

Trump DOJ seeks to erase January 6 convictions of Proud Boys, Oath Keepers ringleaders ahead of 2026 elections

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On Tuesday, the Trump Department of Justice (DOJ) asked the D.C. Circuit Court to vacate the convictions of four high-level Oath Keepers previously convicted for organizing and participating in the violent January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol. The documents indicate that the administration is also seeking to remove the convictions of Proud Boys members similarly found guilty of seditious conspiracy and other violent felonies.

The motion, submitted by Jeanine Pirro, specifically concerns Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and three other current or former members of the group that stormed the Capitol: Kelly Meggs, Kenneth Harrelson and Jessica Watkins. In November 2022, Rhodes and Meggs, a top lieutenant in the organization and leader of the Florida chapter of the group, were convicted of seditious conspiracy, the most serious charge leveled against the more than 1,500 people criminally prosecuted for participating in the failed putsch.

Harrelson and Watkins were charged with seditious conspiracy but not convicted. They were, however, convicted of several felony charges, including obstructing an official proceeding. Rhodes, Harrelson and Watkins all served in the US military and used their training to breach the Capitol in search of lawmakers to take hostage. While they did not carry guns into the building, the militia group established several “QRFs,” or “quick reaction forces,” immediately outside the D.C. area, armed with thousands of rounds and dozens of rifles, ready to supply the fascists with deadly weapons once given the order by Trump.

Rhodes was later sentenced to 18 years in prison but ended up spending less than four years incarcerated. Since his release from prison last year, Rhodes has resumed his far-right agitation, appearing regularly on Alex Jones’ *InfoWars* program.

One of Trump’s first actions upon his return to the

White House was to pardon or commute the sentences of his far-right foot soldiers, who, as a general rule, faced limited consequences for storming the Capitol after being fed lies by Trump and his Republican co-conspirators that, in order to “Stop the Steal,” they had to prevent the Electoral College certification.

While Trump’s pardons and commutations last year shortened or ended the sentences of the convicted, they did not erase the actual felonies from their records. If these motions are granted and the charges dismissed, they will effectively wipe away the criminal judgments in the most serious January 6 cases.

Tuesday’s motion claims that dismissal of the convictions is “just under the circumstances” because the “United States has determined in its prosecutorial discretion that dismissal of this criminal case is in the interests of justice.” In other words, it is in the interests of the Trump administration, and the financial oligarchy it represents, that fascist militia leaders face no consequences for their criminal actions.

The motion cites Trump’s January 20, 2025 commutation, noting that in the “Executive Branch’s view, it is not in the interests of justice to continue to prosecute this case or the cases of other, similarly situated defendants.”

The filing notes that the government is also filing two similar motions regarding Oath Keeper Roberto Minuta and Proud Boy Ethan Nordean. CNN reported that the motions could also affect the convictions of Oath Keepers Edward Vallejo, Joseph Hackett and David Moerschel, as well as Proud Boys Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola.

Nordean, Rehl and Biggs led the most violent section of the mob to the Capitol. Court testimony revealed that the group saw its role as that of chief agitators. With a

bullhorn in hand, Nordean sought to whip the far-right mob into a frenzy. He implored his Proud Boy associates to “fash the fuck out,” a command Pezzola followed through on, using a riot shield to smash a glass window at the Capitol in the building’s first breach. After Pezzola was sentenced to 10 years in prison in September 2023, he screamed as he was led out of the courtroom, “Trump won!”

Following the motion, the fascists took to social media to praise Trump administration officials. Proud Boys leader and “prolific” FBI informant Henry “Enrique” Tarrío wrote on X on April 15: “Full rights restored and full military benefits and back pay will be processed. ... This is my happiest day since the pardon that released us from the jaws of injustice!”

He thanked Pirro and Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, along with Trump, for “doing what’s right and showing that justice is still alive in our country. MAGA!”

In a livestream with Tarrío, Rehl said, “Justice is coming,” and credited Trump: “He always says ‘never give up’ and that’s what we have to do, stand our ground and keep fighting.”

If the motion is granted, which appears that it will be, it would clear the path for the militia members to rearm themselves ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. During the trial of Rhodes, prosecutors submitted evidence that he spent \$17,000 on weapons and tactical equipment after January 6. Prior to the attack, the separate Oath Keeper QRFs amassed “suitcases filled with ammunition” and rifles at hotels in Virginia and in trucks parked outside D.C.

The DOJ’s motion is a warning to the working class. Under conditions in which Trump and the Republicans are widely hated, the aspiring dictator is summoning and preparing the same paramilitary elements that heeded his violent call to action some five years ago.

Trump is already moving to disrupt the midterm elections and make it difficult for workers and their families to vote. He has called for a federal takeover of elections and has demanded that states send voter rolls to the DOJ which are then shared with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for alleged “citizenship checks” aimed at removing voters. At least 12 states, including Alaska, Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Wyoming, have already sent lists to the federal government.

Trump has repeatedly called for eliminating vote by mail, castigating it as inherently fraudulent, and is also

trying to pass the SAVE Act, an anti-voter legislation aimed at imposing bureaucratic hurdles to proving citizenship in order to vote.

In the last month, Trump has deployed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) thugs to airports to harass, kidnap and detain workers. War Room host and former White House adviser Steve Bannon has repeatedly called on Trump to deploy the immigration Gestapo to polling locations.

That Trump is in a position to pardon his fascist foot soldiers and disrupt the midterm elections is entirely the fault of the Democratic Party. On the day of the attack, then President-elect Joe Biden implored Trump to go on television and appeal to these fascists to halt their rampage.

Trump did no such thing, but this did not prevent Biden and the Democrats from calling for a “strong Republican Party” in the aftermath of the attack. Throughout Biden’s presidency, his attorney general, Merrick Garland, stalled efforts to prosecute Trump for the coup. Taking the measure of the Democrats’ unwillingness to prosecute Trump and his co-conspirators, Republicans, and even sections of the pseudo-left, adopted Trump’s lie that the greatest injustice that occurred on January 6 was not the storming of the Capitol and the attempt to overthrow the election but the prosecution of some of Trump’s fascist foot soldiers.

Throughout Biden’s presidency, the Democrats did everything in their power to downplay the danger of dictatorship and rehabilitate the Republican Party. This was done in order to advance their shared class interests, namely prosecuting the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and eliminating all public health and mitigation measures concerning the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The return of Trump to the White House demonstrates that the working class must advance its own independent program, separate from the Democrats and Republicans, in order to defend democratic rights and hold the criminals in both parties, and their financial benefactors, responsible for their numerous crimes.



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