

Proud Boys trial moves forward as January 6th panel prepares report

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Five members of the Proud Boys, including the group's former national chairman, face charges for their role in the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021 [File: Emily Elconin/Reuters]

Washington, December 20 (RHC)-- A trial in the United States against five members of the far-right group known as the Proud Boys is set to move forward, with the group's former leader, Enrique Tarrio, among

those facing charges of seditious conspiracy for their involvement in the attack on the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021.

U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly said jury selection would continue on Monday after he dismissed a request from the defense to delay the trial's start, which coincides with the final public hearing of a congressional committee investigating the attack.

Defense lawyers argued that the January 6 Committee's findings, produced on behalf of the US House of Representatives, would prejudice the proceedings. "We don't want to be picking the jury in this highly confusing and combustible environment," lawyer Norm Pattis, who is representing Proud Boys member Joseph Biggs, told the judge.

Tarrio, Biggs, Ethan Nordean, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola are all accused of seditious conspiracy as well as other charges in relation to the January 6th attack. Kelly said that he would remind jurors to avoid media coverage that could result in bias during the proceedings, but he stated that jury selection, a process that can take several days, would move forward immediately.

The trial has brought attention to the role that armed far-right groups played in the 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol. During the attack, supporters of former U.S. President Donald Trump tried to stop the certification of the 2020 election results by violently storming the building that houses the U.S. legislative branch.

Tarrio, formerly the national chairman of the Proud Boys, was not present on the day of the attack, but prosecutors have alleged that he was a key figure in a conspiracy to use violence to prevent the peaceful transfer of power.

In its indictment, the U.S. Justice Department accused Tarrio of helping to organize a new chapter of the Proud Boys called the Ministry of Self-Defense. This new chapter, prosecutors said, worked to plan the events of January 6th by raising funds for travel to Washington, DC, and gathering supplies like paramilitary gear.

The indictment also included messages between Tarrio and other Proud Boys leaders. In the days before the Capitol attack, Tarrio told his followers on social media "Let's bring this new year with one word in mind... Revolt." And as Trump supporters entered the Capitol on January 6th, Tarrio made two consecutive posts that read "Make no mistake" and "We did this," according to the indictment.

Tarrio and his four codefendants could face up to 20 years in prison if they are found guilty of sedition.

The Proud Boys trial is the latest in a series of prosecutions against key figures involved in the January 6th attack. In late November, a jury found Stewart Rhodes, the leader of another far-right group known as the Oath Keepers, guilty of seditious conspiracy in relation to the attack on the Capitol.

The conviction of Rhodes, who faces up to 20 years in prison as he awaits sentencing, was seen as a significant win for the government as it pursues charges against participants in the insurrection.

Tarrio is probably the highest-profile figure to face jurors over his role in the Capitol attack, and his trial is expected to take at least six weeks.

Meanwhile, the January 6 committee voted unanimously to recommend criminal charges against former President Trump during its final public session on Monday, accusing him of "inciting" insurrection. Prior to the Capitol attack, Trump made repeated claims — without evidence — that the 2020 election was fraudulent.

The congressional committee does not have the ability to pursue criminal charges itself but can recommend that the Justice Department do so. The panel subpoenaed Trump in October, calling for him

to appear before the committee to answer questions about January 6th and requesting documents related to communications with far-right groups.

Trump has refused to appear before the committee, which is expected to end its work before the Republican Party takes control of the U.S. House of Representatives at the start of the new year.

Donald Trump has said that he will seek the presidency again in 2024.

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