Flynn and Roger Stone, two Trump loyalists who were part of a “war room” at the Willard hotel. After initially trying to meet Flynn and Stone in person, Hutchinson said, Meadows then spoke with them by phone. (Hutchinson also recalled how, days earlier, Meadows had said to her, “Things might get real, real bad on January 6th.”)

It will be up to Merrick Garland to decide whether this adds up to a winnable case against Trump on charges of obstruction, incitement, or another offense, and the pressure is growing on him to act. “There is no doubt in my mind that [Trump] was involved in criminal activity,” Representative Elaine Luria, one of the Democratic members of the January 6th committee, told CNN after the hearing. Summing up what the evidence at each hearing is making ever more difficult to deny, Luria described the events of that day as “a conspiracy—a failed coup, essentially.”

As ever, the challenge to prosecutors would be proving that the former President had criminal intent in a case where he would insist that he sincerely believed the 2020 election had been stolen. Regardless of the legal obstacles to convicting Trump, however, Hutchinson’s testimony reconfirmed, in perhaps the most graphic way yet, that he must never again be allowed anywhere near power. If Dean, the White House counsel to the Nixon Administration, in his June, 1973, testimony to the Senate Watergate Committee, provided firsthand evidence that Richard Nixon was a scheming, lying coverup artist, Hutchinson provided an inside-the-West Wing confirmation that Trump isn’t fit to lead a support group for reformed rageaholics, let alone lead the country. The idea of the nuclear codes being handed back to him is surely now unthinkable.

When Trump reached the Ellipse on the morning of January 6th, Hutchinson observed that “he was fucking furious” that the relatively small crowd inside the secure area would look bad on television. In a tape of her previous testimony to the committee’s investigators, Hutchinson expanded on Trump’s mind-set. “He was furious about the mags”—magnetic metal detectors. “He was angry we weren’t letting people through the mags with weapons.”

Hutchinson said that Trump demanded the Secret Service take down the checkpoints and let his supporters in with their weapons. She recounted how another White House staffer, Anthony Ornato, one of Meadows’s deputies, explained to Trump that the reason many of his supporters didn’t want to go through the checkpoints was that they wanted to go straight from the speech to the Capitol, and have with them their arms, which included AR-15 rifles and Glock pistols. Trump seemed unconcerned. Hutchinson recounted him saying, “I don’t effing care that they have weapons. They aren’t here to hurt me. Take those effing mags away.”

During his speech, Trump told his supporters he would march with them to the Hill. After he finished and got into an armored black S.U.V., Hutchinson took up what happened as it was recounted to her a bit later in the day by Ornato. The head of Trump’s security detail, Bobby Engel, told him they couldn’t go the Capitol because the Secret Service didn’t have sufficient resources to guarantee his safety. It was then that Trump demanded to be driven to the Hill and reached for the steering wheel.

“Sir, you need to take your hand off of the steering wheel, we’re going back to the West Wing, we’re not going to the Capitol,” Engel informed Trump, according to Hutchinson. She went on: “Mr. Trump then used his free hand to lunge toward Engel, and when Mr. Ornato recounted the story to me, he motioned to his clavicles.”

In a statement on his social-media platform, Trump dismissed Hutchinson’s testimony as “fake,” “sick,” and “fraudulent.” That was true to form. Hutchinson is far more believable. She said Engel was in the room when Ornato told her the story about the altercation in the presidential vehicle and apparently didn’t correct or disagree with any of it. She also recounted Trump exhibiting out-of-control rage on other occasions, including in December, 2020, when he learned that his Attorney General, Bill Barr, had publicly dismissed his claims of election fraud.

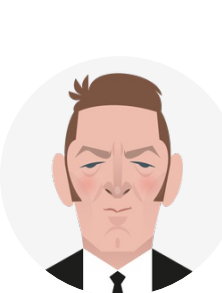
Hutchinson, whose West Wing office was down a short hall from the Oval Office and the President’s dining room, recalled how she heard a loud noise and went to investigate. “I first noticed there was ketchup dripping down the wall, and there was a shattered porcelain plate,” she said. “The valet had articulated that the President was extremely angry at the Attorney General’s AP interview and had thrown his lunch against the wall, which was causing them to have to clean up. So I grabbed a towel and started wiping the ketchup off the wall to help the valet out.”

That was the reaction of a normal person. Trump, as we all know, and as Hutchinson’s historic testimony has vividly reconfirmed, is not nearly normal. If this doesn’t finish him, what will? ♦

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