



PRESS RELEASE

Two Leaders of Oath Keepers Found Guilty of Seditious Conspiracy and Other Charges Related to U.S. Capitol Breach

Tuesday, November 29, 2022

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of
Columbia

Three Other Defendants Also Found Guilty of Multiple Felonies Following Eight-Week Trial

WASHINGTON – Elmer Stewart Rhodes III, the founder and leader of the Oath Keepers, and Kelly Meggs, the leader of the Florida chapter of the organization, were found guilty by a jury today of seditious conspiracy and other charges for crimes related to the breach of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Their actions disrupted a joint session of the U.S. Congress that was in the process of ascertaining and counting the electoral votes related to the presidential election.

Three additional defendants, who were leaders and associates of the organization – Kenneth Harrelson, Jessica Watkins, and Thomas Caldwell – were found guilty of related felony charges. The verdict followed an eight-week trial and three days of deliberations. No sentencing date was set.

“Today the jury returned a verdict convicting all defendants of criminal conduct, including two Oath Keepers leaders for seditious conspiracy against the United States,” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “The Justice Department is committed to holding accountable those criminally responsible for the assault on our democracy on January 6, 2021. The prosecutors and

agents on this case worked tirelessly, with extraordinary skill, and in the best traditions of the Department of Justice.”

“As this case shows, breaking the law in an attempt to undermine the functioning of American democracy will not be tolerated” said FBI Director Christopher Wray. “The FBI will always uphold the rights of all citizens who peacefully engage in First Amendment protected activities, but we and our partners will continue to hold accountable those who engaged in illegal acts regarding the January 6, 2021, siege on the U.S. Capitol.”

“This case reaffirms the strength of our democracy and the institutions that protect and preserve it, including our criminal justice system,” said U.S. Attorney Matthew M. Graves for the District of Columbia. “Over a period of many weeks, a fair and impartial jury heard evidence in a search for the truth of the conduct of these defendants before, during, and after the events of Jan. 6, 2021.”

“Democracy depends on the peaceful transfer of power. By attempting to block the certification of the 2020 presidential election results, the defendants flouted and trampled the rule of law,” said Steven M. D’Antuono, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI’s Washington Field Office. “This case shows that force and violence are no match for our country’s justice system.”

Rhodes, 57, of Granbury, Texas, also was found guilty of obstruction of an official proceeding and tampering with documents and proceedings. Meggs, 53, of Dunnellon, Florida, also was found guilty of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of an official proceeding, conspiracy to prevent an officer from discharging duties, and tampering with documents or proceedings.

Harrelson, 42, of Titusville, Florida, was found guilty of obstruction of an official proceeding, conspiracy to prevent an officer from discharging duties, and tampering with documents or proceedings. Watkins, 40, of Woodstock, Ohio, was found guilty of conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of an official proceeding, interfering with law enforcement officers during a civil disorder, and conspiracy to prevent an officer from discharging duties. Caldwell, 68, of Berryville, Virginia, was found guilty of obstruction of an official proceeding, and tampering with documents or proceedings.

According to the government’s evidence, the Oath Keepers are a large but loosely organized collection of individuals, some of whom are associated with militias. Following the Nov. 3, 2020, presidential election, Rhodes, Meggs, and others began plotting to oppose by force the lawful transfer of presidential power. Beginning in late December 2020, via encrypted and private communications applications, Rhodes, Meggs, Harrelson, Watkins, Caldwell, and others coordinated and planned to travel to Washington, D.C., on or around Jan. 6, 2021, the date of the certification of the electoral college vote.

The defendants also, collectively, employed a variety of manners and means, including: organizing into teams that were prepared and willing to use force and to transport firearms and ammunition into Washington, D.C.; recruiting members and affiliates; organizing trainings to teach and learn paramilitary combat tactics; bringing and contributing paramilitary gear, weapons, and supplies – including knives, batons, camouflaged combat uniforms, tactical vests with plates, helmets, eye protection, and radio equipment – to the Capitol grounds; breaching and attempting to take control of the Capitol grounds and building on Jan. 6, 2021, in an effort to prevent, hinder and delay the certification of the electoral college vote; using force against law enforcement officers while inside the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021; continuing to plot, after Jan. 6, 2021, to oppose by force the lawful transfer of presidential power, and using websites, social media, text messaging and encrypted messaging applications to communicate with each other and others.

On Jan. 6, 2021, a large crowd began to gather outside the Capitol perimeter as the Joint Session of Congress got under way at 1 p.m. Crowd members eventually forced their way through, up, and over U.S. Capitol Police barricades and advanced to the building’s exterior façade. Shortly after 2 p.m., crowd members forced entry into the Capitol by breaking windows, ramming open doors, and assaulting Capitol police and other law enforcement officers. At about this time, according to the government’s evidence, Rhodes entered the restricted area of the Capitol grounds and directed his followers to meet him at the Capitol.

At approximately 2:30 p.m., according to the government’s evidence, Meggs, Harrelson, and Watkins, along with other Oath Keepers and affiliates – many wearing paramilitary clothing and patches with the Oath Keepers name, logo, and insignia – marched in a “stack” formation up the east steps of the Capitol, joined a mob, and made their way into the Capitol. Rhodes and Caldwell remained outside the Capitol, where they coordinated activities.

While certain Oath Keepers members and affiliates breached the Capitol grounds and building, others remained stationed just outside of the city in quick reaction force (QRF) teams. According to the government’s evidence, the QRF teams were prepared to rapidly transport firearms and other weapons into Washington, D.C., in support of operations aimed at using force to stop the lawful transfer of presidential power.

Rhodes was arrested on Jan. 13, 2022, in Texas. Meggs was arrested on Feb. 17, 2021, in Florida. Harrelson was arrested on March 10, 2021, in Florida. Watkins was arrested on Jan. 18, 2021, in Ohio. Caldwell was arrested on Jan. 19, 2021, in Virginia.

The charges of seditious conspiracy, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of an official proceeding, and tampering with documents or proceedings each carry a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. The charge of conspiracy to prevent an officer from discharging duties carries a statutory maximum of six years in prison. The charge of interfering with law enforcement officers during a civil disorder carries a statutory maximum of five years in prison. All of the charges also carry potential financial penalties. Each defendant was convicted of at least one offense that carries a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

The Court will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

This case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia and the Department of Justice's National Security and Criminal Divisions. Valuable assistance was provided by numerous U.S. Attorney's Offices throughout the country.

The case is being investigated by the FBI's Washington Field Office with valuable assistance provided by numerous FBI offices throughout the country, including the Dallas, Cincinnati, Tampa, Jacksonville, and Richmond Field Offices.

In the 22 months since Jan. 6, 2021, over 900 individuals have been arrested in nearly all 50 states for crimes related to the breach of the U.S. Capitol, including over 275 individuals charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement. The investigation remains ongoing.

Anyone with tips can call 1-800-CALL-FBI (800-225-5324) or visit tips.fbi.gov.

Updated November 30, 2022

Topic

VIOLENT CRIME

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January 31, 2025



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