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Before the Select Subcommittee to
Investigate Remaining Questions Surrounding January 6, 2021

January 14, 2026

Good Afternoon, Chairman Loudermilk, Ranking Member Swallwell, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Federal Bureau of Investigation and its handling of the “Capitol Hill Pipe Bomb Investigation.” It is an honor to visit with the committee today.

My name is Chris Piehota, and I am a retired FBI Supervisory Special Agent with nearly 25 years of experience. At the time of my retirement, I served as an Executive Assistant Director, one of FBI’s most senior career executive roles. Prior to this role, I served as an FBI Assistant Director and before that as a Special Agent in Charge of an FBI Field Office. During my FBI career, I was taught about and personally developed familiarity with investigative, operational, administrative, and leadership requirements that can and should be met during properly executed and managed FBI operations.

Capitol Hill Pipe Bomb Investigation

We are here today to discuss the possible circumstances surrounding a case that cuts to the heart of public trust in federal law enforcement, specifically the FBI and specifically the placement of the two viable pipe bombs outside the Democratic and Republican National Committee Headquarters circa January 5, 2021.

Arrest of Brian J. Cole, Jr.

The December 4, 2025, arrest of Brian J. Cole, Jr. was a noteworthy investigative achievement for the FBI and its law enforcement partners. Unfortunately, this arrest alone is not the central issue before this Committee. A primary issue for discussion today is how this case remained unsolved for nearly five years, despite indications that the FBI had decisive information in its possession.

Potential FBI Challenges Contributing to Investigative Stagnation

There are three primary areas of consideration when looking at past and present FBI challenges: Culture, Leadership Environment, and Operational Practices. We must assess the following factors to determine the FBI's general fitness and performance in how it conducted the Capitol Hill Pipe Bomb case.

Culture: How did the FBI demand the fabled fidelity, bravery, and integrity in all of its related operations? In the high-stakes environment present, it was plausible that investigators inadvertently eliminated or disregarded possible leads due to lack of time and resources or flawed prioritization (a fidelity shortfall); became overly conservative in their approaches for fear of mistakes (a bravery shortfall); or pursued too many leads in a surface-level fashion to show urgency and expected progress (an integrity shortfall). In the end, culture determined how the organization behaved and performed when times were good or bad.

Leadership Environment: Leadership remains the lifeblood of any FBI investigation – the kind of fearless, principled leadership that demands excellence and makes no concessions when the safety and security of the American people are at stake. How did FBI leadership set expectations and maintain standards, preferred practices, and behaviors during this case? What drove FBI leadership to set

priorities, allocate resources, and motivate people, in this matter? One thing I learned over the course of my career was, ultimately, we lead or we fail.

Operational Practices: Information volume can crush an investigative team, if not adequately resourced and prioritized. How did the FBI manage investigative workloads that could have resulted in terabytes of specialized data and information and required a small standing army to process investigative findings in a timely, usable manner. Regarding other possible operational impacts, the presence of additional factors such as case ownership churn (re-assignment of case agents), insufficient investigative skill or experience, investigative and analytic “stovepipes,” and overwhelmed administrative systems could have converged to cause unforeseen and unrecognized investigative gaps. If the pipe bomb investigation was not actively led and managed, it is no surprise the investigation eventually stalled.

Conclusion

In closing, this discussion brings us to an important takeaway: the Cole arrest itself appears to revalidate and remind us of the power, effectiveness, and necessity of a skilled, objective, apolitical, well-led FBI. However, the Cole arrest was not borne of a new strategy; it was the result of a salvage operation.

Salvage operations and “cold case” approaches will not protect America and its people. The Cole arrest indicates we still have work to do in rebuilding an FBI that can effectively meet and defeat 21st-century threats and challenges, while concurrently protecting the American people and upholding the Constitution.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.