

Contempt of Congress trial begins for coup plotter Stephen Bannon

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Jury selection was completed Monday in the criminal contempt trial of fascist Stephen Bannon, a former political adviser in the Trump White House and co-conspirator in the January 6 coup. As of this writing, Bannon is the only high-level Trump adviser to face any legal repercussions for anything related to the January 6 coup.

Politico reporter Kyle Cheney reported Monday night that 22 prospective jurors had been selected and that the Department of Justice (DoJ) indicated that they expect opening arguments in the trial to begin tomorrow, with the entire trial expected to be completed by the end of this week.

Since being subpoenaed last September by the House Select Committee investigating the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, Bannon has refused to supply documentation or appear for a deposition before the committee.

In a “Hail Mary” attempt to avoid prosecution, Bannon announced this past weekend that he would agree to testify before the select committee ... if it was in public and televised live. In a ruling last Monday, US District Judge Carl Nichols said that Bannon’s decision to testify before the committee now or in the future had no bearing on the contempt case, as the date Bannon was expected to appear before the committee had long passed. He ordered the criminal trial to move forward as scheduled.

For refusing to comply with the committee’s request to appear for a deposition or provide documentation about what he knew concerning Trump’s coup, Bannon was indicted on two counts of criminal contempt by the DoJ on November 12, 2021. Each count carries a maximum \$100,000 fine and up to a year in prison.

After months of delay, the trial itself is expected to be over quickly after Judge Nichols, a 2019 Trump appointee and former law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, rejected two of Bannon’s main lines of defense last week.

Nichols said that Bannon’s lawyers could not argue that Bannon was protected by “executive privilege” because there was no evidence Trump ever invoked it and Bannon was not working for the US government during the period about which the committee sought to question him. Nichols also ruled that Bannon cannot argue that he was just following the advice of his lawyer, who he alleges told him not to cooperate with the

committee.

After the rulings, Bannon’s lawyer, David Schoen, complained to Nichols: “What’s the point of going to trial here if there are no defenses?” Nichols responded, “Agreed.” While it is likely Bannon will be found guilty, there is no question he will appeal the verdict.

While Bannon had no formal White House role since 2017, he currently hosts the far-right *War Room* podcast, which streams twice a day, five days a week, online. On the program Bannon regularly hosts reactionaries of all stripes, including anti-vaccine advocates, Christian zealots, militia members and fascistic Republican politicians such as Trump coup lawyer Rudy Giuliani and aspiring Missouri senator and disgraced former governor, Eric Greitens.

Bannon was an officer in the Navy and an investment banker at Goldman Sachs before joining the ultra-right media website Breitbart. He served as the chief executive officer of Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign and following Trump’s victory he was appointed to the position of Trump’s chief strategist in the White House, until he was fired by Trump in August 2017. Bannon remained in communication with Trump after his dismissal but did not have any formal position in the executive branch thereafter.

In addition to Bannon, the House of Representatives, in near-party-line votes, has recommended criminal contempt charges for former White House trade adviser Peter Navarro, Trump White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and former Trump communications director Daniel Scavino Jr., all of whom have refused, to varying degrees, to comply with subpoenas issued by the select committee.

Navarro was indicted by the DoJ this past June, however the DoJ announced the same day of the Navarro indictment that they would not be pursuing charges against Meadows or Scavino Jr., a testament to the complete inability of the Democratic Party and the DoJ to hold Trump and his Republican co-conspirators accountable for attempting to overthrow the government more than 18 months after the fact.

In their subpoena, the select committee cited comments Bannon made publicly that demonstrated his foreknowledge of the attack on the Capitol. These include a January 5, 2021, declaration on his show in which Bannon told his far-right

audience to “strap in” and that “tomorrow it’s game day. All hell is going to break loose tomorrow ... So many people said, ‘Man, if I was in a revolution, I would be in Washington.’ Well, this is your time in history. It’s all converging and now we’re on the point of attack tomorrow.”

Speaking to his right-wing audience, Bannon said that the country was facing a “constitutional crisis” and “that crisis is about to go up about five orders of magnitude tomorrow.” The select committee has revealed that Bannon made these comments after talking with Trump on the phone earlier that morning.

In seeking to question Bannon, the committee also cited his participation in the Willard Intercontinental Hotel “war room.” The hotel is located two blocks from the White House and served as an extension of Trump’s coup plotting, a command center where the “Don’s” lieutenants carried out orders from the would-be dictator. The vice chair of the select committee, neoconservative war-hawk Liz Cheney, has stated that Bannon “was in the war room at the Willard on January 6.”

Trump allies spotted at the Willard at least once leading up to or on January 6 include: Trump coup lawyers Rudy Giuliani, John Eastman, Jenna Ellis and Boris Epshteyn; Roger Stone and his Oath Keeper bodyguards; retired General Michael Flynn; campaign spokesman Jason Miller; US Senator Tommy Tuberville; and Trump’s sons Eric and Donald Jr.

Working with Trump and these allies, and broadcasting through his *War Room* podcast, Bannon promoted the “Stop the Steal” movement. This galvanized far-right support for Trump’s coup and was spearheaded by Republican Reps. Paul Gosar and Andy Biggs, both Republicans from Arizona with known ties to the Oath Keeper militia group, and Rep. Mo Brooks (Republican-Alabama.)

All three representatives were named as leaders of the “Stop the Steal” rallies in a December 28, 2020, livestream by Republican operative and “Stop the Steal” organizer Ali Alexander, who also participated at the Willard Hotel war room.

“We four schemed up of putting maximum pressure on Congress while they were voting, so that who we couldn’t lobby we could change the hearts and the minds of the Republicans who were in that body hearing our loud roar outside,” Alexander boasted on the public stream.

Further proving that the January 6 attack was not a spontaneous event, but the culmination of a definite political strategy worked out months in advance by the Trump White House, the Republican Party and with elements of the police-military-intelligence apparatus, *Mother Jones* magazine released audio last week from an October 31, 2020, meeting Bannon held in his Washington D.C. townhouse with far-right benefactors/operatives, where he laid out Trump’s plan to defy the election results and declare himself victor regardless of the vote.

Mother Jones wrote that Bannon hosted a “half dozen

supporters of Guo Wengui, an exiled Chinese mogul for whom Bannon has worked. Bannon helped Guo launch a series of pro-Trump Chinese-language news websites that have promoted an array of far-right misinformation, including a video streaming site called GTV. The meeting was intended to help GTV plan its election night coverage.”

Guo Wengui (also known as Miles Guo) has been a business partner of Bannon’s for years, helping him propagate the fascistic conspiracy theory that SARS-CoV-2 is a man-made bioweapon deliberately released by the Chinese Communist Party.

During the meeting Bannon explained that Trump was going to “declare victory. But that doesn’t mean he’s a winner. He’s just gonna say he’s a winner.”

Explaining that more Democratic voters cast their ballots via mail, as opposed to Republicans, Bannon said that by Trump declaring victory early, “by 10 or 11 o’clock at night,” even if he was losing it did not matter, because Trump would claim that any mail-in ballots counted later on in the evening were fraudulent.

“[A]t 10 or 11 o’clock Trump’s gonna walk in the Oval, tweet out, ‘I’m the winner. Game over. Suck on that,’” Bannon said. He continued, “So when you wake up Wednesday morning, it’s going to be a firestorm ... You’re going to have antifa, crazy. The media, crazy. The courts are crazy. And Trump’s gonna be sitting there mocking, tweeting shit out: ‘You lose. I’m the winner. I’m the king.’”

Bannon said that he anticipated violence after Trump unilaterally declared victory but that it was “a revolution.”

“Here’s the thing,” Bannon explained. “After then, Trump never has to go to a voter again. He’s gonna fire [Christopher] Wray, the FBI director ... He’s gonna say ‘Fuck you. How about that?’ Because ... he’s done his last election. Oh, he’s going to be off the chain—he’s gonna be crazy.”

That Bannon, Trump and the rest of his accomplices remain free and uncharged, more than 18 months after the coup, underscores that the defense of democratic rights cannot be left to the Democratic Party, a party of the Wall Street and the CIA. The only social force capable of defending the democratic rights of the entire population is the international working class, united on a socialist program and perspective opposed to the source of dictatorship, the capitalist system.



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