

Federal prosecutors reveal Oath Keeper founder directed members during Jan. 6 fascist assault

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In three separate court documents filed in the last week, founder of the far-right Oath Keepers militia group Stewart Rhodes was identified as having communicated with indicted members of the group in the lead up to and during the assault on the US Capitol on January 6.

While Rhodes has yet to be formally charged, prosecutors in the documents allege that Rhodes urged his followers, who would later break into the Capitol and delay the certification of the Electoral College vote, to be “prepared for violence.”

Prosecutors allege Rhodes instructed the group to bring non-lethal weapons to Washington D.C. and directed them to possible entrances into the Capitol.

Far-right militias such as the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys and III Percenters played the leading role in spearheading the assault on the Capitol on January 6. Of the over 300 people charged so far, nearly 20 have claimed membership in the Proud Boys and at least 12 have ties to the Oath Keepers.

An ongoing tally by NPR identifies 53 arrestees with ties to “extremist or fringe groups or ideas.”

The allegations against Rhodes emerged in court papers filed late Monday night by prosecutors in response to a motion for release filed by defense lawyers for former Navy commander and alleged Oath Keeper leader Thomas Caldwell, 66, of Virginia.

In arguing against releasing Caldwell, prosecutors disclosed text and social media communications made between him, Rhodes and fellow Oath Keepers in the months preceding the attack on the Capitol.

The communications demonstrate that the actions of January 6 were not a spontaneous event, but the result of conspiracy organized by former President Donald Trump aimed at blocking certification of the Electoral College vote, overthrowing the victory of Joe Biden and paving

the way for Trump to assume dictatorial powers.

Prosecutors allege that Rhodes was part of a Signal encrypted text group called “DC OP: Jan 6 21,” along with previously indicted Oath Keeper members Kelly Meggs and Jessica Watkins, and “regional Oath Keeper leaders from multiple states across the country.”

In the chat, members and affiliates of the Oath Keepers discussed coming to Washington D.C. on January 5 and 6 to “provide security to speakers and VIPs at the events.”

“Person One,” identified by prosecutors as Rhodes, warns the group not to “bring in anything that can get you arrested. Leave that outside DC.” Rhodes adds, “We will have several well equipped QRFs [Quick Reaction Forces] outside DC And there are many, many others, from other groups, who will be watching and waiting on the outside in case of worst case scenarios.”

Rhodes offers advice for circumventing D.C. gun law restrictions, telling the group he “Highly recommend[s] a C or D Cell flashlight if you have one. Collapsible batons are a grey area in the law. I bring one. But I’m willing to take that risk because I love em. Good hard gloves, eye protection], helmet. In a pinch you can grab Mechanix gloves and a batter’s helmet from Walmart. Bring something to put on your noggin. Atifa likes brikes.” [sic]

The prosecutors noted that these messages echoed previous calls to action authored by Rhodes. “It is CRITICAL that all patriots who can be in DC get to DC to stand tall in support of President Trump’s fight to defeat the enemies foreign and domestic who are attempting a coup, through the massive vote fraud and related attacks on our Republic. We Oath Keepers are both honor-bound and eager to be there in strength to do our part, including [preparing] to do whatever must be done to honor our oaths,” read the Oath Keepers website on January 4.

There is no doubt that far-right militias, working in concert with the Trump White House and the Republican Party, coordinated their actions on January 6, along with sections of the police, military and intelligence agencies.

The Oath Keepers are closely connected to the fascistic Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (CSPOA) which was founded by former Arizona Sheriff Richard Mack, who is also a founding board member of the Oath Keepers. CSPOA sheriffs that have backed Trump and fascist militias include Joe Arpaio, David Clarke and Dar Leaf.

It is not a coincidence that the same right-wing forces that were mobilized in opposition to the public health measures to stem the spread of the coronavirus are the same forces that instigated the assault on January 6. Trump's tweets to "Liberate Michigan" and "Liberate Virginia" were dress rehearsals for the January 6 coup attempt in D.C.

Similar to Leaf justifying the attempted assassination plot of Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer as simply a "citizens' arrest," the court documents filed on Monday cite an unknown male who participated in recorded Oath Keeper radio communications justifying the storming of the Capitol by claiming, "You are executing citizen's arrest. Arrest this assembly [congress], we have probable cause for acts of treason, election fraud."

In both instances, the Democrats have played the leading role in covering up and downplaying the fascist conspiracies, even when they are the initial target. The Democrats are terrified that exposing the plots would reveal that they are directed by the same social interests behind both the "herd immunity" policy which the Democrats also support.

The numerous ties between the Trump White House and fascist militias was further exposed with the charging of two more Oath Keepers in the last week.

This past Saturday, New Jersey Oath Keeper member Roberto Minuta, 36, was arrested at his home by FBI agents. Minuta faces several charges including obstructing an official proceeding, entering a restricted building and tampering with documents and proceedings.

Prosecutors allege Minuta "aggressively berated and taunted US Capitol police officers," and "attacked the US Capitol and obstructed Congressional proceedings with other attackers."

Minuta was previously identified by the *New York Times* as one of the Oath Keeper bodyguards who accompanied Trump political crony Roger Stone while he was in D.C. on January 5 and 6.

Daily Beast has also confirmed that Minuta was in D.C. providing security for former Trump national security adviser Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn during the December 12 pro-Trump march. Minuta was also in D.C. for the November 14 "Million MAGA March," where he provided security for InfoWars founder and fascist conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, who paid at least \$50,000 to speak at a January 5 Trump rally in D.C.

In a January 2020 interview with the *Virginia Mercury*, Minuta revealed he had come to join 10,000 other pro-Trump gun activists and militia members during the state's Lobby Day demonstration because he had heard about it on Jones's show.

Minuta became a "lifetime Oath Keeper" in May 2020 after defying public health orders by reopening his tattoo shop. In a video congratulating Minuta for violating public safety measures, Rhodes says he is "honored to have him as a member of Oath Keepers." Minuta said he opened his shop as "a display of defiance against a tyrannical dictator."

On Tuesday, a second Oath Keeper who provided security to Stone ahead of the January 6 assault was also arrested. Joshua James, 33, was charged with obstruction of Congress and entering the Capitol without permission. In charging documents, James is identified as one of the Oath Keepers participating in the "stack" military formation that was seen entering the Capitol.

The affidavit also notes that James was in communication with another Oath Keeper, dubbed "person five" during the November 12 and December 14 rallies in D.C., during which "person five" provided "personal security detail for one or more speakers at the events," per the prosecutors.

This language indicates that more information about the role of fascists in organizing the January 6 plot is yet to come.



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