

# Trauma in House gallery bonds Congress members 1 year later

By Jennifer Haberkorn  
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON - A few months after a mob stormed the U.S. Capitol, a sound jolted Rep. Sara Jacobs back to one of the most terrifying moments in her life: the echoing thud of the doors to the cavernous House chamber slamming shut.

The Democrat from San Diego knew it was just a drill, but the moment nevertheless transported her back to the afternoon of Jan. 6, 2021, when she found herself trapped in the chamber's gallery as a pro-Trump mob breached the building.

This time, the rookie lawmaker pulled out her phone and texted for help - from a support group of 28 House members who are wrestling with the same lingering trauma of having been cornered in the gallery that deadly day a year ago. In minutes, members flooded the chat group with responses that sought to soothe Jacobs' anxieties.

"When they started closing all the doors and locking them, the sounds were very similar," said Jacobs.

"It was very triggering," she said, "and I really leaned on the group after that."

The fallout from the training exercise was just one of many moments in the year since the insurrection when the "Gallery Group," as it became known to its participants, has rallied around a struggling member.

Interviews with several of its participants, who discussed their involvement in broad terms to protect one another's privacy, reveal how the diverse group of Democrats formed a tight and intimate bond as they navigated the unsettling experience of having survived a violent insurrection.

They have supported one another through the immediate shock of the day, the impeachment of then-President Trump over his role inciting the mob, the release of haunting videos of the violence, the continuation of the false narrative that Trump won the election and simmering tension between Democrats and the Republicans who continue to perpetuate that myth. With the memory-laden and stress-filled anniversary approaching Thursday, lawmakers say the Gallery Group is proving to be their go-to lifeline.

"It was a really traumatic experience that at the same time was hyper-personal and hyper-national," said Jacobs, one of two freshmen in the group who was so new to her job on Jan. 6 - her fourth day in office - that she says she



**JACOBS:** Rep. Sara Jacobs has found emotional support from the "Gallery Group" of fellow members of Congress who were trapped in the House gallery during the insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021. Photos by Kent Nishimura/Los Angeles Times



**BREACH:** Trump supporters breach the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, before 30 or so House Democrats could be safely evacuated from the House gallery.

was "hiding under a chair, introducing myself to people."

"Having other people who went through it was really, really important for me," she added, "as I was processing what happened and how to think about it and how to maintain resilience around it."

### A bond formed in trauma

When the mob breached the Capitol, the majority of the 435 House members were in their offices in the surrounding buildings, or on the House floor. Capitol Police quickly cleared the House floor and ushered those lawmakers into a safe room. But for the 30 or so lawmakers in the gallery - all Democrats, according to members - there was no such quick rescue.

Rioters had swarmed into the building quickly, before the gallery could be evacuated. The best police could do was to lock the doors and tell lawmakers to hunker down, according to members' accounts.

As they looked over the balcony's railing and watched their colleagues being whisked away to safety, they felt trapped. Some contemplated jumping but reconsidered - it was too steep a drop.

They watched police barricade the chamber's door and hold back the insurgents, who had broken a glass window into the chamber. They heard the mob approaching in the nearby hallways and the gunshot that killed Ashli Babbitt, a rioter who broke

through a blocked hallway and was slain by a Capitol Police officer guarding lawmakers. They prayed with Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester of Delaware and followed Arizona Rep. Ruben Gallego's instructions on how to put on a gas mask.

"We and a couple of other groups of people - we were left behind," said Rep. Dan Kildee of Michigan. "There was no way to go out the back way. There was no way down to the floor. So we were just totally stuck. That experience was really traumatic for us."

In under an hour, according to members' accounts, police cleared the hallway of rioters enough to escort members to a safe room, where they reunited with their Republican and Democratic colleagues. (All of the members in the gallery had been Democrats because they were adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols and Republicans were not, according to Democrats.)

A few days after the attack, during a virtual meeting among House Democrats, Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington discussed the horror of what she and the others in the gallery had faced.

She expressed concern that other members were grappling with it all, too. So, she started a text chain:

"Thanks to all who reached out to me after I spoke today about our experiences as the group in the gallery on the 6th, experiences that are quite different from other members who were on the floor or in their offices since we got left there for at least 45 minutes after everyone else was evacuated. I know many of you are experiencing similar feelings of trauma and stress," Jayapal wrote, including details for a virtual meeting to be held on Zoom a few days later.

"This is just for anyone who wants/needs it, of course," she added, "so if you don't feel like you want to participate, no pressure at all. Love to you all. Be gentle on yourselves."

## US hits record 1M cases of COVID-19 with data delay

(Bloomberg) - The United States added more than 1 million people to its COVID-19 case count Monday as the true scope of a surge in infections over the holidays began to round into view.

The highly mutated variant, combined with delayed reporting by local governments over the holidays, led to a single-day record for new cases for any country in the world. Monday's number is almost double the previous mark of about 590,000 set just four days ago in the U.S., which itself was a doubling from the prior week.

Using a seven-day average, which smooths out the unevenness of data across the country, cases climbed to 485,363 a day Monday, more than doubling in the span of a week. The data is compiled by Johns Hopkins University, which relies on local governments, some of which may take more time than others to update their figures.

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- III. Roll Call
- IV. Adoption Of Agenda
- V. Approval Of Minutes
- VI. Chairperson's Report
- VII. Treasurer's Report
- VIII. Committee Reports
- IX. Nursing Education
- X. Administrator's Report
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