



Written by [James Murphy](#) on April 7, 2023

Tennessee Legislature Ousts Two Democrats for Riotous Anti-gun Stunt

The Tennessee Legislature [expelled two Democratic members](#) from the state's General Assembly on Thursday, after they led an out-of-control anti-gun protest while the legislature was in session on March 30. Representatives Justin Jones from Nashville and Justin Pearson from Memphis were both removed from their positions after the GOP's supermajority voted by a two-thirds majority of the total membership to oust them.

Jones, the clear leader of the riotous event, was ushered out in a 72-25 vote. Pearson was removed in a 69-26 vote. A third member, Democrat Gloria Johnson from Knoxville barely survived being ousted in a 65 -30 vote.



State Rep. Justin Jones following his expulsion (AP Images)

Jones had been previously [arrested](#) by capitol police after allegedly assaulting House Speaker Glen Casada and Representative Debra Moody by throwing coffee at them in an elevator in 2019.

The Tennessee Constitution allows for members to “punish its members for disorderly behavior, and, with the concurrence of two-thirds, expel a member.” But the provision has only been used three other times since the end of the Civil War and, apparently, never for violating rules of decorum.

During the March 30 events, Jones, Pearson interrupted House proceedings by bringing in a bull horn and leading the public gallery, which was angry because of the recent Nashville school shooting in which a transgender person killed six, in anti-gun protest chants.

Johnson was standing with Jones and Pearson but did not use the bull horn or scream or shout.

Officially, Jones and Pearson were ousted for rules violations. The resolutions to remove Jones and Pearson noted that the accused “did knowingly and intentionally bring disorder and dishonor to the House of Representatives,” then “began shouting without recognition,” and “proceeded to disrupt the proceedings of the House Representatives.”

Speaking on the House floor for twenty minutes, Jones defended himself and his actions.

“What is happening here today is a farce of democracy,” Jones declared. “What is happening here today is a situation in which the jury has already publicly announced the verdict. What we see today is just a spectacle. What we see today is a lynch mob assembled to not lynch me, but our democratic process.”

Since Jones and Pearson are black, while Johnson is white, perhaps it was inevitable that racism was claimed to be the reason that Jones and Pearson were expelled, while Johnson was barely saved.

Johnson herself made that very point while speaking with CNN: “It might have to do with the color of



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our skin.”

“I think it’s pretty clear, I’m a sixty-year-old white woman. And they are two young black men,” Johnson said. “I was talked down to as a woman, mansplained to — but it was completely different from the questioning that they got.”

But while Johnson stood next to Jones and Pearson during the protest, she reportedly did not shout or speak on the bull horn.

“That’s a false narrative on her part,” current House Speaker Cameron Sexton told Fox News. “She had two attorneys in the well, and if you go back and look at opening, her attorney...came out strong, made a lot of points that she was not as active a participant as the other two, she didn’t grab the bullhorn, she didn’t scream and yell.”

So, even Johnson’s own attorneys made the case that she wasn’t as involved as Jones and Pearson, which likely led to her being held less responsible for the riotous behavior.

The GOP supermajority insists that the action was proper in order to protect the House from unruly behavior.

“This is just not about one specific instance or one specific rule that may have been broken. The rules here are for order,” said Representative Johnny Garrett, a Republican. “We owe that to the constituents that we represent across this state. “We owe that to the constituents that we represent across this state.”

“What they did was try to hold up the people’s business on the House floor instead of doing it the way that they should have done it, which they have the means to do,” Sexton said. “They actually thought that they would be arrested, and so they decided that them being a victim was more important than focusing on the six victims from Monday. And that’s appalling.”

Jones, however, claimed it was an attempt to subvert the will of the voters.

“Your extreme measure is an attempt to subvert the will of voters who democratically elected us as representatives to speak and to passionately fight for them,” Jones declared.

As obnoxious as their anti-gun stunt was, there’s a good chance that Jones and Pearson’s removal is only temporary.

County representatives will next appoint temporary replacements for Jones and Pearson until special elections can be held. Jones and Pearson are not barred from running for those same seats so, in the end, their removal may turn out to be as much of stunt as the original protest was.



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