

*Trump ally Steve Bannon
convicted of contempt of U.S.
Congress*



Bannon's lawyers have said they intend to appeal the verdict [Jose Luis Magana/AP Photo]

Washington, July 22 (RHC)-- A U.S. jury has found Donald Trump ally Steve Bannon guilty of contempt of Congress after a four-day trial for defying requests for information by the congressional committee investigating the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

The guilty verdict on Friday is the first conviction related to refusing to cooperate with the January 6th panel. Bannon faced two counts of criminal contempt for refusing to appear before the committee. Each count carries a minimum of 30 days and up to a year in jail.

Bannon's lawyers said they intend to appeal the verdict. "We may have lost a battle here today, but we are not going to lose this war," Bannon told reporters outside the federal court in Washington, DC after the verdict.

In closing arguments earlier on Friday, both sides of the trial re-emphasised their primary positions. The prosecution maintained that Bannon willfully ignored clear and explicit deadlines, and the defense claimed Bannon believed those deadlines were flexible and subject to negotiation.

Bannon was served with a subpoena on September 23rd last year, ordering him to provide requested documents to the committee by October 7th and appear in person by October 14th.

Bannon's lawyer Evan Corcoran told jurors in his closing arguments that those deadlines were mere "placeholders" while lawyers on each side negotiated terms. Corcoran said the committee "rushed to judgment" because it "wanted to make an example of Steve Bannon."

Prosecutors focused on the series of letters exchanged between the January 6 panel and Bannon's lawyers. The correspondence shows committee chair, Bennie Thompson, immediately dismissing Bannon's claim that he was exempted under Trump's claim of executive privilege and explicitly threatening him with criminal prosecution.

"The defense wants to make this hard, difficult and confusing," said Assistant US Attorney Amanda Vaughn in her closing statement. "This is not difficult. This is not hard. There were only two witnesses because it's as simple as it seems."

Bannon declined to testify on Thursday, and his lawyers did not call any witnesses. Instead, they argued that the judge should dismiss the charges as unproven. U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols, a Trump appointee, did not immediately rule on the request.

Bannon's team told the judge that Bannon saw no point in testifying at his trial since Nichols's previous rulings had gutted his avenues of defence. Among other things, Bannon's team was barred from calling as witnesses House Speaker Nancy Pelosi or members of the House panel.

Bannon was serving in an unofficial advisory capacity to Trump at the time of the riot early in 2021. The committee wanted to speak with Bannon because it had information that he was actively involved in planning, logistics and fundraising for Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election and stop Congress from certifying Democrat Joe Biden's victory.

The panel's subpoena demanded any documents or communications relating to Trump and others in his orbit, including lawyer Rudy Giuliani and groups such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers.

The committee heard nothing from Bannon until after the first deadline had passed, at which point his lawyer sent a letter to the committee stating that Bannon was protected by Trump's claim of executive privilege and would not be providing documents or appearing.

The committee responded in writing that the claim was invalid – Trump was no longer president, and Bannon was not employed at the White House at the time of the riot. Vaughn told jurors on Thursday that the subpoena issued to Bannon "wasn't optional. It wasn't a request, and it wasn't an invitation. It was mandatory."

Bannon was indicted in November on two counts of criminal contempt of Congress, one month after the Department of Justice received the House panel's referral. Last month, the Department of Justice also charged Peter Navarro, a former adviser to Trump, with two counts of contempt of Congress for failing to cooperate with the committee.

Bannon's conviction comes as the congressional committee presents its findings on the January 6 riots in a series of public hearings that have attempted to link Trump to the attack.

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