

Two thousand former US Justice Department officials call for resignation of William Barr

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More than 2,000 former officials of the US Department of Justice have signed an online petition calling on Attorney General William Barr to resign. The number of signatures doubled in 24 hours after the petition was first made public on Sunday.

The campaign against Barr is the latest round in the ongoing political warfare in Washington, erupting after the failure of the Democratic Party's impeachment drive against President Trump. That ended with a vote in the Senate that fell far short of the two-thirds required to remove him from office.

Trump has since gone on the warpath, firing or removing officials who testified against him in the House impeachment inquiry, as well as seeking to quash the remaining cases that arose from the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller. That 22-month probe found no proof of a conspiracy between Russia and the Trump campaign in the 2016 election.

The move against Barr was launched after he intervened into the ongoing case of Trump crony Roger Stone, overruling the prosecutors who had recommended a lengthy jail term and urging the judge to impose a lighter sentence. All four prosecutors involved in the case resigned in protest, one of them leaving the Justice Department entirely, the other three withdrawing only from the Stone case.

Stone was convicted last November of seven counts of lying to Congress, lying to the FBI in the Mueller probe, and witness-tampering. Federal Judge Amy Berman Jackson is scheduled to sentence him on February 20, but Stone's attorneys filed a motion last week seeking a new trial, claiming bias in the federal jury that heard the first case against him. A hearing on that motion is to take place in Jackson's courtroom today.

Stone testified falsely before Congress and the Mueller probe, boasting about having been an intermediary between Trump and WikiLeaks, although he actually had

no contact with the anti-secrecy organization.

WikiLeaks made public documents that damaged Clinton's 2016 campaign by exposing her closed-door speeches to Wall Street audiences, in which she promised to serve their interests, as well as emails by Democratic National Committee (DNC) operatives in which they discussed how to undermine the campaign of Clinton's main primary rival, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

Two of the four Justice Department prosecutors who brought the case against Stone had been part of the Mueller investigation, and there was a concerted effort to exaggerate the significance of Stone's actions in order to push the fabricated narrative that Russian agents had hacked the DNC and Clinton campaign email servers and supplied the leaked documents to WikiLeaks. This was used in the campaign of vilification and persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is currently in prison in London awaiting the start of hearings next Monday on the US request for his extradition to face espionage charges.

In reality, despite media claims to the contrary, there was no connection between WikiLeaks and the Trump campaign, and there is no evidence to support claims that Russia supplied the leaked material. (WikiLeaks operates a drop box which is designed to allow anonymous deposits of documents).

Stone himself is a despicable right-wing provocateur with a record of slanders and dirty tricks going back to the campaign of Richard Nixon in 1972. The prosecution alleged that he had sent death threats to a potential witness against him, Randy Credico, a comedian and liberal activist whom Stone knew and claimed was an intermediary with WikiLeaks.

Although Credico testified that he never took the threats to himself (and his dog) seriously, given Stone's record as a blowhard and fabricator, they became the pretext for escalating Stone's jail sentence from 15-21 months—the

standard for a first-time perjury conviction—to 7–9 years in prison.

Barr did not intervene in the case because the lengthy jail term was particularly onerous for a 67-year-old man. Federal, state and local prosecutors seek draconian sentences for impoverished defendants from the working class all the time: it is an essential aspect of the repressive functions of the capitalist state.

Stone is a wealthy political operative and a longtime crony of President Trump, who was howling on Twitter about the injustice allegedly being carried out. In intervening on Stone’s behalf, however, Barr crossed the line that has been maintained since the Watergate scandal of 1972–74, which ended with the forced resignation of Stone’s first political boss, President Nixon.

According to this tradition, now nearly half a century old, the president may not interfere with the decisions of rank-and-file prosecutors in the Department of Justice. Even in the Trump administration, there were formal rules limiting contact between the Justice Department and White House on criminal matters: only the president, vice-president and White House counsel could speak to the Department of Justice, and then only to the attorney general and his closest aides, not to prosecutors at work on pending cases.

Trump’s intervention was not a secret effort to subvert the legal system, in the style of Nixon, but a brazen effort trumpeted to his 60-million-plus followers on Twitter. After Barr issued a mild reproof last week, suggesting that such tweets made it difficult for him to do his job, Trump replied, again publicly on Twitter, that he had every right to intervene in any criminal case, although he claimed not to have done so yet.

It is this assertion of sweeping and unconstitutional executive authority that sparked the response among former Department of Justice officials, in a petition organized by a group called Protect Democracy, which previously campaigned to defend Special Counsel Mueller from Trump threats. The group includes officials from both Democratic and Republican administrations going back three decades.

The petition declares that “President Trump and Attorney General Barr have openly and repeatedly flouted” the principle that “political interference in the conduct of a criminal prosecution is anathema to the Department’s core mission and to its sacred obligation to ensure equal justice under the law.”

The petition continues: “[I]t is unheard of for the Department’s top leaders to overrule line prosecutors,

who are following established policies, in order to give preferential treatment to a close associate of the President, as Attorney General Barr did in the Stone case.

“A person should not be given special treatment in a criminal prosecution because they are a close political ally of the President. Governments that use the enormous power of law enforcement to punish their enemies and reward their allies are not constitutional republics; they are autocracies.”

The language of the petition indicates that the former prosecutors and other officials are concerned both that Trump’s actions are a threat to democratic rights, and that his intervention has discredited the federal “justice” system as a whole and weakened it in the eyes of the American people, thus undermining the authority of the capitalist state machine.

Significantly, the petition in effect calls on Department of Justice employees to rebel against Trump and Barr by following the example of the four prosecutors who resigned. It advises that Justice Department employees should “be prepared to report future abuses to the Inspector General, the Office of Professional Responsibility, and Congress; to refuse to carry out directives that are inconsistent with their oaths of office; to withdraw from cases that involve such directives or other misconduct; and, if necessary, to resign and report publicly...to the American people the reasons for their resignation.”

This appeal demonstrates that the same forces that instigated the impeachment inquiry against Trump—through the actions of an anonymous CIA “whistleblower” who filed a complaint against the president with the Intelligence Community Inspector General—are still engaged in political warfare with the White House.



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