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POLITICS

Biden pardons Fauci, Milley and members of Jan. 6 panel

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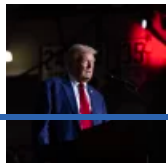
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Biden said the preemptive pardons were needed because of threats of "unjustified and politically motivated prosecutions" by the incoming administration.

"The issuance of these pardons should not be mistaken as an acknowledgment that any individual engaged in any wrongdoing, nor should acceptance be misconstrued as an admission of guilt for any offense," Biden said in a statement issued hours before President-elect Donald Trump takes the oath of office.

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Trump has made more than 100 threats to prosecute or punish perceived enemies

Biden said "exceptional circumstances" had prompted the pardons. "Even when individuals have done nothing wrong — and in fact have done the right thing — and will ultimately be exonerated, the mere fact of being investigated or prosecuted can irreparably damage reputations and finances," he said.

It is not clear that the incoming Trump administration intends to prosecute the individuals. Pam Bondi, Trump's nominee for attorney general, said last week during her confirmation hearing that there wouldn't be political prosecutions on her watch. But Trump's nominee for FBI director, Kash Patel, has called for many of Trump's opponents to be investigated or prosecuted.

Fauci was a leading figure in the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic. An infectious disease specialist at the National Institutes of Health, he encouraged people to wear masks and social distance, but Trump allies accuse him of covering up the alleged real causes of COVID. Trump called Fauci a "disaster" and Fauci has been investigated by congressional Republicans.

In a statement, Fauci said, "Throughout my career, I have been motivated by one simple goal: to improve the health and lives of humankind," noting that he served under presidents of both parties from Ronald Reagan to President Biden.

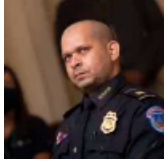
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~~"Let me be perfectly clear: I have committed no crime and there are no possible~~
grounds for any allegation or threat of criminal investigation or prosecution of me," Fauci said. "The fact is, however, that the mere articulation of these baseless threats, and the potential that they will be acted upon, create immeasurable and intolerable distress for me and my family. For these reasons, I acknowledge and appreciate the action that President Biden has taken today on my behalf.

Milley was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during Trump's first term and later called Trump "fascist to the core" in a book by journalist Bob Woodward. Trump has said he should be executed.

In a statement, Milley thanked the president for the pardon, saying he was grateful not to have to put family and friends through any potential legal battle.

"After forty-three years of faithful service in uniform to our Nation, protecting and defending the Constitution, I do not wish to spend whatever remaining time the Lord grants me fighting those who unjustly might seek retribution for perceived slights," he said.



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Biden said the members of the Jan. 6 committee — and law enforcement officials who testified before it — were doing their job to shed light on the insurrection attempted by a mob of Trump supporters in 2021.

"Rather than accept accountability, those who perpetrated the January 6th attack have taken every opportunity to undermine and intimidate those who participated in the Select Committee in an attempt to rewrite history, erase the stain of January 6th for partisan gain, and seek revenge, including by threatening criminal prosecutions," Biden said.

The leaders of the House Select Jan. 6 committee, Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss.; and Republican Vice Chair Liz Cheney, said in a joint statement on behalf of the committee they were grateful for the pardons.

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"These are indeed 'extraordinary circumstances' when public servants are pardoned to prevent false prosecution by the government for having worked faithfully as Members of Congress to expose the facts of a months-long criminal effort to override the will of the voters after the 2020 elections," they said.

They also said they remain undeterred by threats of criminal violence or prosecution, and encouraged by the Constitution's "sweeping" speech and debate clause and the pardons.

"We pray that our institutions will prevail over these coming four years, but their survival will undoubtedly require courage by their citizenry, those in elected office and the press," they said. "The truth and the Constitution must prevail."

For months, members of the Jan. 6 committee had discussed the potential of Biden issuing preemptive pardons during calls behind closed doors. However, the group was split. For example, Thompson told NPR he welcomed a pardon from Biden. But by and large, he was the committee's sole member that expressed that interest publicly. Maryland Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin was less clear on the plans earlier this month. "It's not up to me," he said.

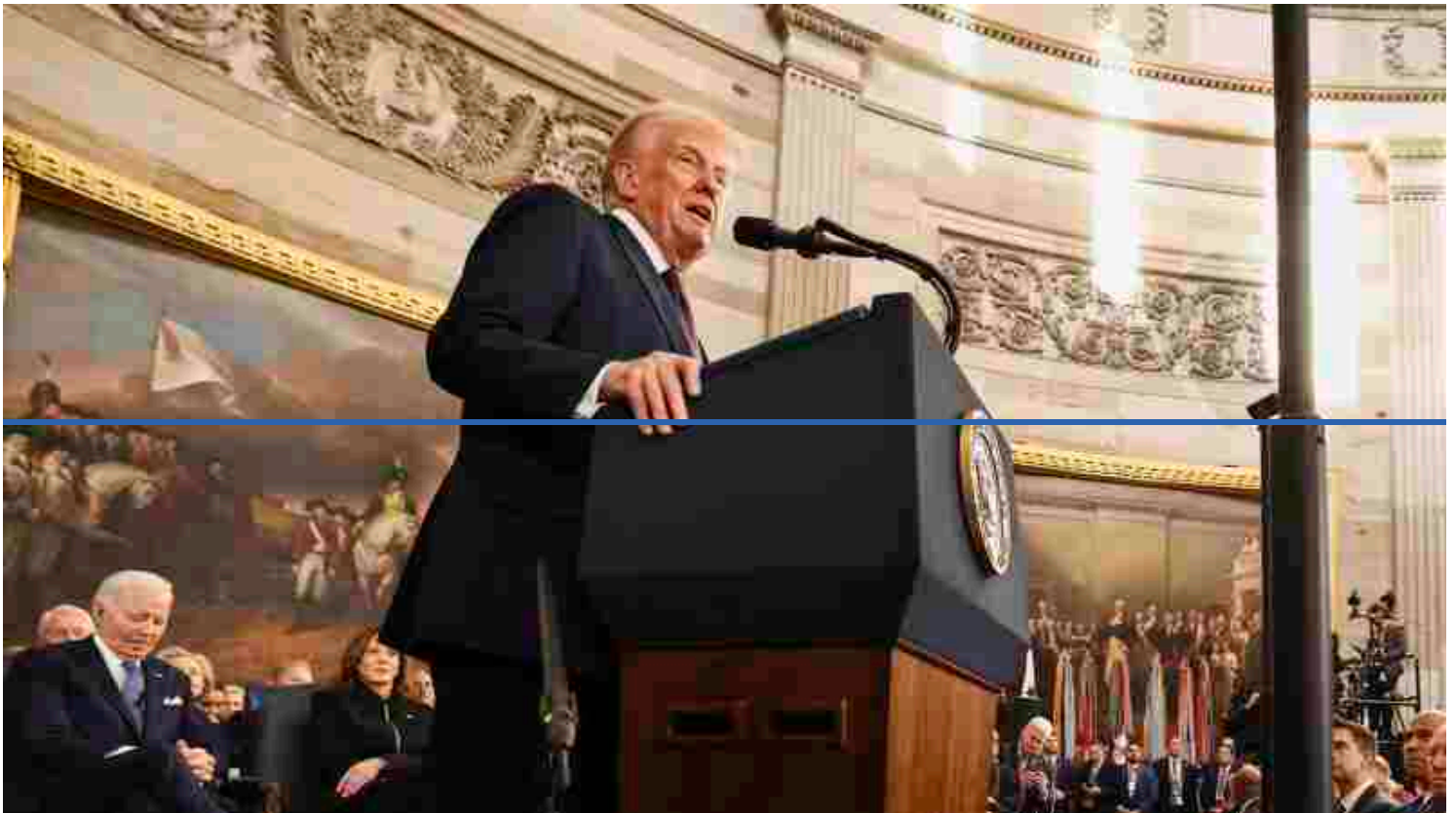
Staffers for the House select Jan. 6 committee were "surprised" by the news of the pardon. A congressional aide said they were sorting whether they needed to accept the pardon or how the process worked. There was plenty of confusion since the announcement didn't include names or specifics of what the pardon covered. However, the aide, who was not authorized to speak on the record, said staffers were relieved by the news in case the Trump administration did target the committee's staff.

In the end, it appears the panel's final report pardons will cover dozens of staffers. More than 50 were listed in the preliminary section of the panel's final report. It was also unclear if the pardons covered consultants and contractors also listed in the report.

NPR correspondent Claudia Grisales contributed to this report.

joe biden donald trump mark milley anthony fauci january 6 committee

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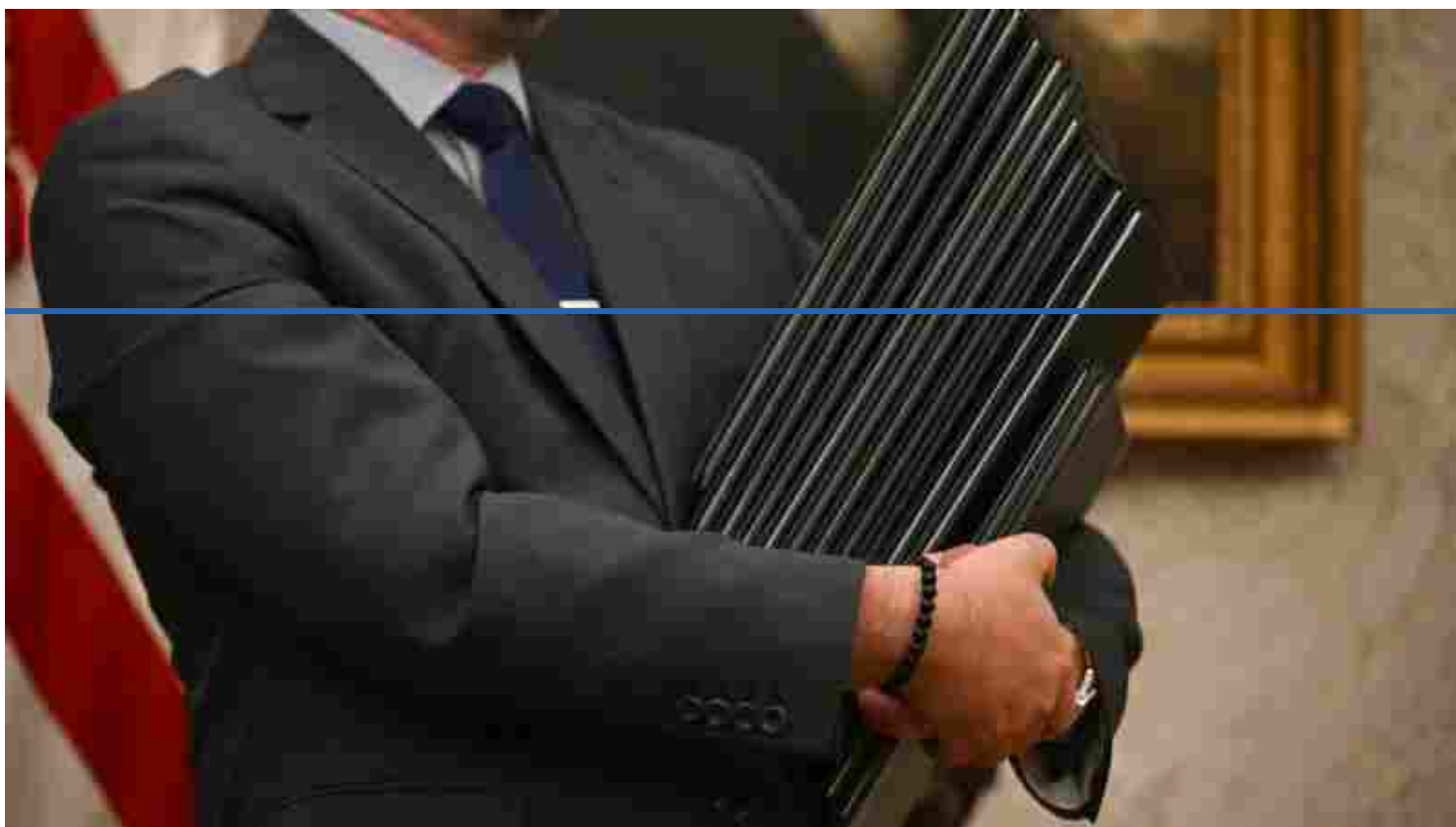
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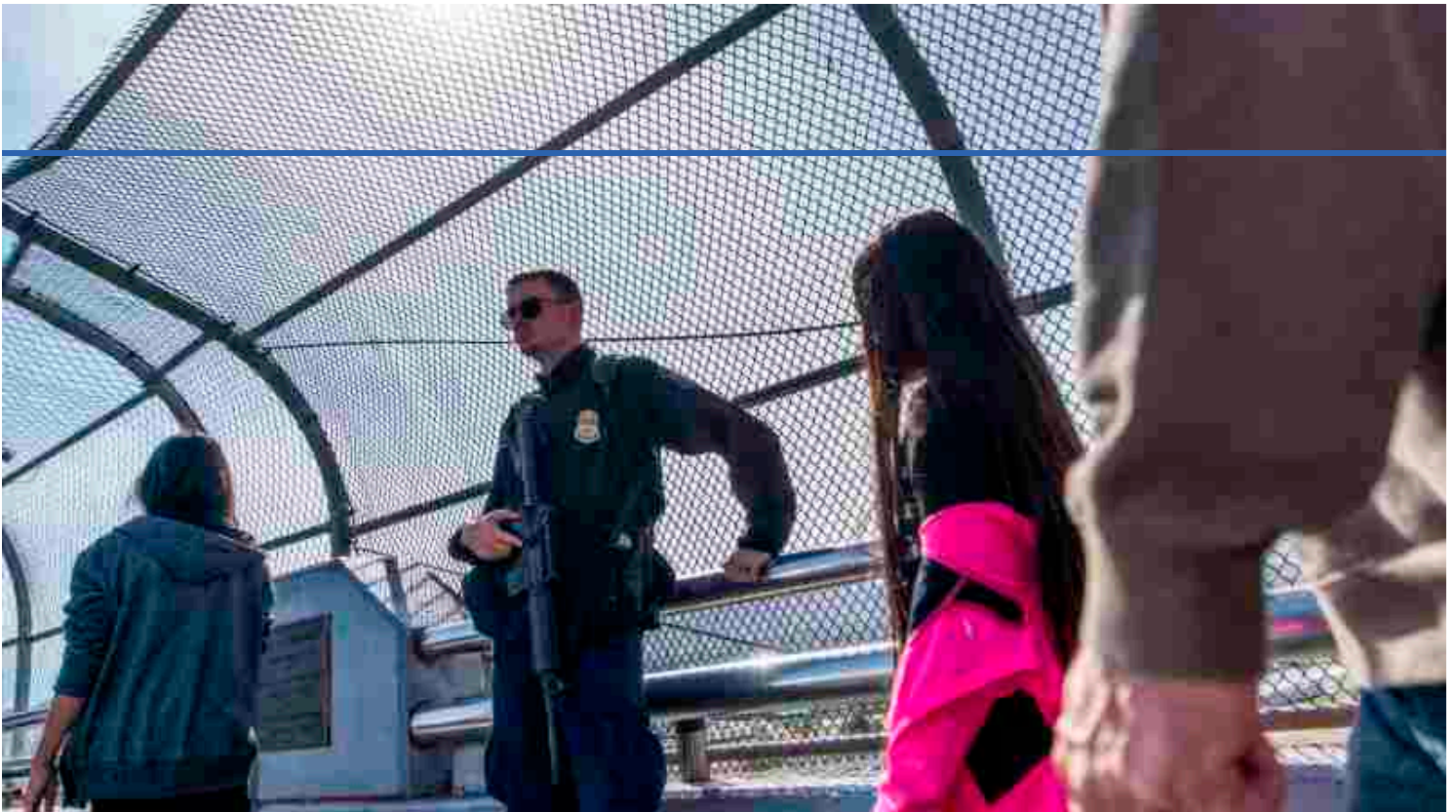
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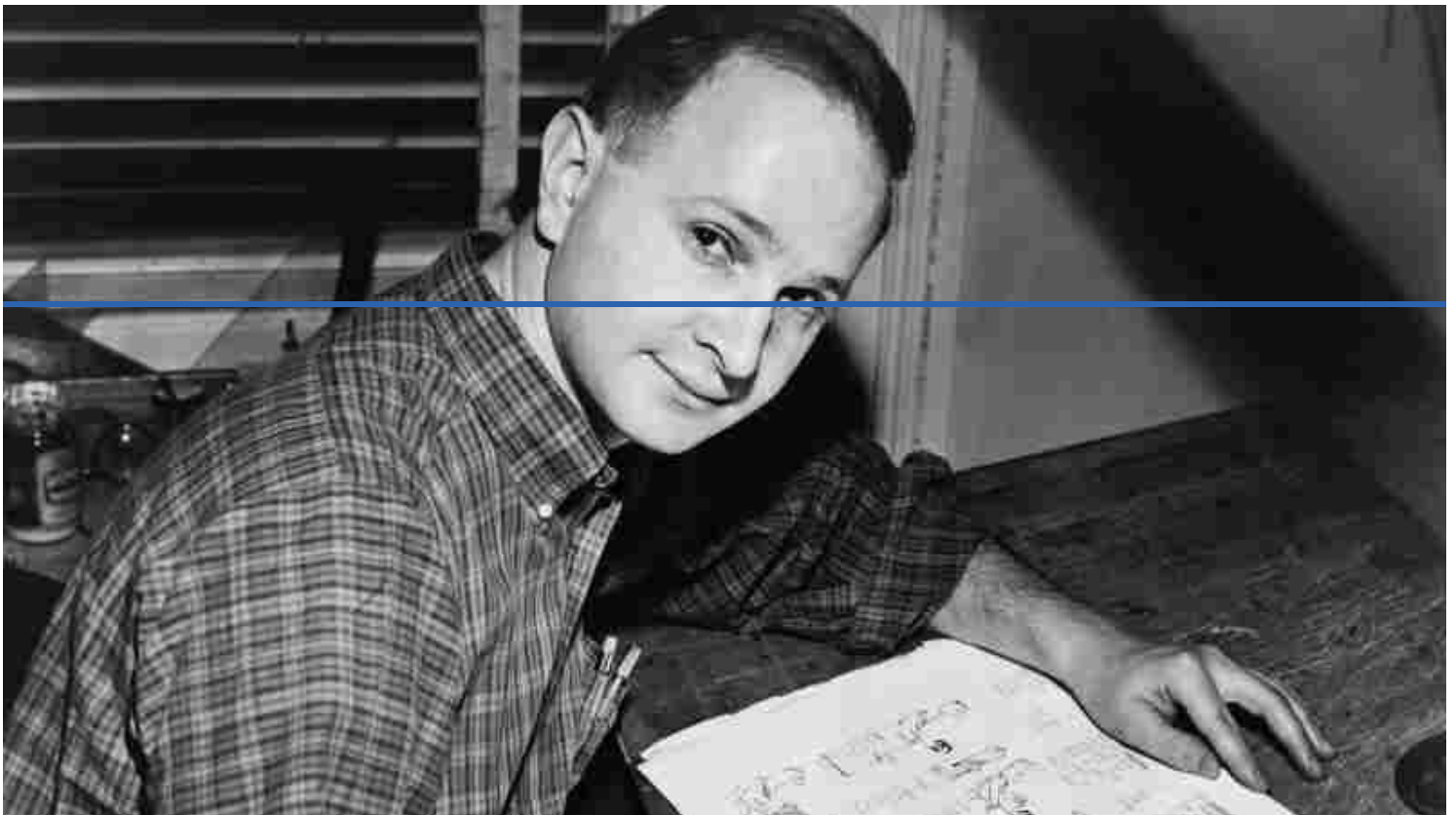
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