

Trump's ex-adviser Steve Bannon goes on trial for defying congressional subpoena

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Washington, July 19 (RHC)-- Steve Bannon -- the anti-establishment outsider who helped bring Donald Trump to the White House -- is now on trial for refusing to testify about the January 6, 2021 assault on the US Capitol.

The 68-year-old former investment banker rose to prominence as the head of far-right news outlet Breitbart before latching onto the Trump phenomenon and guiding the billionaire to the presidency.

Trump rewarded Bannon by naming him chief strategist, a major victory for the alt-right that sent shudders through the political mainstream. He held the post for less than a year before being fired, but Bannon's loyalty to Trump survived.

He vowed to fight for Trump from outside the White House, pushed the president's discredited allegations of fraud in the 2020 election, and refused to testify to lawmakers investigating the Capitol attack, claiming to be covered by presidential executive privilege.

Steve Bannon recently reversed course and agreed to testify after allegedly receiving Trump's blessing, but it was too late. If found guilty, he faces up to a year in prison for each of two charges of contempt of Congress.

After serving in the U.S. Navy and making his name at Goldman Sachs during the 1980s boom years, Bannon founded his own investment bank before selling it to Societe Generale in 1998 and going on to be a Hollywood producer.

Some of his projects were standard entertainment fare, but documentaries on late president Ronald Reagan, populist darling Sarah Palin and the Tea Party movement brought him into right-wing circles.

He became an investor in Andrew Breitbart's eponymous media venture, which aimed to buck what its founder saw as the progressive left's grip on the news agenda. Democrats and liberals were in the site's crosshairs, but moderate Republican lawmakers also felt its lash, accused of failing to stand up to President Barack Obama.

Breitbart died in 2012 and Bannon took over, promoting Trump's candidacy before officially joining his campaign. He was one of the most influential figures in the White House, and was behind some of Trump's most controversial moves, including his ban on some travelers from abroad and pulling the United States out of the Paris climate change agreement.

After frequent clashes, including with Trump himself, Bannon was pushed out in August 2017, returning to Breitbart. His participation in Michael Wolff's gossipy and damaging book "Fire and Fury" angered the president, who dubbed him "Sloppy Steve" and suggested he "cried when he got fired and begged for his job" -- but their relationship survived.

Bannon stepped down from Breitbart in early 2018. In 2020, he was charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud over funds raised to build a wall on the border with Mexico -- a flagship Trump policy that the president had falsely promised would be paid for by the US's southern neighbor.

Trump pardoned Bannon -- who had pleaded not guilty to the fraud charge -- on his last day in office, two weeks after Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to prevent the certification of Joe Biden's election victory.

Bannon was one of dozens of people called to testify before the House committee about the assault. Investigators believe that he and other Trump advisors could have information on links between the White House and the rioters.

White House records show that Bannon spoke with Trump twice on January 6. The day before the attack, he told listeners of his podcast that "all hell is going to break loose tomorrow."



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