

Federal indictment alleges extensive planning for fascist January 6 Capitol coup attempt

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Three US military veterans were involved in advanced planning and recruitment for the storming of the US Capitol that took place on January 6, according to a federal indictment released on Wednesday. The defendants are alleged members of the fascistic Oath Keepers militia, which was involved in the storming of the Capitol in an attempt to overturn the results of the presidential election. The indictment charges that planning for the assault began shortly after the November 3 election, including recruitment and training exercises in multiple states in order to be “fighting fit by inauguration.”

Federal prosecutors allege that US Army veteran Jessica Marie Watkins, 38, Marine veteran Donovan Ray Cowl, 50, both from Woodstock, Ohio, and retired Navy commander Thomas E. Caldwell, 66, from Berryville, Virginia, set up training exercises and base camps in Ohio and North Carolina to prepare for the January 6 coup attempt. All three face multiple charges, including conspiring to obstruct Congress, which could result in a 20-year prison sentence.

Watkins, the commander of the so-called Ohio State Regular Militia, is alleged to have begun recruiting members to join fellow Oath Keepers in an assault on the Capitol on November 9. Watkins is alleged to have set up a “basic training” camp outside Columbus, Ohio, in early January. Prosecutors allege that Watkins also participated in a “leadership only” conference call via an encrypted app, although with whom is left unsaid. The documents also allege that Navy veteran Caldwell had made arrangements for a busload of over 40 conspirators, with unspecified “weaponry,” to arrive in Washington D.C. ahead of the January 6 assault.

The documents also allege that in December, Cowl attended a training camp with an unspecified number of militia members in North Carolina, while at the same time, Caldwell and Watkins organized forces in Northern Virginia.

In an interview with the Loudoun *Times-Mirror*, Virginia Republican state delegate Dave LaRock confirmed that Caldwell was very active in local Republican politics and

had even been chosen as a delegate to Loudoun County’s Republican convention in Berryville last March. LaRock, who admitted to being with the mob at the Capitol on January 6, but claimed to have not entered the Capitol, said he was “shocked” and “amazed” to learn that Caldwell had been arrested.

LaRock told the *Times-Mirror*, “Tom is a wonderful man. He and Sharon have been very supportive of me.” LaRock added that, “Tom has served our country in a long and distinguished career in the US military. I think very highly of Tom and Sharon.”

In earlier charging documents, prosecutors cited a Facebook video that was allegedly posted at 7:47 p.m. on January 6 in which Caldwell boasts, “Us storming the castle. Please share. Sharon is right with me! I am such an instigator! She was ready for it man! Didn’t even mind the tear gas.”

According to an FBI agent’s affidavit submitted in connection with the indictment, after breaking into the Capitol, Caldwell received information from an unnamed person on the whereabouts of members of Congress, via Facebook messages. One of them read: “All members are in the tunnels under capital seal them in,” and “Go through back house chamber doors facing N left down hallway down steps.” This evidence potentially substantiates charges that right-wing Republican members of Congress were directly coordinating with militia leaders storming of the Capitol.

The newly unsealed documents also hint at higher-level coordination between Oath Keepers members and the leader and founder of the group, Stewart Rhodes. While not formally named in the new charging documents, previous documents had referred to [Person One] as “Stewie.” The new documents allege Caldwell wrote to Watkins, “Don’t know what [Person One] is cooking up but I am hearing rumblings of another MAGA march 12 December. I don’t know what will happen but like you I am very worried about the future of our country ... I believe we will have to get violent to stop this.” Caldwell added, “you are my kinda person and we may have to fight next time.”

On December 12, leader of the Proud Boys and recently revealed confidential federal informant Enrique Tarrío took a public tour of the White House, before he and his street gang attended a pro-Trump “Stop the Steal” rally that featured as speakers former national security adviser Michael Flynn, My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell, and right-wing commentator Jack Posobiec. After the speeches and once night fell, clashes and fights between Proud Boys and counterprotesters left four people stabbed and 33 arrested.

In another message allegedly sent on December 30, Caldwell told Watkins, “If [Person One] isn’t making plans, I’ll take charge myself, and get the ball rolling,” after which Caldwell allegedly added, “I don’t know if [Person One] has even got out his call to arms, but its [sic] a little friggin late. This one we do on our own. This one we are doing on our own.”

In an interview with the *Washington Post* last week, Oath Keepers leader Rhodes admitted that Caldwell helped corral “Stop the Steal” protesters but denied that Caldwell is a dues paying member of the Oath Keepers or that he held a leadership position in the fascist militia. Rhodes claimed he wasn’t aware of any action Caldwell was taking on January 6 on behalf of the Oath Keepers, but he did admit that Watkins was a member.

Prosecutors also revealed alleged messages that show the group were incited by Trump and thought they were doing their “patriotic duty” by storming the Capitol. “Trump wants all able-bodied Patriots to come” to the “Stop the Steal” rally, Watkins messaged on December 29. Watkins added that, “If Trump activates the Insurrection Act, I’d hate to miss it.”

The documents once again underscore that what happened on January 6 was not the result of an out-of-control mob that just happened to overrun a suspiciously unprepared, poorly equipped and under-staffed Capitol police force, but the result of coordinated action and planning between fascist right-wing militias, police agencies, the military-intelligence apparatus, wealthy benefactors and substantial sections of the Republican Party, to overthrow democratic forms of rule in the US and install Trump as president-dictator.

The indictment cites a message to Watkins from an unidentified man over the app Zello that stated: “You are executing a citizen’s arrest. Arrest this assembly, we have probable cause for acts of treason, election fraud.” This suggests plans for the kidnapping of members of Congress, potentially holding them hostage to force the overturning of the election.

It is imperative that all communications, including text messages and phone calls between Oath Keepers, police, military and Republican officials, be made public. These necessary actions will not happen if left to President Joe

Biden and the Democratic Party, who are doing everything they can to suppress and downplay the events in order to achieve “unity” with their “Republican colleagues.”

The ongoing danger of fascistic violence was underscored by the recent plea deal agreed with Ty Garbin, one of the five men arrested in October and charged with plotting to kidnap Democratic Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. On Wednesday, Garbin turned state’s witness against eight others accused of taking part in the plan and pleaded guilty to kidnapping conspiracy charges.

The plea deal asserts that Garbin, Daniel Harris, Kaleb Franks, Brandon Caserta and Adam Dean Fox began planning to kidnap and hang Whitmer in early June 2020. By mid-June, Fox, seeking to grow the operation, also coordinated with Barry Croft to attend a meeting in Dublin, Ohio, of “like minded individuals” where they discussed removing “tyrants” from office.

At this point, the group was planning, in a preview of the events of January 6, to storm the Michigan state capitol after setting off a diversionary explosion in another location to divert law enforcement and use tasers and zip ties to “neutralize” their “asset” for “detaining” and “extraction.” Similarly, two pipe bombs, one at the Republican, the other at the Democratic National Committee headquarters, were found during the fascist assault on the Capitol, along with zip ties and tasers.

According to the plea deal, the group practiced shooting a modified AR-15 type semi-automatic assault rifle that had a 37-millimeter projectile launcher and attempted to build bombs during a July 12–13 “FTX” or “field training exercise” held in Cambria, Wisconsin. The group prepared on the property of 70-year-old Michael Jung, a self-described member of the Oath Keepers and III Percenters, who has yet to be charged.

By July 18, Garbin, Fox, Croft, Franks, Harris and “others” attended a meeting of militia leaders from “several” states in Peebles, Ohio. It was at this meeting that the group decided the assault on the Michigan Capitol would be too difficult and to begin planning to kidnap Whitmer at her vacation home.



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