

Biden issues last-minute pardons for family and January 6 Committee members, commutes sentence of Leonard Peltier

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In his final hours as president, Joe Biden issued a flurry of unprecedented pre-emptive pardons in an attempt to shield members of his family, political allies of both parties, and even top military officers from incoming President Donald Trump, who has pledged to go after “the enemy within.”

With less than 30 minutes remaining in his presidency, Biden granted a pre-emptive pardon to five members of his own family, including his brother James Biden; his sister-in-law Sara Jones Biden; his sister Valerie Biden Owens; his brother-in-law John T. Owens; and another brother, Francis Biden, for “any nonviolent offenses” they may have “committed or taken part of” between January 1, 2014 through January 20, 2025.

This is the second time in two months Biden has granted a sweeping pardon to members of his own family. Last month, prior to the sentencing of his son Hunter, convicted of illegally purchasing a gun and tax evasion, Joe Biden issued a blanket pardon for Hunter. That pardon not only swept away Hunter’s conviction, but, in similar fashion to Monday’s pardons, wiped the slate clean on any other offenses over the last decade.

This is not insignificant, as both Hunter and James Biden have been credibly accused of trading on their family name for profit. Both have participated in business deals, Hunter in Ukraine and James in China, that have been subjected to years of Republican investigation and innuendo. Of course, none of the alleged or convicted crimes perpetrated by Hunter or James hold a candle to the decades of war crimes carried out by the outgoing or incoming president.

In a statement briefly posted on the official White House website Monday, Biden wrote that his family “has been subjected to unrelenting attacks and threats, motivated solely by a desire to hurt me—the worst kind of

partisan politics. Unfortunately, I have no reason to believe these attacks will end.”

In a head-spinning contradiction, Biden wrote that while he believed in the “rule of law” and that the “strength of our legal institutions will ultimately prevail over politics,” the threat of “baseless and politically motivated investigations” weighed heavily on him. “Even when individuals have done nothing wrong and will ultimately be exonerated, the mere fact of being investigated or prosecuted can irreparably damage their reputations and finances,” Biden wrote.

In other words, while Biden claims to believe in the rule of law, in practical terms he will exercise the extraordinary and fleeting power of the presidency to circumvent it.

That Biden felt he had to issue these pardons on his way out of office completely undercuts the claims by him and the Democratic Party as a whole that American democracy has been vindicated by the “peaceful transfer of power” to the aspiring dictator Trump. The Democrats and Biden, as Biden’s own actions reveal, know that the 47th president is intent on waging political warfare against all political opponents in a completely dictatorial manner.

Trump’s return to the White House is the inflection point of a social counterrevolution aimed at rolling back any and all gains won by the working class over previous decades in the service of expanding the wealth and political power of the financial oligarchy and waging global imperialist war.

It is notable that despite Trump’s incessant threats to launch the largest mass deportation operation in US history, Biden did not issue any pardons for “Dreamers” or other undocumented immigrants. This will leave millions of people, including as many as 3.6 million

Dreamers, who in many cases have no conscious memory of living anywhere else besides the US, subject to attacks by the Trump administration.

Revealing the extreme fragility of the current social and political system in the heart of world imperialism, Biden, in addition to pardoning members of his own family, issued pardons for current and former members of the House who participated in the Select Committee on the January 6 attack, including former Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney and current Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson.

Cheney, an arch war-monger like her war criminal father, former Vice President Dick Cheney, served as vice chair of the committee which was nominally led by Thompson. While the committee uncovered some damning factual details concerning the coup, its main purpose was to whitewash and obscure the immense support Trump's plot had and retains within pillars of capitalist rule, including the Republican Party, the Supreme Court, the Pentagon and federal and local police and intelligence agencies.

In a statement issued by both Thompson and Cheney on behalf of the committee following the pardon announcement, the pair expressed their:

gratitude to President Biden for recognizing that we and our families have been continuously targeted not only with harassment, lies and threats of criminal violence, but also with specific threats of criminal prosecution and imprisonment by members of the incoming administration, simply for doing our jobs and upholding our oaths of office. We have been pardoned today not for breaking the law but for upholding it.

They added:

These are indeed “extraordinary circumstances,” when public servants are pardoned to prevent false prosecution by the government for having worked faithfully as Members of Congress to expose the facts of a months-long criminal effort to override the will of the voters after the 2020 elections, including by inciting a violent insurrection to thwart the peaceful transfer of power.

Former member of the committee and recently elected senator from California, Adam Schiff (Democrat), released a statement after the pardon was issued calling it “unnecessary” and “unwise” but adding he understood “why President Biden believed he needed to take this step in light of the persistent and baseless threats issued by Donald Trump and individuals who are now some of his law enforcement nominees.”

Biden also issued pre-emptive pardons for Dr. Anthony Fauci and retired Gen. Mark Milley. He said both were “dedicated selfless public servants” who, nevertheless, “have been subjected to ongoing threats and intimidation for faithfully discharging their duties.”

Responding to the pardons, Trump texted NBC News that they were “disgraceful” and that “Many are guilty of MAJOR CRIMES!”

Finally, Biden commuted the sentence of Leonard Peltier, a now 80-year-old Native American political prisoner who was framed for the deaths of two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975. For decades, activists, socialists and people of conscience have been fighting for the release of Peltier. He has spent over 50 years in the American prison system even though it has been known for decades that FBI agents threatened and coerced witnesses into changing their testimonies in order to convict Peltier.

Peltier suffers from a number of medical conditions, including diabetes, and has repeatedly been infected with COVID-19 while incarcerated. Biden's commutation noted that Peltier was not receiving a pardon. Instead, he will be subject to house arrest for the rest of his life.



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