US lawmakers to certify Trump win, four years after Capitol riot

AFP- Exactly four years after Donald Trump's supporters stormed the US Capitol, seeking to overturn his election loss, lawmakers meet Monday to certify his 2024 win, cementing the Republican's comeback from political ignominy.

Heightening the drama around the January 6 joint session of Congress, a powerful storm was forecast to blanket Washington in snow overnight.

By almost any measure, 78-year-old Trump has navigated a remarkable return to power.

Four years ago, leaders in his own party appeared ready to turn their backs, but now they are rushing to embrace their twice-impeached, criminally convicted leader.

Having defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in November, a vengeful Trump will take office in two weeks, with the entire Republican Party – down to the last lawmaker – under his sway.

The ceremony on Monday may prove discomfiting at best for Harris, who as vice president is mandated under the US Constitution to preside over the election certification.

The process then launches a two-week countdown towards Trump's inauguration January 20, when he will begin a second term in a ceremony on the same Capitol steps that four years ago his supporters fought up, intent on disrupting US democracy.

While Monday's certification is expected to go off smoothly, a sense of unease hangs over the country.

A mass killing on New Years Day in New Orleans by a self-

professed, US-born jihadist, and a separate suicide in a Tesla Cybertruck explosion outside a Trump property in Las Vegas made an alarming start to the year.

Meanwhile, six days of funeral ceremonies for late former president Jimmy Carter got underway this weekend and all US flags on government buildings will be at half-staff for a month – including during Trump's inauguration.

Just in case of unrest, authorities erected a ring of security fencing around the Capitol.

For his part, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson was more worried about the impending snowstorm, telling lawmakers not to leave Washington on the weekend, then find themselves stranded.

"Do not leave town," he told Fox News on Sunday. "Whether we're in a blizzard or not, we are going to be in that chamber making sure this is done."

Uber-loyal Trump Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene proclaimed she would "walk to the Capitol if I have to."

– 'Rearview mirror' –

Congressional certification had largely been considered a constitutional formality until January 6, 2021.

Then-president Trump broke all precedent with a concerted campaign of lies to persuade Americans that the election had been stolen and that he, not Joe Biden, was the true winner. Finally, he tried to pressure his vice president Mike Pence to refuse to certify Biden's victory.

In a raucous speech outside the White House early on that January 6, Trump demanded supporters "fight like hell."

Thousands marched on Capitol Hill and attacked the citadel of American democracy. Assailants battered police with metal bars

and flag poles, smashed windows, sent lawmakers running in fear, and chanted “Hang Mike Pence!”

Four people died that day – two from heart attacks, one from a potential overdose, and a rioter fatally shot by police as she tried to force her way into the House chamber. Four police officers committed suicide subsequently.

Trump followed the unfolding trauma on television from the White House, only intervening hours later. Ashen-faced lawmakers in Congress finally certified Biden’s victory.

But American memories of January 6 appear to be fading, with most voters in the latest election apparently not considering it an issue – and Trump continuing to insist he did nothing wrong.

“An unrelenting effort has been underway to rewrite – even erase – the history of that day,” Biden wrote in The Washington Post on Sunday. “We cannot allow the truth to be lost.”

New Republican Senate Majority Leader John Thune echoed the attitude of nearly all his party, telling CBS News: “You can’t be looking in the rearview mirror.”

Thune dodged the issue of Trump’s promise to pardon insurrectionists, saying the decision will rest with the president.

One of the police officers injured during the unrest, Aquilino Gonell, lashed out at Trump in Sunday’s New York Times.

“I sometimes wonder why I risked my life to defend our elected officials from a mob inspired by Mr Trump,” Gonell wrote, “only to see him return to power stronger than ever.”

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