

Arrests, convictions and jail terms mount for January 6 attackers—but not for organizers and coup plotters

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Six more members or followers of the fascist Oath Keepers militia group were convicted Monday in the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, with a federal jury returning guilty verdicts on 27 separate charges, acquitting on only five charges and undecided on two more.

Most of the defendants were convicted of multiple charges, with four convicted of the most serious offense, conspiring to obstruct an official proceeding—in this case, the certification by Congress of Trump’s defeat in the 2020 presidential election.

Five were accused of participating in a group assault, known as a “stack,” of Oath Keepers who mounted the east-facing steps of the Capitol and helped force open the doors, giving the mob as a whole access to the building. They were William Isaacs, 23, of Kissimmee, Florida; Laura Steele, 53, of Thomasville, North Carolina; Connie Meggs, 60, of Dunnellon, Florida, and a married couple from Cincinnati, Ohio, Bennie Parker, 72, and Sandra Parker, 63.

The other defendant, Michael Greene, 39, of Indianapolis, was identified as the coordinator of an Oath Keeper security force in charge of protecting Republican VIPs on January 6. He was convicted of trespassing on restricted grounds and acquitted of three other charges, while the jury failed to reach a verdict on the charge of conspiring to obstruct an official proceeding.

Meggs is married to Kelly Meggs, a top Oath Keepers leader convicted of seditious conspiracy in a separate trial along with the group’s founding leader, Stewart Rhodes. Steele’s brother was convicted in that trial as well.

Sentences were handed down against other January 6 attackers who had previously been convicted or pleaded guilty to various charges related to the coup.

Anthony Puma, 50, of Brownstown Township, Michigan, a Downriver suburb of Detroit, admitted last year to breaking into the Capitol through a broken window, while live-streaming the attack on the building and posting it on Facebook. He was sentenced Tuesday to nine months in prison, a \$500 fine and \$2,000 in restitution for damage caused to the building.

Prosecutors called for a sentence of 15-21 months, citing his cooperation with the FBI investigation and guilty plea, while Puma’s attorney urged home confinement rather than jail time. In a letter to the judge, Puma blamed President Trump for his actions, saying he had been “tricked” by the former president.

Identified in court records as a technical worker who had filed for bankruptcy three times, Puma was an enthusiastic participant in the January 6 actions. On December 31, 2020, he posted on Facebook about his plans to participate in the attack, which he hoped would result in Trump getting “his second term ... Then you never know we might have to start killing some commie bastards. #stopthesteal.”

The night of January 5, he posted the question on Facebook, “What time do we storm the House of Representatives?” Later he posted an answer, “Hopefully we are storming the House of Representatives tomorrow at 1:00 pm.”

This was just one of hundreds, if not thousands, of advance warnings of the attack, down to the minute it would begin, which were supposedly “missed” by the police and intelligence agencies. They actually ignored them because they were in sympathy with Trump’s efforts to establish a presidential dictatorship.

A Missouri man, Joshua Dressel of Jefferson County, in the southern suburbs of St. Louis, was sentenced to only 14 days in prison and fined \$500 with \$500 in restitution. He could have been sentenced to six months in prison and a \$5,000 fine, on the charge of parading, demonstrating or picketing in the Capitol building. Prosecutors asked for a sentence of only 45 days and the judge reduced that even further. According to court records, while Dressel was in the first wave of Trump supporters to enter the building, he left after 20 minutes and remained outside on the grounds, while discouraging other protesters from engaging in further combat with the police. He told the court that he ran a small company whose clients and contractors “have been subject to all the mess that has occurred.”

There was at least one new arrest in the case, Elliott Resnick, 39, the former chief editor of the *Jewish Press*, the largest weekly Orthodox Jewish newspaper in New York. While Resnick and his publisher had long claimed that he was in the Capitol as part of press coverage of the crowd—he wrote a sympathetic article about the attack—video evidence reportedly shows him grabbing a police sergeant who was attempting to block the rioters using pepper spray. The FBI arrested Resnick last week in New York on charges including civil disorder and assault of or interference with law enforcement.

Last week the US attorney for Washington DC, Matthew Graves, informed the chief judge of the Federal District Court for the

capital that the Justice Department believed that 700 to 1,200 more defendants could face charges for the events of January 6. This could double the number of guilty pleas or convictions, which is currently approaching 1,000.

“We expect the pace of bringing new cases will increase, in an orderly fashion, over the course of the next few months,” he wrote. According to Bloomberg News, “The prosecutor also said he did not know the exact proportion of misdemeanor and felony cases to come but thought there would be a larger proportion of felonies...”

Justice Department figures show that about 1,000 people have been arrested in connection with January 6, of whom 518 pleaded guilty, 133 to felonies and 385 to misdemeanors, while 53 have been found guilty at trial. Only 55 have been charged with conspiracy, and 106 with “using a deadly or dangerous weapon or causing serious bodily injury to an officer,” the two most serious charges, carrying the longest jail terms.

Of these thousands of cases, however, none involves Trump and his inner circle, including fascist plotters such as Steve Bannon and Roger Stone—who had close ties to the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers—as well as top officials at the Pentagon and intelligence agencies, who covered up the preparations for the coup or blocked the dispatch of police and military forces to defend the Capitol.

The case against Trump has been delegated to special prosecutor Jack Smith, who is also overseeing the investigation into Trump’s handling of classified documents taken to his Mar-a-Lago estate. There has been little media discussion of charges to be brought against the entire group of cronies who constituted the intermediate layer in the coup planning, and no discussion at all of charges involving top government officials. These were also given kid-glove treatment by the House Select Committee into the January 6 insurrection, which has now disbanded.

While ignoring the free pass to the top coup plotters, some press accounts have taken note of the tendency among the judges of the Federal District Court to hand down more lenient sentences on January 6 defendants than sought by prosecutors, whose sentencing recommendations have themselves been much lighter than those which would usually be sought against defendants convicted of assaulting police or breaking into federal buildings.

According to a *Washington Post* analysis, one federal judge, Trevor N. McFadden, has sentenced 30 January 6 defendants, and gone below the prosecutor’s request 28 times. Even when he sentenced Geoffrey Sills, 31, on Tuesday, March 21, for violent attacks on Capitol Hill police in which he took photos of the assaults and posted them online, the judge gave him a penalty of 52 months, compared to double that called for by the prosecutor.

According to the *Post* account, “Sills wore a full gas mask, goggles and gloves into the Capitol that day, entered the lower West Terrace tunnel and flashed a strobe light in the eyes of officers. He swiped a baton from one officer and then smashed him and other officers with it as the battle raged inside the tunnel. One of the officers retired as a result of his injuries.”

Judge McFadden declared, “Of all the January 6th defendants I’ve sentenced to date, your conduct is the most troubling, the most outrageous.” But even this was not enough for him to accept the sentencing range of 97 to 121 months recommended by the prosecutors. He set his own range of 57 to 71 months, then

lowered it still further because Sills supposedly displayed remorse.

An even more reactionary demonstration of sympathy for those participating in the coup came last Friday, when US District Judge John Bates sentenced a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, Larry Brock of Grapevine, Texas, to only two years in prison for his role in the attack. Prosecutors had sought a five-year term. Bates found Brock guilty last November, in a bench trial, on one felony count of obstruction of an official proceeding and four misdemeanor counts.

Brock was seen on January 6 in a combat helmet and tactical vest, carrying zip-tie handcuffs on the floor of the Senate. He had outlined a “Plan of Action if Congress fails to act on 6 January” in a message sent to another veteran two weeks earlier. Among the “main tasks” he proposed to carry out were “Seizing all Democratic politicians and Biden key staff and select Republicans, including Senators John Thune and Mitch McConnell,” and interrogating them using “measures we used on Al Qaeda.”

He added that he would “eliminate” national media figures and impose “Media silence except for White House communications.” Afterwards, he expected Trump to issue a full pardon “for all crimes up to and including murder” for those who put down “the Democratic Insurrection.”

“I think it’s especially reprehensible, and quite frankly unbelievable, coming from a former senior military officer,” Bates, himself a former military officer, said, referring to the “rules of engagement” Brock had laid out before January 6. “It’s detailed, it’s persistent, it’s consistent, and it’s both astounding and atrocious. And that’s coupled with the fact that he purchased and wore a tactical vest and helmet.” He added that Brock seemed completely unrepentant.

Despite all these admitted aggravating factors, he slashed the prosecution’s sentence recommendation by more than half.



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