

U.S. urges six-month sentence for former Trump adviser Steve Bannon

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Steve Bannon faces the possibility of prison time for refusing to comply with a subpoena to testify before the congressional committee investigating last year's Capitol riot [File: J Scott Applewhite/AP Photo]

Washington, October 17 (RHC)-- The U.S. Department of Justice has asked a federal judge to sentence former President Donald Trump's adviser Steve Bannon to six months in prison for defying a subpoena to testify before a congressional committee investigating the United States Capitol riot.

U.S. prosecutors recommended the sentence on Monday, accusing Bannon of pursuing "a bad-faith strategy of defiance and contempt" and publicly disparaging the panel investigating the attack on January 6, 2021. The Justice Department also urged U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols to fine Bannon \$200,000.

"Throughout the pendency of this case, the Defendant has exploited his notoriety — through courthouse press conferences and his War Room podcast — to display to the public the source of his bad-faith refusal to comply with the committee's subpoena: a total disregard for government processes and the law," the department wrote in its filing.

The recommendations come just days after the January 6 panel last week voted to subpoena Trump in an effort to compel the ex-president's testimony about the Capitol riot and his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election.

It is unclear if Trump, who denounced the subpoena last week, will comply with the panel's move. Refusal to comply with a subpoena can result in criminal charges.

Bannon was convicted of two counts of contempt of Congress in July, and will be sentenced by Nichols on Friday morning. Each count is punishable by between 30 days to one year in prison and a fine ranging between \$100 to \$100,000.

Bannon's attorneys filed a sentencing memo on Monday saying their client should be sentenced to probation only. If the judge insists on incarceration, then Bannon should be permitted to serve his sentence at home, and not in prison, they said. In their memo, they argued that Bannon was convicted on statutes governed by "outdated" case law, and that he relied on his lawyer's legal advice by not appearing before the committee.

The Department of Justice said it asked the judge to impose the maximum fee of \$200,000 due to Bannon's "insistence on paying the maximum fine rather than cooperate with the Probation Office's routine pre-sentencing financial investigation".

The department also expressed frustration that Bannon had not produced a "single document" for the committee, and stated that Bannon's refusal to cooperate with the subpoena undermined the committee's work.

"The defendant's statements prove that his contempt was not aimed at protecting executive privilege or the Constitution, rather it was aimed at undermining the committee's efforts to investigate an historic attack on government," the department said.

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 President 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, as well as far-right groups such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers.

Separately, Bannon has also been charged with two counts of money laundering, three counts of conspiracy and one count of scheming to defraud in a case involving donations for the construction of a wall on the US-Mexico border that allegedly defrauded donors.

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