



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on January 23, 2024

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America's Political Prisoners: One J6er's Story

Behind me, two heavy steel doors shut with a fatalistic clash that conjures an image of Dante at the portal of Hell: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

I've crossed the perimeter of a federal prison to meet one of the reputed "threats to our democracy," convicted of "storming the Capitol" on January 6, 2021.

A guard nonchalantly ushers me into a dreary room that gives the impression of a neglected small-town DMV. Haphazard rows of cheap plastic chairs litter the floor, and the walls are lined with discolored plastic placards bearing messages such as "NO PROFANITY" and other codes of conduct and dress for visitors. No one has yet bothered to remove the makeshift sign that reads "FACE MASKS REQUIRED BEYOND THIS POINT," though all ignore the directive.

"Just sit anywhere you see three chairs," the guard says, gesturing toward the rows as she takes her place with two colleagues at a raised desk area to the side of the room. The chairs are laid out in groups of four — three side-by-side facing a solo seat. I choose a cluster near the middle, a respectful distance from another visiting couple, where I can see out of a barred window into the interior yard. Even the sun seems to cast a different light there — the fault, perhaps, of the dirty glass.

My eyes wander about as I wait. At one end of the room there is a small, glass-enclosed office with a colorful steam engine smiling out from the far wall and children's toys stacked on top of a short table. A twin chamber next door to the playroom serves as a disorganized storage closet. Empty, unused vending machines, haphazardly covered with blue tarps, fill the back of the visitation room. The ceiling shows signs of water damage.

Just as boredom sets in, I glance back through the window. This time the yard isn't empty. A solitary figure, dressed in khaki trousers and matching short-sleeved shirt, is walking with a more resolute step than did the guard who escorted me. In another place, that clothing might suggest maintenance or janitorial staff. Not here. He is definitely an inmate, and not just any inmate. The man approaching me, unaware that I can already see him, is Kelly Meggs.



Midjourney



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Standing guard: Kelly Meggs, leader of Florida's Oath Keepers, provides security at a January 5, 2021 event outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. (Kelly Meggs)

From Patriot to Prisoner

It's a name that three years ago would not have meant much to anyone outside his circle of family and friends. They knew him as a loving husband, father, and grandfather; a hard-working and honest businessman; a God-fearing Second Amendment advocate; and an animal lover with a penchant for barbecue and cold beer. Today, the federal government identifies this former head of Florida's Oath Keepers as a domestic terrorist and violent insurrectionist.

His has been one of the most high-profile J6 trials — the seditious conspiracy case against Oath Keepers founder Stuart Rhodes and four associates. Meggs' rap sheet paints an ugly picture: seditious conspiracy, conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of an official proceeding, conspiracy to prevent an officer from discharging duties, and tampering with documents or proceedings. Together, these could mean up to 86 years behind bars.

A November 2022 Department of Justice (DOJ) press release announcing his conviction by a "fair and impartial jury" said that immediately after the 2020 election, he and other Oath Keepers "began plotting." They organized "quick reaction force (QRF)" teams "prepared and willing to use force and to transport firearms and ammunition to Washington, D.C." They trained in "paramilitary combat tactics," and brought "knives, batons, camouflaged combat uniforms, tactical vests with plates, helmets, eye protection and radio equipment" to the Capitol to attempt a takeover. They breached the Capitol and used "force against law enforcement officers." Even after January 6, they continued "to plot ... to oppose by force the lawful transfer of presidential power."

Authorities arrested Meggs on February 17, 2021, at his home in Dunnellon, Florida. Thereafter, prosecutors filed a brief quoting numerous texts, emails, and social-media posts from him. These depict him rallying others to "join the fight" on "the 6th when we are all in DC to insurrection," partnering with the Proud Boys and the Three Percenters, and providing lists of suggested provisions. During the trial, prosecutors showed the jury a patch Meggs had worn on January 6. It read: "I don't believe in anything. I'm just here for the violence." After leaving the Capitol, Meggs wrote in an online Signal chat: "We aren't quitting!! We are reloading!!"



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Sentencing came in May 2023, in Washington, D.C., when U.S. District Court Judge Amit Mehta said Meggs was out of touch with reality for asserting that police had invited people inside the Capitol. He also called Meggs absurd for claiming that he would be absolved if only more surveillance camera footage were made public. Prosecutors asked for a 21-year prison sentence; Mehta slapped the 54-year-old with 12, to be followed by three years of supervised release.

In DOJ statements, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland said Meggs' actions posed a "grave threat" to our "democratic institutions." U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Christopher Wray declared that he had laid "siege on the U.S. Capitol." And Matthew Graves, U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, stated that the Oath Keeper conspired with his cohorts "to violently attack our government and our democracy."

So as I sit in this cheerless visitation room watching Meggs approach, I ponder what it will be like to meet the man face-to-face. Then a door next to the playroom opens, and he steps through.

His Story

The first thing I notice is not so much his six-foot-five stature as his broad smile and the friendly look in his eyes. His white mustache and beard give him a paternal air. He strides across the room and greets me warmly. "Hi, Rebecca! Great to see you!" to which I respond tongue in cheek: "Welcome to Memphis!"

We both laugh. Was I worried about meeting a vicious criminal? How silly. We take our seats.

"How are they treating you in here?" I ask, for he was transferred only last October to the Bluff City facility. Most of his incarceration has been spent in the infamous D.C. gulag — including nearly 300 days in solitary confinement. Meggs was responsible for the J6ers' nightly singing of the National Anthem.

He likes his new cellmate, who had prayed that God would send him a J6er as a "celly." The food is decent, as are most of the staff. He shows me the tattoos on his arms: "J6 Political Prisoner" on his right inside forearm, with a giant "We the People" scrolled down the outside, and "GATOR1" on his left wrist, indicating his position in Florida's Oath Keepers. He talks about his job on the prison's facilities, construction, and landscape crew, and improvements they're trying to make as the government converts the complex from medium to low security.

"If you're such a threat to society, why are you in a low-security prison?" I ask.

That question turned the conversation to J6. "We were there to provide a security detail for [former Trump political consultant] Roger Stone. We had Secret Service security clearance," Kelly explains.

Oath Keepers were accustomed to that role, the group being "a non-partisan association of current and formerly serving military, police, and first responders, who pledge ... to defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic" — a description stated on the group's now-defunct website.

"It was a common request, if Oath Keepers could come and help with security," lifetime member Kate Hilton told Lara Logan on Truth in Media's "The Rest of the Story." Members have volunteered their time to work thousands of rescue and security missions since the group's founding in 2009. From riot control in places such as Ferguson, Missouri, to relief efforts following natural disasters, Oath Keepers donated their time, energy, and resources, and none was ever accused of a crime prior to J6.



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“We weren’t there to instigate violence,” Kelly explains. “We were there to prevent people from getting hurt, just as we’ve done many times before.”

He texted Rhodes that morning, “We’re in,” indicating that Secret Service had just admitted his team to the restricted area at the White House Ellipse. “But they used that against me in court, as if I texted him after we went inside the Capitol. The time stamps prove otherwise, but it didn’t matter.”

It wasn’t the only message taken out of context. The conversation surrounding his “insurrection” comment proves it was a reference to the expectation that Trump would invoke the Insurrection Act if militant agitators such as Antifa caused trouble. The president had promised to do so during the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) riots following George Floyd’s death, and Kelly’s texts and social-media posts reveal that he was coordinating with others on the security detail, as well as with D.C. Metro Police and the U.S. Secret Service, to protect against potential left-wing counterprotesters.

“That’s why we wore riot gear to the rally — in case people threw things or attacked us.” It’s also why they had backup QRF teams at the ready. “Security plans often involve backup teams in case they’re needed,” Kelly explains. “The FBI does the same thing.”

Patriot leader: Stuart Rhodes founded the Oath Keepers in 2009, dubbing its members “Guardians of the Republic” who pledge the motto: “Not on our watch!” (AP Images)



The Fateful Afternoon

After the Ellipse rally, Kelly and his companions made their way to the Capitol, where, unbeknownst to them, barricades had already been breached. None of them knew they were entering a restricted area.

In fact, according to their security clearance, they were supposed to report to an outside staging area. “We couldn’t find it, so we didn’t know exactly what to do.” They spotted friends standing on stairs outside the east entrance and filed up in their now-infamous stack formation to join them — nothing nefarious, simply a routine method to avoid getting separated in the crowd.

“There wasn’t any violence. Everyone was just singing patriotic songs like *God Bless America* and waving flags and banners,” Kelly remembers. “Then we heard a loud bang behind us and climbed to the top of the stairs to see what happened.” Someone had opened the doors from the inside, and when the crowd outside saw it, they surged forward. “There wasn’t anything you could do to stop from going in at



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that point.” Worried that the onrush would trample his wife, Connie, who had been with him all day, Kelly warned her, “Stay on your feet! No matter what happens, stay on your feet!”

Once in the building, they found themselves on the edge of the Rotunda (underneath the Capitol’s central dome) and near the hallway leading to the House speaker’s office, where they saw Capitol Hill Police Officer Harry Dunn.

“He was freaking out, screaming and yelling,” recalls Kelly. “He was saying things like ‘They’re killing us!’ and something about if he gets taken out, he’ll take a lot of people with him. And he had a rifle. So another Oath Keeper, Ken Harrelson, talked with him and helped calm him down.”

Harrelson then rallied his fellows, who stood guard around Dunn, protecting him for more than five minutes. “On his first FBI 302, he acknowledged that we helped him, forming a barrier between him and the crowd,” Kelly recounts.

An FBI 302 is an interview report form used by agents during investigations. Those associated with Kelly’s trial are under a court order preventing them from being made public. However, The Blaze investigative journalist Steve Baker obtained two of them and said he found deceptions.

Kelly says he found several as well. On his second 302, Dunn waffled, according to Kelly. “I didn’t tell them they could stand there. They just did,” Kelly paraphrases. By the third interview, Dunn’s story had taken a drastic turn, Kelly says. “They were yelling at me.” Then, in court on October 31, 2022, Dunn testified, “They were trying to get past me, and I stopped them.”

Independent journalist Stephen Horn captured the encounter on video during two hours of continuous footage. It should have cleared matters up, but when the video was shown in court, the portion that displayed Oath Keepers aiding Harry Dunn was mysteriously missing. “As soon as you caught a glimpse of me off to the right, the screen went black,” Kelly says. “It stayed that way for about 30 seconds, and when it came back up, Horn is standing in the Rotunda.”

Kelly was told it was the only copy of that video, but last summer, another J6 family in a separate trial produced the unedited version. “It’s not 30 seconds that’s missing. There are three minutes missing from the version they showed in my trial!” Kelly exclaims.

He believes those three minutes would reveal the truth. Without them, “it was our word against theirs,” Kelly laments, citing Dunn’s testimony as well as that of U.S. Capitol Police Special Agent David Lazarus. The latter testified in court that he ran past Dunn outside the speaker’s office several times and witnessed his colleague’s “antagonistic” encounter with the Oath Keepers while he himself “rescued” some of Pelosi’s staffers.

But this past November, never-before-released photos from Capitol security cameras show that Lazarus was elsewhere when the Oath Keepers were helping Harry Dunn. U.S. Representative Barry Loudermilk (R-Ga.), chairman of the Committee on House Administration’s Subcommittee on Oversight, gave Baker time-stamped screen shots of Lazarus’ movements that day.

“What he testified to witnessing between Dunn and four Oath Keepers on #Jan6, he simply could not have seen, because Lazarus was in another Senate office building across the street from Constitution Ave.,” wrote Baker in a post on X.

The photos are part of 40,000 hours of Capitol surveillance footage being released over time by U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) beginning last November. Loudermilk’s subcommittee is slowly



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uploading portions of that video to an online viewing room.

Will it help Kelly? He's not convinced. After all, at sentencing, Judge Mehta admitted that neither he nor his companions assaulted police.

Kelly wonders if it could help his wife. Connie Meggs is currently serving her 15-month sentence in a federal detention center in Miami. "She went into [Bureau of Prisons] custody on Halloween," Kelly winces. "Way to ruin it for my grandkids."

Connie was arrested the same day as her husband, and spent 45 days in jail and then 2½ years on home detention with an ankle monitor. Baker reported on X that during Connie's sentencing, "Mehta falsely stated: 'You decided to come to Washington with a truck full of guns. You decided to go up those steps. You decided to follow Kelly Meggs into Speaker Pelosi's suite.'"

But neither of them brought guns to D.C., nor did they enter Pelosi's office. The reality is that the couple spent less than 20 minutes inside the Capitol, damaged nothing, assaulted no one. In fact, as they were leaving, Kelly stopped to help Capitol Police officers remove protesters from the building.

National hero? Presidential Citizens Medal recipient and former Capitol Hill Police Officer Harry Dunn testified against Oath Keepers and has publicly complained about suffering PTSD from January 6. He is now running for office in Maryland's 3rd Congressional District. (AP Images)



Double Standard

A truth-be-damned approach and brutal sentencing seem par for the course for J6ers. Take Enrique Tarrío, leader of the Proud Boys, who is currently serving 22 years, though he was not in Washington, D.C., nor did he commit any acts of violence in relation to the 2020 election. Internal messages among Proud Boys members were marked by the same boastful bravado as that of the Oath Keepers, but U.S. government investigators could not find a single communication among more than half a million in which Tarrío ordered anyone to interfere with the election certification, let alone cause an insurrection. In fact, a week before January 6, their leader reminded Proud Boys to obey police lines.

"The government's entire case rested on the idea that the Proud Boys had a secret and unspoken plan to overthrow America's democratic republic and replace it with a dictatorship led by former president Donald J. Trump," explain Alex Gutentag and Michael Shellenberger on their Public Substack. However,



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they say, the evidence demonstrated no plan, secret or implicit, and “the idea that there was [a plan] is a conspiracy theory.”

Nevertheless, not only is “Tarrío’s sentence longer than the median time served in state prison for murder, rape and other violent offenses,” but “his sentence is also significantly longer than if you light someone on fire in the name of Black Lives Matter.” They cite the case of Montez Lee, an arsonist who killed a man during a 2020 riot protesting George Floyd’s death in Minneapolis.

In a bitterly ironic twist, on the day of Tarrío’s sentencing, the Department of Justice argued on behalf of Lee, cutting their usual sentencing guidelines for his crime in half — from 20 down to 10 years. In a sentencing memorandum, DOJ claimed that Lee was among “many people who felt angry, frustrated and disenfranchised,” and in his defense even quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from a 1966 CBS interview: “We’ve got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard.”

Therefore, “in demanding harsh sentences for nonviolent January 6 rioters and leniency for violent BLM rioters,” reads the Public post, “Biden’s Justice Department is openly engaging in political prosecutions.”

Moreover, consider the disparity in numbers.

Official estimates put 2020 BLM riot participants in the millions. Nationwide, they caused at least 25 deaths (including a retired police captain), hundreds of injuries, and billions of dollars in property damage. Yet, according to the Associated Press, federal prosecutors brought charges against a scant 300 people connected with those riots. In local jurisdictions across the country, “most citations and charges against George Floyd protesters were ultimately dropped, dismissed or otherwise not filed,” reported *The Guardian*.

In contrast, federal prosecutors have charged more than 1,200 people connected with J6, though only about 2,000 protesters entered the Capitol. And that’s only the beginning. Early in January, Graves announced the Biden administration’s intent to begin prosecuting people who never entered the building.

Whistleblowers

However, it seems that not all present on the Hill that day were actual protesters. In 2022, several FBI whistleblowers revealed that undercover officers, confidential informants, and agency assets swelled the J6 crowds at the Capitol. Director Wray had previously dodged questions on that topic before the House Homeland Security Committee, calling it “categorically false” to suggest that FBI agents “in some way instigated or orchestrated January 6.”

Louisiana Republican Clay Higgins was the congressman interrogating him. “The FBI assets that were dressed as Trump supporters ... were there to specifically wave in the Trump supporters that had gathered outside the Capitol,” Higgins revealed on “The Tucker Carlson Encounter” in January. (See “Insurrection or FedGov Operation?”)

U.S. House investigations leading to that conclusion were spurred by whistleblowers such as FBI intelligence analyst George Hill, who divulged that the agency refused to release video to its own Boston Field Office for fear of incriminating undercover agents or confidential informants.

For their heroism, say the whistleblowers, their lives have been ruined. “The FBI will crush you. This



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government will crush you and your family if you try to expose the truth about things they are doing that are wrong,” testified whistleblower and U.S. military veteran Garrett O’Boyle before the House Judiciary Committee in May 2023.

Retaliation is a typical tactic of self-righteous leftists, who actually support violence if it forwards their subversive agenda. Vice President Kamala Harris showed herself a champion of George Floyd rioters in a June 1, 2020, tweet: “If you’re able to, chip in now to the @MNFreedomFund to help post bail for those protesting on the ground in Minnesota.”

Massachusetts Democrat and Squad member Representative Ayanna Pressley fell in lockstep on MSNBC’s *AM Joy* program, encouraging BLM rioters and looters. “There needs to be unrest in the streets for as long as there’s unrest in our lives,” she stoked.

“Too many see the protests as the problem. No, the problem is what forced your fellow citizens to take to the streets: persistent, poisonous inequities and injustice,” wailed CNN anchor Chris Cuomo, in support of George Floyd dissidents. Ignoring the First Amendment (“the right of the people peaceably to assemble”), this brother of then-New York Governor Andrew Cuomo demanded, “Show me where it says protesters are supposed to be polite and peaceful.”

Harsh Sentencing

Such concessions are not extended to J6ers, least of all by Biden’s so-called Justice Department. Kelly points out what he calls an unprecedented and “sinister” application of law that judges in J6 trials are relying on to “pull off these harsher, unconstitutional sentences.”

They have consistently invoked 18 U.S.C. § 1512, a law related to “tampering with a witness, victim or an informant.” Part (c) of the statute was added in 2002 as part of the Sarbanes-Oxley response to the Enron scandal, and it includes an umbrella statement that condemns anyone who “(2) otherwise obstructs, influences, or impedes any official proceeding, or attempts to do so.” That offense incurs a sentence of up to 20 years.

Kelly says that the court applied 1512(c)(2) to him for two reasons. First, “for obstructing an official proceeding which I was not near until 30 minutes after it adjourned and left four hours before it restarted.” Second, because he deleted an Oath Keepers group chat concerning their J6 security detail from his phone on January 7, one day after the incident and more than a month before his arrest. “Of course I deleted it. It’s what I do every time we finish doing security. I didn’t need it anymore.”

Moreover, Kelly explains, previous case law shows a “clear and solid foundation of applying 1512(c) to judicial proceedings” that involve evidence tampering. Judges are now ignoring that precedent by labeling *legislators’* certification of presidential election results as a *judicial* proceeding. Furthermore, they are disregarding the more obvious 18 U.S.C. § 1505, “obstruction of proceedings before departments, agencies and committees,” which carries a sentence of not more than five years. “Had I actually committed an act of terrorism,” Kelly exclaims, “the time would have been limited to eight years maximum!” He rhetorically asks, “Why use 1512 other than its 20-year max sentencing?”

“If you notice, all of the January 6th cases reference other January 6th cases in determining that the charges are correct,” he notes. “This is judicial collusion the likes of which no one has ever seen before.”



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Several J6ers have petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to challenge DOJ's use of the statute. Oral arguments will take place this spring, with a decision due before the Court's recess in the summer.

So J6ers are left waiting. But Kelly is making the most of his time. Along with his job, he plays in a couple of bands at the prison, an appropriate pastime in Elvis Presley's hometown.

He has also completed one book and is working on another. The first, composed for charity and due for publication this spring, is entitled *One Question Remains*. "It is an overview of the current political situation, the military-industrial complex," the prison system, and January 6, Kelly explains. The second book will tell his personal story, which is still unfolding.

Hope Amid Suffering

It's also multifaceted. First, there's the financial annihilation. Capital One canceled the Meggs' credit cards "for business reasons," despite Kelly's stellar credit and payment history. "Bank of America closed our account only after reporting us to the FBI for being in DC on January 6th. This happened without a subpoena; they just turned over our personal finance records to the feds," he says. His investment company also closed his accounts. Only local credit unions will service the family now.

Kelly's retirement is gone as well. "I had to sell a rental home and cash out my 401(k) just so my family could live for the past three years." Between attorney fees and regular monthly expenses on his five-acre farm, Kelly worries they will lose everything.

Yet "once you get past the horror of having everything you've worked for your whole life ripped apart and destroyed, the financial loss is the least of your worries." What concerns him most is what "can never be recovered — time with my family."

He longs for his wife, with whom communication has been entirely cut off since her incarceration. "We've been married for 26 years. I haven't seen her in over a year and have seen her only one time with a brief hug in three years." A line from a favorite song, "To you, I'm just a man. To me, you're all I am," stays with him daily. "I've never loved her more than I do now. But when you're ripped apart for days then weeks then months and years, it takes you way beyond anything you can imagine."

His eyes glow with pride when he talks about his son, Zack, now age 25, who manages the farm and finances. His daughter lives in a separate house on the property with her three children. Without a father in the picture, they have now also lost both grandparents. Kelly's "little buddy" was only nine years old when authorities ripped his grandfather away. The toddler, then two, no longer has her "Pappa."

"She would come to my big chair with her bottle every night when she got tired and put her hands up," Kelly remembers as tears well. "She would lay on my chest, and I would rub her back and hair until she fell asleep. Every night I still think about it and get choked up. She is almost five now, and those years were stolen not only from me, but also from her."

The youngest "doesn't even know me." With all the financial constraints and more than 700 miles separating them, visits aren't possible. It's particularly cruel, since "the same type of prison I am in sits just 30 minutes from my house."

"These are the things that bother me most. They took time away from my family that can never, ever be replaced. I can always make money again, but I cannot ever get those years with my grandkids back."



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He sums up the plight of J6ers:

The attack on J6 defendants doesn't stop after arrest. It has just begun. They said it from the very start: "We want to make sure no one ever questions our authority again."

They knew we were innocent. The lead prosecutor sent an email to our attorneys that said we did no planning to enter the Capitol on J6. Yet we are charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government?

Our government is completely out of control. They are no longer protecting life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They are derailing it in the interest of lining their own pockets and pushing an evil, demonic agenda against our republic.

The idea of a Deep State or One World Government or Global Elites is no longer a conspiracy theory. It is rampant everywhere, from transgender indoctrination of our children to climate change to the invasion at our southern border. It's out in the open. Why? They control the media, the corporations, the banks. They poison our population with vaccines and send our money overseas to fund a war that we started. If you stand up, they will succeed with their false charges against you, because they control the judges.

"They wanted me to lie and tell a false story about Stuart Rhodes, but I refuse to lie," Kelly asserts, having been told by an attorney that prosecutors dangled that carrot in return for a plea bargain. "So they lied about me. They had officers lie on the stand, and when we asked for a new cross examination after we discovered the lie, we were denied. They even got one of my attorneys disbarred."

I ask Kelly for the solution. "The opposite of evil is good," he responds. "Good has much more power than evil. That's how we ended the *One Question Remains* book. It's a challenge to Christians to get involved politically and vote our country back from the ground up."

We're interrupted by a loud voice from behind me, which jolts us both. "Fifteen minutes!" shouts one of the guards. Kelly and I instinctively glance at a small clock on the wall and look at each other in shock. I've been there for nearly four hours!

"Time flies when you're having fun," I joke.

He grins broadly and thanks me for the visit. But on a serious note, he leaves me with a final thought:

"I never considered myself a patriot. A patriot goes into battle knowing he may die. I just went to a rally to do security to protect people and speak up against what I felt was wrong with an election," he says.

"They put this moniker on all of us J6 guys. We never asked for it. But I can promise you we do wear it with honor. When we sing the Anthem, we scream the last words of the line 'that our flag was STILL THERE,' knowing the country our Founding Fathers built is STILL THERE! It may be the death of us, but we will never stop singing that song or wearing that badge of honor."

Author's note: Kelly asked me to thank everyone who has helped him, especially people who have sent letters of support through the years. Many of those do not include a return address; he believes fear of retaliation may play a role in that. He wants everyone to know that he fully understands, but it is also important to him that they realize how much their support is appreciated. Those who wish to contact him or any other J6ers can find their contact information at [PatriotMailProject.com](#). Support and



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prayers can also be sent to their struggling families at
[GiveSendGo.com](#).



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