



CITIZENS FOR
RESPONSIBILITY &
ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

September 17, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Removal of Rep. Madison Cawthorn from His Committee Assignments

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (“CREW”) respectfully requests that the House of Representatives remove Rep. Madison Cawthorn from his committee assignments in light of his recent statements calling for violence and undermining democracy. In statements to a crowd at a political event, Rep. Cawthorn warned of “bloodshed” and the need to “pick up arms against” fellow Americans if, in his view, elections continue to be “rigged” and “stolen.” Rep. Cawthorn also voiced support for the insurrectionists charged with storming the Capitol on January 6 and suggested he is working on plans for similar gatherings.

Rep. Cawthorn’s statements represent the exact opposite of what he was elected to do – serve the cause of democracy. Earlier this year, the House adopted a resolution stripping Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of her committee assignments due to her actions and statements that, among other things, advocated violence against public officials and claimed mass shootings were faked. Rep. Cawthorn’s conduct and language warrants the same response from the House.

Rep. Cawthorn was elected to the House in 2020 and took his seat on January 3, 2021. He is currently a member of the House Committee on Education and Labor and the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs.¹

On August 29, 2021, Rep. Cawthorn spoke at a Macon County Republican Party event in Franklin, North Carolina.² The Macon County Republican Party videotaped the event and

¹ Madison Cawthorn, Committees and Caucus, <https://cawthorn.house.gov/about/committees-and-caucuses>.

² Madison Cawthorn (@CawthornforNC), Twitter (Aug. 29, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3AcHfic>; Felicia Sonmez, Rep. Madison Cawthorn falsely suggests elections are ‘rigged,’ says there will be ‘bloodshed’ if system continues on its path, *Washington Post*, Aug. 31, 2021, <https://wapo.st/3k5JZce>. Peter H. Lewis, In Madison Cawthorn’s Franklin

posted it on its Facebook page.³ Many of Rep. Cawthorn's most disturbing comments involved his assertion that the 2020 election was stolen and his call for violence if future elections are similarly "rigged." Repeating the false claim that led to the January 6 attack on the Capitol, Rep. Cawthorn stated that "anybody who tells you Joe Biden was dutifully elected is lying to you. We all saw the fraud, it was on full display in front of us, we know it was a stolen election."⁴ Turning back to these false assertions of widespread election fraud later in his speech, Rep. Cawthorn explicitly warned of violence in future elections, saying that "if our election systems continue to be rigged and continue to be stolen, then it's going to lead to one place, and it's bloodshed."⁵ Rep. Cawthorn then added: "And, I will tell you, as much as I'm willing to defend our liberty at all costs, there is nothing that I would dread doing more than having to pick up arms against a fellow American. And the way that we can have recourse against that is if we all passionately demand that we have election security in all 50 states."⁶

Moments before making those statements, Rep. Cawthorn held a gun he was asked to sign while making other comments suggesting violence against political opponents.⁷ Discussing "how hypocritical the Democrats are" regarding gun rights, Rep. Cawthorn said that "these people do not have your best interests at heart. I highly recommend that, as much fun as we have target shooting, we all need to be storing up some ammunition."⁸ Rep. Cawthorn also appeared to threaten President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris earlier in his speech, telling the crowd, "I will remove Joe Biden from office, and then, when Kamala Harris inevitably screws up, we will take them down, one at a time."⁹

After Rep. Cawthorn's statements drew national attention and scorn, his spokesman attempted to shift their seemingly clear meaning. According to spokesman Luke Ball, Rep. Cawthorn in fact was "CLEARLY advocating for violence not to occur over election integrity questions," adding that Rep. Cawthorn "fears others would erroneously choose that route and strongly states that election integrity issues should be resolved peacefully and never through violence."¹⁰ Mr. Ball also claimed that Rep. Cawthorn's use of the phrase "take them down" actually meant "using Constitutional mechanisms to remove Kamala Harris from office if she violates her oath."¹¹

During his speech, Rep. Cawthorn also voiced support for the supporters of President Trump charged with crimes for trying to overturn the results of the 2020 election by attacking the Capitol on January 6, and indicated that he was working on future events

appearance, 'bloodshed' just 1 of many provocative comments, *Asheville Citizen Times*, Sept. 4, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3z9C0io>.

³ The video was taken down after Rep. Cawthorn's comments attracted national attention, but a full copy remains available on YouTube and excerpts are available elsewhere online. *Id.*; Madison Cawthorn Macon County Republican Party Appearance 8-29-2021, YouTube, Aug. 31, 2021 ("Cawthorn Video"), <https://bit.ly/3EqfiXo>.

⁴ *Id.* (excerpt at 50:41); see also Lying About 2020, Rep. Cawthorn Warns Of More Bloodshed, *MSNBC*, Sept. 1, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3z8TawS>.

⁵ Cawthorn Video (excerpt at 1:22:25); Sonmez, *Washington Post*, Aug. 31, 2021.

⁶ Cawthorn Video (excerpt at 1:22:32); Sonmez, *Washington Post*, Aug. 31, 2021.

⁷ Cawthorn Video (excerpt from 1:18:08-1:22:11).

⁸ *Id.* (excerpt at 1:21:05)

⁹ *Id.* (excerpt at 50:14); Sonmez, *Washington Post*, Aug. 31, 2021.

¹⁰ Sonmez, *Washington Post*, Aug. 31, 2021.

¹¹ *Id.*

similar to the January 6 rally that led to the insurrection. Rep. Cawthorn first described the individuals charged with crimes related to the January 6 insurrection as “political hostages” and “political prisoners,” and suggested he would like to “try and bust them out.”¹² Then, when a person in the crowd asked him “when are you going to call us to Washington again?”, Rep. Cawthorn responded, “we are actively working on that one . . . we have a few plans in motion that I can’t make public right now.”¹³

This is far from the first time Rep. Cawthorn has made threats and statements suggesting violence, and he unquestionably knows the power and danger of words like his. In late December 2020, Rep. Cawthorn encouraged attendees at a Turning Point USA event to call their members of Congress and “lightly threaten them” if they did not support his views on election fraud.¹⁴ “Say: ‘If you don’t support election integrity, I’m coming after you. Madison Cawthorn’s coming after you. Everybody’s coming after you,’” he told the crowd.¹⁵ And on January 6 itself, he spoke at the “Stop the Steal” rally that led to a mob violently breaching the Capitol, the deaths of several members of law enforcement and protesters, and a delay in the certification of the 2020 presidential election.¹⁶ Perhaps notably, Rep. Cawthorn spoke immediately before Rudy Giuliani, who called for “trial by combat” to fight claimed election fraud.¹⁷

Rep. Cawthorn’s inflammatory statements have been widely condemned. The *Charlotte Observer* said that “his rhetoric is dangerous, not only to his party but to his country,” and called for the House to censure him.¹⁸ Rep. Elizabeth Cheney said Rep. Cawthorn was “using language that seems intended to incite violence” and called for Leader McCarthy to “very clearly condemn it and explain how dangerous it is.”¹⁹ Rep. Adam Kinzinger tweeted: “This is insane. Based on a total lie. This must stop.”²⁰ However, as you noted, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy has so far refused “to take action again a member of his conference who is calling for violence.”²¹

In February of this year, the House faced a similar situation with regard to Rep. Greene. In the years before she was elected to the House, Rep. Greene made a series of disturbing actions and statements, including accusing Speaker Pelosi of treason and suggesting she could be executed for it, liking a social media comment advocating “a bullet

¹² Cawthorn Video (excerpt at 1:14:15); Mabinty Quarshie, *Rep. Madison Cawthorn calls Jan. 6 rioters ‘political prisoners,’ warns of ‘bloodshed’ at GOP event*, *USA Today*, Aug. 31, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3tINZ5I>.

¹³ Cawthorn Video (excerpt at 1:15:05); Sonmez, *Washington Post*, Aug. 31, 2021.

¹⁴ Catie Edmondson and Luke Broadwater, *Before Capitol Riot, Republican Lawmakers Fanned the Flames*, *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 2021, <https://nyti.ms/3kO8Xfd>; Joel Burgess, *Cawthorn: ‘lightly threaten’ members of Congress; tell them ‘everybody is coming after you’*, *Asheville Citizen Times*, Jan. 12, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3tCnz5u>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Rally on Electoral College Vote Certification*, C-SPAN, Jan. 6, 2021 (excerpt at 2:10:11), <https://bit.ly/3nywjbU>; Shelly Tan, Youjin Shin, and Danielle Rindler, *How one of America’s ugliest days unraveled inside and outside of the Capitol*, *Washington Post*, Jan. 9, 2021, <https://wapo.st/39lBsfb>.

¹⁷ Aaron Blake, *‘Let’s have trial by combat’: How Trump and allies egged on the violent scenes Wednesday*, *Washington Post*, Jan. 6, 2021, <https://wapo.st/3lpUvdO>.

¹⁸ Editorial, *Madison Cawthorne has moved from awful to alarming. Time to pay attention*, *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 1, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3nwacTf>.

¹⁹ Zak Hudak, *Liz Cheney says Madison Cawthorn’s rhetoric on election fraud “seems intended to incite violence”*, *CBS News*, Sept. 1, 2021, <https://cbsn.ws/3k9bSjD>.

²⁰ Adam Kinzinger (@AdamKinzinger), Twitter (Aug. 30, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3AcwcWU>.

²¹ *McCarthy Silent As Another of His Members Calls For ‘Bloodshed’*, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Aug. 31, 2021, <https://www.speaker.gov/newsroom/83121-1>.

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to the head” of Speaker Pelosi, making a Facebook comment suggesting the possibility of hanging former President Barack Obama and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, calling Stoneman Douglas High School shooting survivor and activist David Hogg “#littleHitler”, and agreeing with comments calling the shooting a “false flag operation.”²² Based on her public comments, the House introduced and passed H. Res. 72, which removed Rep. Greene from her assignments on the House Committee on Education and Labor and the House Committee on the Budget.²³ Rep. Cawthorn’s statements similarly calling for violence, supporting the perpetrators of an insurrection, and adopting dangerous false claims require the same response.

We are living through a time of unprecedented danger to our democratic system of governance; influential leaders seem willing to abandon a commitment to free and fair elections in favor of ensuring victory for themselves and their allies at all costs. Political leaders have marshalled the rhetoric of fear, fraud, and distrust to inflame a segment of the population to take violent action against our democracy in service of their own political ends. Rep. Cawthorn’s statements demonstrate his willingness to encourage and incite the type of violence that occurred on January 6.

Rep. Cawthorn may believe that his high office affords him the right to threaten our nation’s democratic institutions and that his comments stoking the fires of insurrection are a proper exercise of his power. He is wrong. These statements disgrace his office and undermine the pillars of our system of government. It is your duty to protect both the institution of the House of Representatives and the American people from a member who is willing to employ the power and influence of his office to attack the fabric of our democracy. We therefore request that you limit the scope of Rep. Cawthorn’s potential malign influence by removing him from his committee assignments.

Sincerely,



Noah Bookbinder
Executive Director

²² Em Steck and Andrew Kaczinski, Marjorie Taylor Greene indicated support for executing prominent Democrats in 2018 and 2019 before running for Congress, CNN, Jan. 26, 2021, <https://cnn.it/3nxWL5q>; see also 167 Cong. Rec. H347-57 (Feb. 4, 2021) (debate on H. Res. 72).

²³ H. Res. 72 (adopted Feb. 4, 2021).