

Trump Has One Thing Left to Do

di Karl Rove

[Donald Trump](#) won't be the first president to skip his successor's inauguration.

The original boycotter was John Adams. After a vicious campaign, Adams left Washington at 4 a.m. on Inauguration Day, March 4, 1801, on the first stagecoach home to Massachusetts. Eight hours later, blue-coated militiamen snapped to attention and an artillery company fired a round as Thomas Jefferson emerged from his boarding house at New Jersey Avenue and C Street. The U.S. marshal for Maryland then walked Jefferson, members of Congress, foreign diplomats and local residents several hundred yards north to the Capitol for the swearing-in ceremony.

John Quincy Adams made inaugural absences a family tradition. In March 1829, he departed the White House the day before Andrew Jackson's swearing-in. Like the 1800 election, the 1828 campaign was particularly nasty.

There are similarities between Mr. Trump and Andrew Johnson, the last president who refused to participate in marking the peaceful transfer of power. Though both were elected as Republicans, neither Mr. Trump nor Johnson, Abraham Lincoln's running mate in 1864, was a longtime party member. Johnson was a Southern Democrat who opposed secession. Mr. Trump was a celebrity real-estate tycoon who had supported Republicans and Democrats.

Both Mr. Trump and Johnson had been impeached and acquitted. Mr. Trump faced charges of abuse of power regarding Ukraine, while Johnson was accused of violating the Tenure of Office Act, which required congressional approval to remove a cabinet member. Both impeachments were motivated largely by other factors: Democratic anger that Mr. Trump was elected, and Mr. Johnson's opposition to congressional Republicans' move to impose on the defeated South state governments dominated by men loyal to the union and black suffrage.

Both men, like the two Presidents Adams, served only one term. Johnson was ignored at the 1868 GOP convention, beaten at the Democratic one, and succeeded by Ulysses S. Grant. Mr. Trump was defeated at the polls and then in more than 50 courtrooms as his lawyers failed to present credible evidence of widespread fraud.

In skipping his successor's inauguration, Mr. Trump is acting selfishly, unwisely and unpatriotically. The U.S. needs presidents to model good behavior. It isn't even in Mr. Trump's interest; Americans applaud people who are gracious in defeat and dislike sore losers. But there's no changing Mr. Trump's mind.

There is, however, one action the president should take to serve the country and keep his reputation from sinking even lower.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation warns that armed protests are planned for every state capitol from Jan. 16 until at least Jan. 20, and at the U.S. Capitol from Jan. 17 to 20. This is supposedly the work of the Boogaloo movement—gun-toting extremists who advocate a second civil war and support Mr. Trump’s retention, regardless of the election outcome. There are also ordinary Americans spun up by Mr. Trump’s spurious election claims, who want to express their anger. They’ll all be wearing MAGA paraphernalia and waving Trump flags and signs. Some will be carrying weapons. If more violence and disruption occur, the president’s already tattered reputation will be further shredded.

Mr. Trump must do what he hasn’t yet done—forcefully tell his followers not to participate in protests or disrupt Mr. Biden’s inaugural, and urge them to join him, their president, in condemning violence and disorder.

Americans know Mr. Trump didn’t act while a police officer was beaten to death, a rioter was shot and killed, and Congress was shut down. Instead, he sat in the Oval Office watching television until order was restored. He released a video calling rioters “very special” people and saying, “I love you.” It was the next afternoon before he finally denounced violence—and reports say he regrets having done so.

Since then Mr. Trump’s statements have been insufficient. “You always have to avoid violence,” he said on Tuesday, before spending nearly 10 times as many words complaining that [Twitter](#) shut down his account. Pathetic. On Wednesday he sent out a statement: “In light of reports of more demonstrations, I urge that there must be NO violence, NO lawbreaking and NO vandalism of any kind.” But an email is a poor substitute for a personal appeal in a televised Oval Office address.

Many Americans who voted for President Trump were sickened by the violent, seditious attack on our Capitol. America was humiliated in the eyes of the world. The nation is reeling and on edge. And this awful drama hasn’t fully played out.

Mr. Trump can do one good thing as he exits office: go on TV to discourage supporters from becoming accomplices to more violence. Let us hope he does, but I have little confidence he will.