

Trump Pardons Nearly All 1,500 Jan. 6 Rioters

Action comes after Biden immunizes family and other potential GOP targets before departing

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WASHINGTON—President Trump pardoned Monday nearly all of the 1,500 people charged in connection with the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, hours after outgoing President [Joe Biden](#) immunized from prosecution family members and other potential targets of the incoming administration.

Trump's [sweeping clemency](#) delivered on his polarizing campaign pledge to pardon supporters who joined in what federal judges and prosecutors have called an attack on American democracy.

The new president made the announcement after arriving at the White House, effectively wiping away four years of prosecutions, including more than 1,100 convictions in what Justice Department officials have described as the largest investigation in U.S. history.

While pardoning virtually all of those charged, Trump commuted the sentences of more than a dozen others.

"They've been treated very unfairly," Trump said in the Oval Office. "The judges have been absolutely brutal. The prosecutors have been brutal."

"I see murderers from this country get two years, one year, and maybe no time, but they've already been in jail for a long time," he said.

Among the recipients of clemency from Trump were leaders of far-right groups, including the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys, who had been found guilty of seditious conspiracy and other offenses in connection with the Capitol attack.

Trump pardoned former Proud Boys chairman Enrique Tarrio, who was sentenced in 2023 to [22 years in prison](#), and commuted the sentence of Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who was ordered to spend [18 years behind bars](#) for plotting to prevent the peaceful transfer of power.

The breadth of the pardons contradicted the “case-by-case” approach Trump and his allies had signaled ahead of his inauguration. And it flew in the face of admonitions from Republican allies who’d voiced opposition to the notion of pardoning Jan. 6 defendants who’d assaulted police.

More than 140 police officers were injured guarding the Capitol as Congress convened to certify former Biden’s 2020 election victory.

Of those incarcerated people who received pardons, Trump said, “We hope they come out tonight, frankly.”

The pardons will give limited immediate benefit to more than 700 defendants convicted in connection with the Capitol attack who had either completed prison terms or were never ordered behind bars.

Trump’s proclamation also directed the Justice Department to dismiss all pending cases related to the Jan. 6 attack, including hundreds of prosecutions in which defendants were awaiting trial or sentencing.

The dueling sets of pardons by Biden and Trump reflected the enormous distrust and disdain between the two men, as well as their clashing views on the violent riot that has divided Americans living in a charged political climate.

Biden acknowledged it was an extraordinary move to grant pre-emptive pardons to people who haven’t been charged with wrongdoing, but said he couldn’t stand idly by while his family and high-profile officials faced threats of retribution with Trump back in power.

“I believe in the rule of law, and I am optimistic that the strength of our legal institutions will ultimately prevail over politics,” Biden said. “But these are exceptional circumstances, and I cannot in good conscience do nothing.”

Trump blasted Biden’s pardons, which also covered members of the House committee that investigated the Capitol attack. “The brother, the whole deal, was pardoned,” Trump said during a rally after his swearing in. “Can you imagine that?”

A prominent name on Biden’s pardon list was Dr. Anthony Fauci, who served as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Before his retirement in 2022, Fauci helped lead the effort to fight the Covid-19 pandemic under both Trump and Biden.

Trump has repeatedly criticized Fauci, who became vilified by many on the right for supporting safety precautions and shutdowns and for opposing unproven treatments such as the antimalaria drug hydroxychloroquine pushed by Trump.

Fauci defended social-distancing measures and other policies from the early months of the pandemic, saying the steps were based on science available at the time.

Fauci said that he had committed no crime, but that the threats “create immeasurable and intolerable distress for me and my family.” He added: “For these reasons, I acknowledge and appreciate the action that President Biden has taken today on my behalf.”

Another on the pardon list was retired Gen. Mark Milley, who has repeatedly clashed with Trump. In his [2023 retirement speech](#), Milley said the military shouldn’t bow to “wannabe dictators.” He called Trump a “fascist” in a book by Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward. Trump has suggested Milley should face death for treason.

In a statement, Milley said he was “deeply grateful.” He said he didn’t “wish to spend whatever remaining time the Lord grants me fighting those who unjustly might seek retribution for perceived slights.”

Biden also pardoned members and staff of the House committee that investigated the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, as well as police officers who testified before the committee.

Trump had aimed vitriol at a number of committee officials, including former Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a Republican, now-Sen. Adam Schiff (D., Calif.) and Rep. Bennie Thompson (D., Miss.), the select committee’s former chairman.

Thompson and Cheney, the former vice chair of the select committee, said in a joint statement that they had been pardoned “not for breaking the law but for upholding it.” They called Biden’s actions “‘extraordinary circumstances’ when public servants are pardoned to prevent false prosecution by the government.”

In the waning minutes of Biden’s presidency, the White House said he had pardoned his sister, Valerie Biden Owens, and her husband, John T. Owens, and his two brothers, James B. Biden and Francis W. Biden, along with James Biden’s spouse, Sara Jones Biden.

“My 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,” Biden said.

Last year, Biden [pardoned his son](#), Hunter Biden, wiping away criminal convictions on tax and gun charges.

While past presidents have issued controversial pardons to protect allies, donors and family members, Biden's moves were unprecedented in sweep. The threats from Trump were also without parallel. During his campaign, Trump vowed to press the Justice Department to prosecute people he considered part of a political opposition.

Biden also commuted the life sentence of indigenous activist Leonard Peltier, who has been in prison since his conviction for the 1975 killings of two Federal Bureau of Investigation agents during a standoff at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Peltier will spend the remainder of his sentence in home confinement. Activists have spent decades lobbying for clemency for Peltier, who is 80.

The FBI urged Biden to reject the clemency bid. "Peltier is a remorseless killer, who brutally murdered two of our own," former FBI Director Christopher Wray has written.

Sadie Gurman contributed to this article.