

Trump suggests Proud Boys could have a place in American politics as he defends pardons for Capitol rioters



Washington, January 24 (RHC)-- U.S. President Donald Trump on his first full day in office this week defended his decision to grant clemency to people convicted of assaulting police officers during the 2021 attack on the Capitol and suggested there could be a place in American politics for the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, extremist groups whose leaders were convicted of seditious conspiracy against the United States.

The president also continued to dismantle the government's promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion, known as DEI. The White House issued a memo placing on paid leave all federal staff who work on those efforts, with plans to lay them off soon. DEI trainings were also canceled.

Trump's actions were the latest step in his drive to overhaul Washington and erase the work of President Joe Biden's administration.

A priority for Trump has been helping supporters who laid siege to the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, making their pardons his first official action once he returned to the White House after his inauguration on Monday.

Among the roughly 1,500 people pardoned by Trump were more than 200 who pleaded guilty to assaulting police. At least 140 officers were injured during the riot — many beaten, bloodied and crushed by the crowd — as Trump's supporters tried to overturn Biden's election victory.

Before the Capitol attack, the Proud Boys was a group best known for street fights with anti-fascist activists when Trump infamously told the group to "stand back and stand by" during his first debate in 2020 with then-presidential candidate Biden.

The group's former top leader, Enrique Tarrio, and three of his lieutenants were convicted of seditious conspiracy for a violent plot to stop the peaceful transfer of presidential power from Trump to Biden after the 2020 election. Tarrio was serving a 22-year prison sentence, the longest of any Capitol riot case, before Trump pardoned him on Monday. Some members of the group marched in Washington on Monday as Trump was sworn into another term.

When pressed by a reporter about the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers and whether there was a place for them in politics, Trump said: "Well, we have to see. They've been given a pardon. I thought their sentences were ridiculous and excessive."

Trump spoke to reporters at the White House as he highlighted an investment in artificial intelligence infrastructure and declared: "We're back." "I think we're going to do things that people will be shocked at," he said.

When pressed about his decision to free people from prison who were shown on camera viciously attacking Capitol police officers, Trump declared: "I am a friend of police, more than any president who's ever been in this office."

The president on Tuesday said he thought the sentences handed down for actions that day were "ridiculous and excessive" and said: "These are people who actually love our country, so we thought a pardon would be appropriate."

Two major law enforcement groups, The International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Fraternal Order of Police, issued a joint statement saying they were "deeply discouraged" by the pardons and commutations and believed those convicted should serve their full sentences.

The president was also asked about his personal net worth benefitting from his launch of a new cryptocurrency token the day before he was sworn into office, and whether he would continue to sell products to benefit himself while in office.

"I don't know much about it other than I launched it," he said. "I heard it was very successful. I haven't checked it. Where is it today?"

Trump had opened his first full day back in office by demonstrating one of his favored expressions of power: firing people. The new president posted on his Truth social media network early Tuesday that he would fire more than 1,000 presidential appointees "who are not aligned with our vision," including some high-profile names.

Trump fired chef and humanitarian José Andrés from the President's Council on Sports, Fitness and Nutrition, retired Gen. Mark Milley from the National Infrastructure Advisory Council, former State Department official Brian Hook from the board of the Wilson Center and former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms from the President's Export Council.

"YOU'RE FIRED!" Trump said in his post — his catchphrase from his reality TV show, "The Apprentice."

Andrés and Bottoms disputed Trump's assertion that they were fired, saying in posts on social media that they had already submitted their resignations. Biden also removed many Trump appointees in his first days in office, including former press secretary Sean Spicer from the board overseeing the U.S. Naval Academy.

Three major business leaders — SoftBank Group CEO Masayoshi Son, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Oracle Corp. Chairman Larry Ellison — joined Trump on Tuesday afternoon to announce the creation of a new company called Stargate, which would invest up to \$500 billion over the next four years in AI infrastructure, according to the White House.

Initial plans for Stargate, which is beginning construction in Texas, date back to Biden's time in office. Tech news outlet The Information reported on the project in March 2024.

Trump also attended a national prayer service Tuesday morning at Washington National Cathedral, a customary visit for new presidents and one that wrapped up four days of inauguration-related events.

One of the speakers at the interfaith service, the Right Rev. Mariann Budde, the Episcopal bishop of Washington, used her sermon to send a message to Trump, urging compassion for LGBTQ+ people and undocumented migrant workers. "You have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy on the people in our country who are scared now," said Budde, who has criticized Trump before.

Asked afterward by a reporter what he thought of the service, Trump said: "Not too exciting was it. I didn't think it was a good service. They could do much better."

Later in the day, the president met with House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune and other GOP legislators. It was the first formal sit-down for the GOP leadership teams, including House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Senate GOP Whip John Barrasso and the new president, as they chart priorities for using Republican power in Washington. It was more of a date than a marriage, said one person familiar with the private meeting, and granted anonymity to discuss it.

Trump floated many ideas on the priorities ahead — for tax cuts, disaster aid, regulatory reforms and the upcoming March deadline to fund the government — with no clear preference for their various strategies, only that they get the job done. Policy aides Stephen Miller and James Braid joined the talk. The GOP leaders were given chocolate chip cookies and commemorative coins.

After the meeting, Senate Republicans raised the threat of recess appointments to install Trump's Cabinet. Thune pushed for a quick confirmation, but Trump has demanded that Republicans prepare to put the Senate in recess, allowing Trump to appoint his picks to Cabinet posts without Senate

confirmation.

Trump mused Tuesday that the Los Angeles wildfires would give Republicans leverage with Democrats over budget negotiations, because Los Angeles is “going to need a lot of money. And generally speaking, I think you’ll find that a lot of Democrats are going to be asking for help.”

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