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Trump's Jan 6 pardon frees hundreds of Capitol rioters from prison

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Trump's Jan. 6 pardons signal less constrained second term

- Summary
- Poll shows nearly 60% oppose pardoning all Capitol rioters
- Trump's decision criticized by police, families and some Republicans
- Pardons include leaders of Proud Boys and Oath Keepers

WASHINGTON, Jan 21 (Reuters) - Hundreds of [Donald Trump](#) supporters who had been serving prison sentences for participating in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol were freed on Tuesday, after the new president pardoned more than 1,500 people, including some who assaulted police officers.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons said 211 people had been released from federal facilities following Trump's order.

Trump's sweeping pardon — which went further than his allies had signaled they expected — drew condemnation from police who battled the mob, their families and lawmakers, including some of the president's fellow Republicans.

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A majority of Americans disapproved of Trump's decision, a [Reuters/Ipsos poll completed on Tuesday](#) found.

The decision was also criticized by the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the largest police union in the U.S. that had endorsed Trump in the 2024 election. The FOP and the International Association of Chiefs of Police said in a joint statement they were "deeply discouraged" by the pardons.

Among those released was Stewart Rhodes, the former leader of the far-right Oath Keepers group, who had been serving an 18-year sentence after being found guilty of plotting to use force to prevent Congress from certifying Trump's 2020 defeat to Joe Biden.

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"It's redemption, but also vindication," Rhodes told reporters outside the Washington D.C. jail, where a crowd of [Trump](#) supporters waited for more prisoners to be released.

Rhodes, who did not enter the Capitol on Jan. 6, said he did not have any regrets and still believed Trump's false claims that he lost that election due to fraud. Rhodes had been released earlier in the day from a separate facility in Cumberland, Maryland, after Trump commuted his sentence.

Trump ordered clemency for everyone charged in the assault, when a mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol in an unsuccessful effort to overturn his election defeat. Some 140 police officers were injured in the rampage, which sent lawmakers running for their lives.

'THE MAN WHO KILLED MY BROTHER'

Craig Sicknick, whose brother, Capitol Police Officer [Brian Sicknick](#), was assaulted during the riot and died of multiple strokes the next day, called Trump "pure evil" on Tuesday.

"The man who killed my brother is now president," he told Reuters.

"My brother died in vain. Everything he did to try to protect the country, to protect the Capitol - why did he bother?" Sicknick said. "What Trump did is despicable, and it proves that the United States no longer has anything that resembles a justice system."

Trump's order extended from the people who committed only misdemeanors such as trespassing all the way to [those who served as ringleaders](#) for the assault.

Nearly 60% of respondents in the two-day Reuters/Ipsos poll, which was conducted starting immediately [after Trump took office](#) on Monday, said he should not pardon all of the Capitol defendants.

One of Trump's fellow Republicans, Senator Thom Tillis, said sparing rioters who assaulted police sent a wrong message.

"I saw an image today in my news clippings of the people who were crushing that police officer. None of them should get a pardon," Tillis told Reuters in a hallway interview. "You make this place less safe if you send the signal that police officers could potentially be assaulted and there is no consequence."

Others welcomed Trump's decision. Republican Representative Lauren Boebert said she would offer tours of the Capitol to defendants after they are released.



Item 1 of 8 Edward "Jake" Lang, one of the defendants who was released after being pardoned, holds a Bible while hugging a friend outside of the DC Central Detention Facility, January 21. REUTERS/Jon Cherry

[1/8]Edward "Jake" Lang, one of the defendants who was released after being pardoned, holds a Bible while hugging a friend outside of the DC Central Detention Facility, January 21. REUTERS/Jon Cherry [Purchase Licensing Rights. opens new tab](#)

Among those released earlier in the day was Enrique Tarrio, the former leader of the far-right [Proud Boys](#) group.

Tarrio was not present at the Capitol on Jan. 6, but was sentenced to 22 years, longer than for any other defendant, after he was convicted of seditious conspiracy for his role in planning the attack.

CAMPAIGN PROMISE

Trump's pardons went further than many of his allies had signaled. Both Vice President JD Vance and Trump's attorney general choice Pam Bondi had previously said they believed people who committed violence would not be pardoned.

White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt defended the pardons, claiming without evidence that many of the convictions were politically motivated.

"President Trump campaigned on this promise," she said on Fox News. "It should come as no surprise that he delivered on it on Day One."

More than 1,000 defendants pleaded guilty rather than go to trial, including 327 who pleaded guilty to felonies, according to Justice Department statistics.

One protester, Ashli Babbitt, was shot dead by police during the Jan. 6 riot as she tried to force her way into the House of Representatives chamber. Four officers who responded that day later died by suicide.

Trump's were not the only pardons on Monday: Outgoing President Joe Biden in his final hours in office [pre-emptively pardoned five members of his own family](#), a move that followed his pardon last year of son Hunter Biden, who had been charged with tax fraud and an illegal firearms purchase.

Republican Senator Susan Collins said both presidents had acted wrongly, calling it a "terrible day for our Justice Department." Tillis also criticized Biden's pardons.

Trump's action shuts the largest investigation in Justice Department history, including more than 300 cases that had still been pending. Prosecutors filed dozens of motions to dismiss cases on Tuesday morning, federal court records showed.

TRIAL COMES TO ABRUPT END

In Washington, the trial of Kenneth Fuller and his son Caleb, who faced felony charges of obstructing police during a civil disorder, came to an abrupt end on Tuesday.

Federal judges in Washington - including some Trump appointees - have handled Capitol riot cases for years and expressed alarm at the events of the day. At a November hearing, Trump-nominated U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols said a blanket Jan. 6 pardon would be "beyond frustrating or disappointing," according to a court transcript.

The judge presiding over the Fullers' trial, Colleen Kollar-Kotelly, ordered it dismissed without discussion, noting that her ruling satisfied what she called Trump's edict.

Speaking to reporters afterward, Caleb Fuller, 22, said that he and his parents popped a bottle of champagne in their hotel room after hearing Trump's decision on Monday night.

Fuller said he didn't witness any violence during the riot.

"I didn't see anyone get hurt," he said. "So I feel like everyone that was around me is deserving of a pardon."

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