

Oath Keeper founder Stewart Rhodes sentenced to 18 years in prison for 2021 attack on US Capitol

Top lieutenant Kelly Meggs receives 12-year sentence

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On Thursday, Judge Amit P. Mehta sentenced the founder of the Oath Keepers militia group, Elmer Stewart Rhodes III, of Granbury, Texas, to 18 years in federal prison on the charge of seditious conspiracy in the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Rhodes was found guilty last November of seditious conspiracy and other charges linked to the attack on Congress.

In the same courtroom later that day, Judge Mehta sentenced Kelly Meggs, of Dunnellon, Florida, the leader of the Florida chapter of the Oath Keepers, to 12 years in prison. Meggs was also convicted of seditious conspiracy and other charges last year.

Federal sentencing guidelines require those convicted to serve out at least 80 percent of their sentence regardless of “good behavior,” meaning that Rhodes, 58, will be in his 70s before he is released, while the 54-year-old Meggs will be in his mid-60s—barring any presidential pardons.

Prior to his sentencing, Rhodes delivered a fascist diatribe in which he denounced the charges for which he was convicted and pledged his allegiance to the aspiring dictator Trump. Rhodes told Mehta that he was a “political prisoner” and like Trump his only crime was “opposing those who are destroying our country.”

Rhodes claimed that the only thing the Oath Keepers were guilty of was protecting “vulnerable Trump supporters” from attack by Black Lives Matter protesters and “Antifa.” Rhodes said that every person charged with crimes related to January 6 is a “political prisoner.” He added, “All are being grossly overcharged.”

Mehta, an Obama appointee, refuted Rhodes’ claims of a being a political prisoner, noting that he was in front of him because “12 jurors in Washington D.C., who acquitted you

of multiple counts, found you guilty of sedition.”

Prior to sentencing Rhodes, Mehta emphasized the danger the fascist militia leader presented and his lack of remorse for his actions. He said, “I dare say Mr. Rhodes, and I have never said this to anyone I have sentenced: You, sir, present an ongoing threat and a peril to this country, the republic and the very fabric of democracy.”

Mehta added, “The moment you are released, whenever that may be, you will be ready to take up arms against your government.”

While the 18-year sentence handed down by Mehta to Rhodes is the most severe penalty imposed in any of the over 1,000 January 6 cases, it was significantly shorter than the 25-year sentence requested by prosecutors and three years less than the minimum recommended under sentencing guidelines detailed by Mehta earlier in the day.

In arguing for a longer sentence for Rhodes, federal prosecutors wrote in pre-sentencing filings that the former US Army paratrooper and Yale-educated lawyer presented “a current and unique danger to the community and to our democracy,” noting that in an interview four days prior to sentencing, Rhodes had called for “regime change” in the United States.

The 12-year sentence Mehta imposed on Meggs was also below prosecutors’ request of 21 years, and on the lower end of the recommended sentencing guidelines, which ranged from 11.25 to 14 years. While Judge Mehta imposed a “level 6” terror enhancement on Rhodes, he rejected prosecutors’ request for a “level 4” terror enhancement on Meggs, which would have increased his sentence.

Since its founding by Rhodes in 2009, the Oath Keepers, wearing body armor and armed with military grade weaponry, have deployed around the country in support of right-wing causes, such as countering protesters against police violence. They have provided “security” for Republican politicians, including at “Stop the Steal” events in the lead-up to January 6. Over 20 members of the group have been convicted or pleaded guilty to charges in connection with the attack on Congress.

In addition to the Civil War-era charge of sedition, Meggs and Rhodes were convicted of several other serious felonies as part of their plot to stop the certification of Joe Biden’s victory in the Electoral College and keep the defeated Donald Trump in power. Three other Oath Keepers tried at the same time as Meggs and Rhodes—Jessica Watkins, Kenneth Harrelson and Thomas Caldwell—were acquitted of seditious conspiracy, but found guilty of other felonies for their actions in furtherance of Trump’s coup. Watkins and Harrelson will be sentenced by Mehta on Friday.

Following his clear election defeat to Joe Biden, Trump, who repeatedly insisted he would not accept the results of the election if he lost, set into motion his plan, which included summoning the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, III Percenters and other violent white supremacists and fascists to Washington on January 6, 2021.

On election night 2020, Kelly Meggs texted his wife Connie, who was convicted of conspiracy and obstruction earlier this year, that it was time to go on a “killing spree,” starting with “Pelosi.” The Meggses participated in multiple “Stop the Steal” rallies in the lead-up to January 6, with Kelly taking charge of forming an alliance between the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys prior to the attack.

Despite months of these fascists openly telegraphing and planning their attack online and on social media, virtually no security forces were predeployed to the Capitol complex, even as both chambers of Congress and the vice president gathered to certify the election. Once the attack began and police lines were overrun, Trump accomplices in the Pentagon deliberately prevented the deployment of National Guard troops. This gave the small fascist militia groups ample opportunity to carry out their objectives, which included capturing and/or killing Vice President Mike Pence, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and other politicians.

During the attack, Oath Keeper “Quick Reaction Forces,” or QRFs, were deployed around the Capitol with other militia

members stationed outside the city waiting on Rhodes’ orders to bring military grade weaponry to bear. As the attack was underway, Meggs led a “stack” of Oath Keepers into the Capitol rotunda, overrunning the limited police presence.

While Rhodes and many lower-level fascists have been convicted, and now sentenced, for their actions on January 6, Trump and his co-conspirators in Congress, the Pentagon and the Supreme Court have yet to be charged, more than 860 days after the failed coup. That the architects of the conspiracy remain free underscores that the defense of democratic rights cannot be left in the hands of the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and war, no less than the Democrats’ “Republican colleagues.”

Reflecting the transformation of the Republican Party into a fascist political organization and the immense support Trump’s footsoldiers retain within the ruling class, two days prior to the sentencing of Rhodes, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky defended Rhodes on Twitter. He wrote that Rhodes “never entered the Capitol and didn’t commit acts of violence or destruction, yet he’s going to be sentenced Thursday for ‘seditious conspiracy,’ ‘obstructing an official proceeding,’ and ‘tampering with docs’ (deleting stuff on his phone!) Weaponization of speech?”

Florida Governor and presidential candidate Ron DeSantis, who has not embraced Trump’s “stolen election” lies, in an interview Thursday said that if he were elected president, on “day one” he would have “folks that will get together and look at all these cases, people who are victims of weaponization or political targeting, and we will be aggressive at issuing pardons.”

Asked by his host if these pardons included any possible convictions against Trump, DeSantis replied, “I would say any example of disfavored treatment based on politics or weaponization would be included in that review, no matter how small or how big.”



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