

United States Department of Justice

Press Conference

Friday, January 15, 2021, 1:00 PM Eastern

PARTICIPANTS

Marc Raimondi - *Spokesman*

Michael Sherwin - *Interim United States Attorney for the District of Columbia*

Steven D'Antuono - *FBI Assistant Director in Charge of Washington Field Office*

Ashan Benedict - *Special Agent in Charge of ATF Office in Washington*

PRESENTATION

Operator

Good day, and welcome to the Department of Justice media call. All participants will be in listen-only mode. Should you need assistance, please signal a conference specialist by pressing "*" followed by "0". After today's presentation, there will be an opportunity to ask questions. You may join the queue at any time during the presentation by pressing "*" then "1" on your touchtone phone. To withdraw your question, please press "*" then "2". Please note this event is being recorded.

I would now like to turn the conference over to Marc Raimondi. Please go ahead.

Marc Raimondi

Thank you, and thank you all for joining us. We are a few minutes late because we wanted to wait until the mayor of DC was able to finish her press conference because I think hers went a little late.

We have three speakers today that will give brief remarks, and then we have time for a few questions, and then we will let these guys that are leading the investigations and the prosecutions get back to work. The first that is going to speak is the Acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Washington, Michael Sherwin. He is going to be followed by the FBI Assistant Director in Charge of the Washington Field Office Steven D'Antuono, and then we have an individual, Ashan Benedict, who is the Special Agent in Charge of the ATF Office here in Washington. Again he hasn't been one on these calls previously. It is Ashan, A-S-H-A-N Benedict, B-E-N-E-D-I-C-T.

Without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to Michael Sherwin, but I would ask that if you do think you're going to ask a question, start queuing up now, I believe it is "*" "1" to queue up so we can get right into the Q&A phase and then let these guys get back to their day job. Thank you. Go ahead.

Michael Sherwin

So hello, everyone. It is Mike Sherwin here. So a quick update with where we are at in terms of prosecution and the investigation, and then I will turn it over to my colleagues here with the Bureau and ATF.

So as of this morning 8 AM, we have currently 175 open investigations that are subjects that we are currently looking at related to the violence in the capital. That would include cases of violence outside the Capitol and also on the Capitol grounds, and also inside the Capitol. Of--as related to those 275 open investigations, we anticipate that that is going to grow easily past 300 probably by the end of the day and then exponentially increase into the weekend and next week.

So again, as of 8 AM this morning, in terms of cases, prosecutions we have opened 98 criminal cases in terms of criminal cases that have been filed, and the majority of those cases are federal felony cases, so I think I tried to articulate this earlier this week that, initially, we were looking to fix, fine and charge the low hanging fruit, the individuals that we could easily roundup in charge. A great bulk of those were misdemeanor cases, but as the investigation continues, as the days and weeks progress, we are looking at more significant federal felony charges, and that is exactly what we are doing in partnership with our local and federal partners.

So some of the cases that I think want to just highlight, they are emblematic of what we are trying to do here are the following in terms of trying to really focus on some of the violent offenders both inside and outside the Capitol. Some of these cases include Mr. Peter Stager; this was the individual out of Arkansas. He was charged with a federal felony and arrested yesterday in Arkansas, and this was the individual I think that's really the height of hypocrisy that was beating an MPD officer with a flagpole, and at the other end of that flagpole was attached the American flag and look as a veteran I found that case even more egregious, the act of again just the hypocrisy of Mr. Stager's actions.

Another case focusing on violence that was Mr. Steger's case was violence on law enforcement, and we are specifically focusing on that but also, unfortunately, as this case goes on, we are seeing indications that law enforcement officers, both former and current, may have been off duty and participating in this riot activity and I think as we said earlier, we don't care what your profession is, who you are, who you are affiliated with if you were conducting or engaged in criminal activity we will charge you, and you will be arrested, and that is exactly what we are doing.

For example, yesterday, two off-duty Rocky Mountain, Virginia police officers were charged federally and arrested in Virginia for their participation in the rioting at the Capitol. Another case of interest that also came up was Robert Stanford out of Pennsylvania. Again I think this is another case the height of hypocrisy. Mr. Sanford is a retired firefighter, and he was charged with a federal felony with attacking MPD officers. He actually threw a fire extinguisher at them and hit one in the head. Now there's some confusion. This is unrelated to the death of the CP officer that perished, that died unfortunately during these riots, but again this is just another indication of our aggressiveness to try to find and charge immediately the most egregious actors.

A final note here before I turn it over to my colleagues we believe, and we are hopeful, and we believe that these cases are having impact. Over the past few days, we have had several people given the way we are charging these cases and what we are charging them with these federal felonies have self-reported and turned themselves in with attorneys, and we encourage the public to do that, and we believe that will continue as the investigation goes on. So at this point, I'm going to turn over the discussion to my colleagues at the FBI.

Marc Raimondi

Okay. This is Marc Raimondi again. I apologize for not mentioning this at the beginning of the call, but the attribution is this is on the record. It can be recorded for use by the broadcast. You can live tweet, stream, whatever you want to do with this audio. We apologize that we did not have a video feed for this one. Our press conference room is now a security operations center at DOJ, so we are on audio-only. Go ahead, Steven.

Steven D'Antuono

Thanks, Marc. So again, this is Steven D'Antuono. I'm an Assistant Director in Charge of the Washington field office with the FBI. We are here to provide an update on our progress in the investigation of last week's siege at the Capitol. I want to assure you that an enormous amount of work has been done in the past nine days. We are making progress on all fronts. The pipe bomb case, the rioting, and violence investigation, and the death of the U.S. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick.

This is a large puzzle with so many pieces we are working diligently to put those pieces together. We continue to work closely with our partners in the DC U.S. Attorney's Office as well

as with other law enforcement partners here and across the country. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their partnership and collaboration in tracking down, arresting, and charging those responsible for the Capitol riots. FBI personnel continue to work day and night gathering evidence, sharing intelligence, and working with federal prosecutors to bring charges.

To date, we have identified more than 270 suspects involved in criminal activity in and around the capital. The FBI has arrested more than 40 subjects, and with the help of our partners around the country, more than 100 individuals have been taken into custody. We are methodically following all of the leads to identify those responsible and hold them accountable.

The American people have played a critical role in assisting us with these efforts. On behalf of the FBI and our law enforcement partners, I want to thank the American people for your incredible outpouring of tips to help us bring these perpetrators to justice. We are continuing to review them all. We ask that you keep them coming. In the past week alone, we have received nearly 140,000 photos and videos from the public.

To those of you who took part in the violence, here is something you should know every FBI field office in the country is looking for you. As a matter of fact, even your friends and family are tipping us off, so you might want to consider turning yourself in instead of wondering when we are going to come knocking on your door because we will. If you have tips, no matter how small, please contact 1-800-Call-FBI or submit photos and videos to [FBI.gov/USCapitol](https://www.fbi.gov/us-capitol), that's Capitol with an O. Your tips are helping us arrest these people on a variety of federal charges.

Today I want to focus on a particular egregious charge, assault on a law enforcement officer. Law enforcement officers risk their lives each and every day to protect the rights of the American people. Investigating violent assaults on these officers is a priority for the FBI and our partners. If you attack one of us, you attack us all, and as Mike, as acting U.S. Attorney Mike Sherwin just stated, we arrested several first subjects on these charges one was Peter Stager as he mentioned of Arkansas, who had a video, was captured on video using an American flag, the symbol of our democracy to repeatedly strike down a DC Metropolitan Police Officer who was dragged down the Capitol steps and forced into a prone position by a large group of rioters.

Also, like Mike said, we arrested Robert Sanford, a retired Pennsylvania firefighter who has allegedly struck three officers with a fire extinguisher, and these are just two examples of the brutal assaults on law enforcement this week. We are working with the Metropolitan Police Department and the U.S. Capitol Police to identify and investigate all of these and other violent attacks on those who were doing their duty to protect the very symbol of our democracy, the U.S. Capitol.

The tips we have received from the public have been critical in furthering these investigations. You can see photos of additional suspects of assault on a law enforcement officer and help us find them by viewing our seeking information posters at [www.FBI.gov](https://www.fbi.gov). This is an unprecedented incident. If this was an investigation--if this investigation was a football game, we would still be in the first quarter so let this be a reminder the full force of the FBI is investigating the heinous acts we saw last week, and we will leave no stone unturned until we locate and apprehend anyone who participated in the violence. Thank you.

Marc Raimondi

All right. Now speaking is Ashan Benedict from the ATF, the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Washington DC field office where he is the Special Agent in Charge.

Ashan Benedict

Thank you. Good afternoon everybody. So ATF has been sitting on the inaugural committee for months now, and we routinely support every inauguration in Washington DC, working with Capitol Police, Secret Service, FBI, and MPD to coordinate.

Just to back up to January 6, ATF responded to explosive devices on that day, working with Capitol Police and FBI to secure that scene. As that was unfolding, we ended up supporting U.S. Capitol Police, our brothers and sisters in uniform, during the day of the riots there. We are jointly investigating the pipe bombs and the Molotov cocktails with the FBI and the U.S. Capitol Police, and that investigation is currently ongoing.

Following up on the events of January 6 and the overall planning with the inauguration, we have special agents, explosive specialists, bomb technicians, K-9 units, and our special response team all assigned and deployed in and around Washington DC working with Secret Service, Capitol Police, and our MPD partners moving forward.

Firearms, I ask anybody who is coming in the district to be very cognizant of the laws of the district regarding firearms. Anybody who violates federal law as it pertains to firearms possession or firearms trafficking or the use of firearms they will be prosecuted and investigated by the ATF and prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office, so please folks be mindful of the laws on the books and act smartly. We are asking for the public's assistance to provide information on illegal possession of firearms and explosives related to this event, any other events or in the regular course of business they can contact any one of the ATF field offices around the country or call ATF at 888-ATF-bomb. They can also report anonymously through an ATF app called report it.

Finally, I hope this coming week is safe and lawful and free of these challenges that we have faced in the sixth(SP), and we stand ready to protect the nation's capital and work with our partners to ensure their transition and tradition of a peaceful transition of power here in Washington DC. Thank you.

Marc Raimondi

All right. Thank you all for those brief remarks, and operator, we will open it now for questions, please. Again, queue up "*" "1".

QUESTION AND ANSWER**Operator**

And we will now begin the question and answer session. If you do have a question, please press "*" then "1" on your touchtone phone. If you are using a speakerphone, please pick up your handset before pressing the keys. Please note that you will be limited to one question today. Our first question will come from Alex Mallon with ABC News.

Alex Mallon

Hi, there. I am just wondering if you can confirm that there are currently 37 suspects that are being looked at into the investigation of Officer Brian Sicknick's death, and separately from that, several lawmakers in the past couple of days have come forward and said that raised concerns about their colleagues, fellow lawmakers, potentially other people in the Congress, staffers being involved in potentially assisting some of the rioters that we saw, has that become a part of this investigation yet?

Steven D'Antuono

So I will address your first question first, obviously. So the Officer Sicknick case is an ongoing investigation, and we are looking at everything and anyone that is involved in that matter. And then, as for your--sorry, this is Steve D'Antuono, I'm the ADIC of FBI here at WFO. And then the second question is, the women and men of the FBI again, we leave no stone unturned. We are looking at every piece for this puzzle, it is a very large puzzle, as you can imagine, and we are taking every piece that we possibly can and finding every piece to put that puzzle together to give us a true picture of what happened on that day on the sixth, before the sixth and after the six.

Marc Raimondi

Next question, please.

Operator

Our next question comes from Kevin Johnson with USA Today.

Kevin Johnson

Hi, good afternoon. In an earlier filing, I believe late yesterday, you all indicated that there was strong evidence that lawmakers were targeted for capture or for assassination. Can you talk a little bit about whether that applies beyond the case of Mr. Chansley?

Michael Sherwin

Sure. I will address that. This is Mike Sherwin, U.S. Attorney here in DC. So first of all, I want to say start off the bat by saying there is no direct evidence at this point (INAUDIBLE) kill, capture teams, an assassination but let me add to that. Look, as we tried to describe here, the case is are all being charged here in DC and with our law enforcement partners, and what makes this case in particular unprecedented and unusual and extremely complex is the fact that after the event, obviously thousands of people went back to their home districts and that has complicated things obviously because we have had to locate them with our law enforcement officers after they are charged.

We need to work with other districts to not only find these people but have initial appearances in districts across the United States. There were appearances in two districts I believe you are making reference to. I believe Texas and Arizona, and at some of those hearings, there are other prosecutors that may be a disconnect that may be adding information that is not directly related to what we have. So I want to just reiterate what I have already stated and on that basis yes, in terms of complex cases looking for these organized groups, I think I have stated this before. We have specialized prosecutors here working with specialized counterterrorism investigators looking at these type of organization for these most egregious acts, but right now, again, we don't have any direct evidence of kill capture teams.

Marc Raimondi

Thank you. Next question, please.

Operator

Our next question comes from Katie Benner with the New York Times.

Katie Benner

Hi, thanks so much. This is a question for either the U.S. Attorney or the ADIC. We have seen images of people wearing clothing that seemed to identify them as members of groups like the Proud Boys or other militia groups. We have seen neo-Nazi garb. Can you say which extremist

groups you have been able to identify at the Capitol so far, and can you characterize the impact that those extremist groups have had on the investigation? Can you characterize the impact they have had by being in the mix at the rally that day and as part of the attack, and have you seen any coordination within these groups to come to DC in a coordinated way to disrupt Congress last week?

Michael Sherwin

So, Katie, I will start that question, and I will turn it over to my colleagues here at the Bureau. So look, you are right. If you look at social media, you could see a lot of affiliation with some of the protest activity, some of the rioting activity and it runs the whole gamut of different groups from soup to nuts, A to Z but right now look, we are not going to label anything because everything is on the table in terms of extremist groups but look, I think the evidence speaks for itself.

These guys have labeled themselves. I mean, Mr. Kevin Seefried labeled himself when he was walking through the Capitol with the stars and bars, and Mr. Robert Packer labeled himself when he was with the Camp Auschwitz shirt in the Capitol, so we are not going to try to label these people, we will let them label themselves with the evidence, but all of these extremist groups are being looked at in terms of their participation at the Capitol. Steve, do you have anything to add?

Steven D'Antuono

So I would just add the fact that we are looking at this as a riot case. We are looking at everything we can, and we are focused on people who broke the law. I just can't stress enough how wide of a broad scope that this investigation has.

Marc Raimondi

Thank you. Next question?

Operator

Our next question comes from Catherine Herridge with CBS News.

Catherine Herridge

Thanks for taking my questions. My first question is for Mr. Sherwin. We are ten days into this; what does the evidence tell us about premeditation? And secondly, for Mr. Benedict, did the pipe bombs that the RNC and the DNC fail to explode? Thank you.

Michael Sherwin

Okay, so try to address that, Catherine. So look, initially, the initial tranche of arrest are all very reactive type cases where we had violence on police officers, destruction of property within the Capitol, and trespassing and violence outside the Capitol grounds. Those were the initial reactive, quick hit cases.

Trying to reiterate again look, there are bread crumbs of organization in terms of maybe what was taking place outside the Capitol and inside with perhaps some type of communication with core groups of people egressing into the Capitol and some coordinating activity of individuals within the Capitol, and that is a tier 1 top priority for both the U.S. Attorney's Office and our federal law enforcement partners to see again whether there was this overarching command and control and whether there were these organized teams that were organized to breach the Capitol and then perhaps try to accomplish some type of a mission inside the Capitol. But that is ongoing, and again I think this is going to take weeks if not months to find out the actual motivations of some of those groups. Ashan?

Ashan Benedict

This is Ashan Benedict answering your question. I can confirm the devices did not explode by the Capitol on that day. They were rendered safe by law enforcement, and we mitigated the risk to the public, and the components are currently being analyzed.

Marc Raimondi

Okay. Next question, please.

Operator

Our next question comes from Sarah Lynch with Reuters.

Sarah Lynch

Yeah, hi. I was hoping you could provide a little bit more update about you might be looking at with regard to public employees and government employees that might have been involved as some of these cases have come out there's been more information about strange things happening with Capitol Police where one person gave someone a hug and said it's your house now and let the person in. I also was wondering there's been some talk and chatter online about whether any congressional members may have played a role, and I was wondering if you could say whether you are looking to see if any lawmakers may have aided and abetted the rioters getting into the building? Thanks.

Steven D'Antuono

This is Steven D'Antuono, the ADIC for WFO FBI. So this is a large puzzle, and we are looking at every piece of the puzzle that we can possibly put on the table to put the picture together, and the men and women of the FBI are not leaving any stone unturned.

Michael Sherwin

I'm sorry, this is Mike Sherwin. I just want to add to what Steve was saying, and I apologize. At the beginning, I think I may have misspoke. So as of 8 AM this morning, we have 98 current cases in which we have charged. The majority of those are federal felony cases, and as again of 9--8 AM this morning, we have 275 open subject files, which we think will be well over 300 by the end of the day. Thank you.

Marc Raimondi

Next question, please.

Operator

And our next question will come from Patricia Milton with CBS News.

Patricia Milton

Yes. For Mr. Sherwin of those arrested, are there any cooperation being given where they are providing a fuller picture for you and more evidence?

Michael Sherwin

In short sum, yes. Again I think the quick efforts of law enforcement and our prosecutors to charge and quickly arrest a great number of these rioters has had a significant impact. We have had several people based upon people that have already been charged that have on their own self-reported with in some instances with defense attorneys to not only turn themselves in but to provide information about others, which is extremely beneficial and makes our cases move

much more quickly and it helps provide intelligence to the FBI and other partners so we could charge additional peoples. So yes, people are coming forward.

Now look looking into the nuts and bolts we are not cutting deals with anyone; even if people are self-reporting, they will be held accountable, but obviously, we encourage those people to self-report because they could usually, at the end of the day, perhaps get some benefit that other people do not if they do not cooperate with law enforcement. So again, reiterating what the FBI and ATF said, there are hotlines out there. If you know someone involved or if you are involved, it behooves you to turn yourselves in for a variety of reasons.

Marc Raimondi

All right. Thanks. Operator, we will take one more question, please.

Operator

Our next question will come from Sadie Gurman with Wall Street Journal.

Sadie Gurman

Hi, there. Hoping that you can clarify whether you have been able to definitively determine how Officer Sicknick died and secondly, there's been a lot of chatter and a lot of memos and bulletin sent out about what you know the general landscape of threat possibility is ahead of the inauguration but I am wondering if you can kind of describe what you are seeing and whether you are seeing any evidence of specific credible threats to come in the next few days.

Michael Sherwin

So the Officer Sicknick case is an ongoing investigation, and we are still pursuing all leads and avenues on that.

CONCLUSION

Marc Raimondi

All right. Thank you, everybody. If you have any other questions, you can email me or any of the DOJ OR FBI press team, and we will try to get back again. This is Marc Raimondi. Thank you all for joining, and we will talk to you next time. Operator, this is it.

Operator

The conference has now concluded. Thank you for attending today's presentation. You may now disconnect.