

January 6 conspiracy trial: Prosecutor alleges Proud Boys saw themselves “as Donald Trump’s army”

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After nearly four months of testimony, closing arguments began Monday in the seditious conspiracy trial of leaders of the Proud Boys fascist militia, for their role in storming the Capitol on January 6, 2021 at the behest of President Donald Trump.

The Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and other far-right groups attacked the Capitol and blocked the certification of Trump’s defeat in the 2020 presidential election for several hours, until they were dispersed by police.

They acted as part of a multi-faceted conspiracy to keep the former president in power. While Trump and his high-level accomplices in the White House, Congress, Pentagon and Supreme Court remain free, over 600 low-level foot soldiers, including dozens of members of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, have been convicted of serious crimes related to Trump’s failed coup.

For their role in the attack, defendants Henry “Enrique” Tarrío, Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola, all members of the Proud Boys on January 6, have all been charged with seditious conspiracy in addition to several other felonies. While Tarrío, the former head of the group and “prolific” FBI informant, was not at the Capitol during the attack, he and the rest of the accused could face decades in prison if convicted.

In his closing argument Monday, US Assistant attorney Conor Mulroe made clear that the Proud Boys’ actions on January 6 were not the result of a spontaneous protest that got out of hand, but the culmination of a weeks-long plot aimed at using violence to stop the certification of the 2020 presidential election.

“A conspiracy” Mulroe said, “is nothing more than an

agreement with an unlawful objective. These defendants’ fundamental agreement was to stop the certification of the election. That’s the what. And to do by any means necessary, including force. That’s the how.”

Mulroe explained that defendants could be found guilty of conspiracy even if they did not explicitly detail their plans for stopping the certification, “A conspiracy can be unspoken. It doesn’t have to be in writing, hashed out around the table, or even in words. It can be implicit. It can be a mutual understanding reached by a wink or a nod.”

Mulroe said that the accused, “saw themselves as Trump’s army fighting to keep their preferred leader in power no matter what the law or courts had to say about it.”

In making his final case to the jury, Mulroe repeatedly referenced Trump’s words and actions leading up to the coup, which had a direct impact on Proud Boys plans.

First Mulroe drew attention to Trump’s command for the Proud Boys to “stand back and stand by” during his first debate with Joe Biden during the 2020 presidential campaign. Mulroe said the Proud Boys leadership, especially former US Army soldier and fellow government informant Joseph Biggs, were “jubilant” following the debate. Biggs took Trump’s directive “as an order,” according to Mulroe, telling other Proud Boys, “Well sir, we’re ready. Trump basically said to go fuck them up. This makes me so happy.”

Mulroe explained that when some Proud Boys objected to Biggs’ bloodlust, they asked Tarrío to intercede and

disavow him, which Tarrio refused to do.

“What you have here,” Mulroe said, “is Tarrio saying, and Biggs agreeing, that the Proud Boys were a fighting force lined up behind Donald Trump, ready to commit violence on his behalf.”

This view was shared throughout the fascistic militia group. Mulroe pointed out that two cooperating witnesses, former Proud Boys Matthew Greene and Jeremy Bertino, both used the phrase “foot soldiers of the right” to describe themselves.

Greene, 35, a former US Army National Guard human intelligence collector and member of the Proud Boys up through the failed coup, was the first Proud Boy to plead guilty to conspiracy. Greene testified during that trial that he “pled guilty to an implicit agreement with Dominic Pezzola to stop the certification,” and that from his perspective, “it seemed everybody else had the same idea.”

According to Greene, Proud Boy leaders encouraged “violence” and that “if anything, [violence] was celebrated.”

In his testimony, Bertino confirmed that while “I didn’t know the exact plan of how it was going to get done, [but] I know what the objective was.” At 2:39 p.m. on January 6, as fascists and white supremacists were storming the Capitol, Bertino texted Tarrio, “Brother you know we made this happen,” to which Tarrio replied, “I know.”

In addition to Trump’s call for the Proud Boys to “stand back and stand by,” Mulroe pointed to Trump’s December 19, 2020 tweet as a major catalyst for the Proud Boys’ activities. Mulroe drew a connection between the former president’s calls for a “wild protest” and the actions of the Proud Boys.

Mulroe explained that within 24 hours of Trump calling for a “big protest” in D.C. on January 6, “Be there, will be wild!,” Tarrio had established the “Ministry of Self-Defense” (MOSD) chat which was used to coordinate the actions of the Proud Boys leading up to January 6.

“You want to call this a drinking club? You want to call this a men’s fraternal organization? Let’s call this what it is. The Ministry of Self-Defense was a violent gang that came together to use force against its enemies,” Mulroe

said. “It was all about force. It wasn’t to prevent violence. It was to channel it. Or, in Enrique Tarrio’s words, to ‘harness these rally boys in real numbers.’”

Biggs agreed with formation of MOSD and its purpose: “let’s get radical and get real men.”

In the chat, Mulroe said the defendants shared their violent intent to keep Trump in power. “No Trump, no peace, no quarter,” wrote Tarrio in one message.

“Why don’t we bash the fuck out so we don’t have to worry about these problems anymore, live free or die hard. Politics ain’t working for nobody. It’s time to fucking rage,” wrote Nordean. In response to another member in the chat bringing up the prospect of executing politicians at gunpoint, Nordean responded approvingly, “deal.”

Biggs wrote, “Every lawmaker who breaks their own stupid laws should be dragged out of office and hung.”

Defendant Zachary Rehl similarly called for executing Donald Trump’s political enemies, “Hopefully the firing squads are for the traitors that are trying to steal the election for the American people.”

Despite Tarrio being arrested on January 4, Mulroe explained that the conspiracy to prevent the certification did not stop, “When Tarrio was arrested, the strategic objective of stopping the certification of the election remained unchanged even if they were still figuring out tactical details of exactly how to make that happen.”

In his final text to the group before he was arrested on January 4 and the Proud Boys moved to delete many of the texts in the chat, Tarrio wrote to Biggs, “Whatever happens... make it a spectacle,” to which Biggs replied, “yup.”

Closing arguments for the defense are expected to wrap up tomorrow with jury deliberations to follow.



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