

FEDERAL JUDGES SOUND ALARM AS JAN. 6 ARRESTS, SENTENCES CONTINUE WHILE TRUMP'S PARDONS LOOM

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Federal judges are expressing concern over the future of justice for January 6 defendants as Donald Trump prepares to retake office and considers pardoning the participants in the Capitol attack. This week's arrests and sentences of more alleged offenders show effort by the Department of Justice hasn't stopped as they continue to attempt to hold those involved accountable for the violence that disrupted American democracy.

On December 18, a Texas man and a Virginia man were arrested for allegedly assaulting law enforcement during the January 6, 2021, breach of the U.S. Capitol. Authorities said their actions contributed to the chaos that interrupted the certification of Joe Biden's 2020 presidential victory. Earlier in the month, a South Carolina man was sentenced to prison for four misdemeanors related to the attack. On the same day, a judge sentenced a Georgia man to prison after his conviction for assaulting police officers during the riot.

The ongoing arrests and sentences come nearly three years after a mob stormed the Capitol, injuring over 140 police officers—including more than 80 from the U.S. Capitol Police and over 60 from Washington's Metropolitan Police Department. The siege caused extensive damage, with losses estimated at over \$2.8 million. In total, at least 1,561 people have faced federal charges.

However, Trump has remained adamant that those convicted are "hostages," and "patriots."

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who has presided over numerous Jan. 6-related cases, acknowledged her waning confidence in reassuring law enforcement that the rule of law still applies. "I'm not sure I can do that very convincingly these days," Chutkan remarked during a recent sentencing hearing.

Chutkan isn't alone. Fellow jurists appointed by Republicans and Democrats have fretted over the possibility of Trump granting clemency to those convicted.

U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell, appointed by President Barack Obama, recently condemned efforts to downplay the Capitol attack. "The rewriting of the history of Jan. 6, 2021, is incredibly disturbing," Howell said during a sentencing hearing.

Judge Reggie Walton, a George W. Bush appointee, cautioned that continued false claims about election outcomes could tear the nation apart. "We're headed for a breakup of this country," Walton warned, adding, "America isn't a third-world country." Walton also noted that Democrats accepted their defeat in 2024 without spreading misinformation. "Mr. Trump won," he stated. "He won legitimately just like he lost legitimately."

According to Politico, several judges have openly criticized Trump's rhetoric and impact on defendants' attitudes toward the court. The outlet reported that Walton clashed with defendant Michael Bradley, who was convicted of attacking police officers with a baton. Bradley defied Walton's authority, questioning his integrity and claiming he was "being convicted without a victim."

Some Jan. 6 defendants have recently requested permission to attend Trump's second inauguration, Politico noted. The Justice Department has opposed these requests, arguing that allowing defendants to return to the "scene of the crime" would dishonor the officers who defended the Capitol that day. Yet on Thursday, Chutkan permitted one defendant, Eric Peterson, to attend, issuing a terse, one-sentence order without explanation.

Judge Royce Lamberth, a Ronald Reagan appointee, captured the frustration of the judiciary in a 13-page opinion accompanying a Jan. 6 sentencing. "The true story of what happened on January 6, 2021, will never change," he wrote, rejecting attempts by some defendants to portray themselves as victims of government persecution.

"They trashed it," Chutkan said of the rioters' actions in the Capitol. "They treated it like a motel room after a concert. Engaging in an act of destruction and violence in order to halt the peaceful transfer of power has to be met by consequences."

There are no comments yet.