

Verdict

Acquitted of all charges

Jury finds Rittenhouse not guilty in shootings

KENOSHA, Nov. 20. (AP): Kyle Rittenhouse was acquitted of all charges Friday after asserting self-defense in the deadly Kenosha shootings that became a flashpoint in the debate over guns, vigilantism and racial injustice in the US.

Rittenhouse, 18, began to choke up, fell forward toward the defense table and then hugged one of his attorneys as he heard a court clerk recite "not guilty" five times. A sheriff's deputy whisked him out a back door.

"He wants to get on with his life," defense attorney Mark Richards said. "He has a huge sense of relief for what the jury did to him today. He wishes none of this ever happened. But as he said when he testified, he did not start this."

The verdict in the politically combustible case was met with anger and disappointment from those who saw Rittenhouse as a vigilante and a wannabe cop, and relief and a sense of vindication from those who regarded him as a patriot who took a stand against lawlessness and exercised his Second Amendment right to carry a gun and to defend himself. Supporters donated more than \$2 million toward his legal defense.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, the long-time civil rights leader, said the verdict throws into doubt the safety of people who protest in support of Black Americans.

"It seems to me that it's open season on human rights demonstrators," he said.

Rittenhouse was charged with homicide, attempted homicide and reckless endangering for killing two men and wounding a third with an AR-style semi-automatic rifle in the summer of 2020 during a tumultuous night of protests over the shooting of a Black man, Jacob Blake, by a white Kenosha police officer.

Rittenhouse, a then-17-year-old former police youth cadet, said that he went to Kenosha to protect property from rioters but that he came under attack and feared for his life. He is white, as were those he shot.

The anonymous jury, whose racial makeup was not disclosed by the court but appeared to be overwhelmingly white, deliberated for close to 3 1/2 days.

Attacked

President Joe Biden called for calm, saying that while the outcome of the case "will leave many Americans feeling angry and concerned, myself included, we must acknowledge that the jury has spoken."

Former President Donald Trump, who at the time of the shootings said it appeared Rittenhouse had been "very violently attacked," issued a statement Friday congratulating Rittenhouse on the verdict, adding "if that's not self defense, nothing is!"

Rittenhouse could have gotten life in prison if found guilty on the most serious charge, first-degree intentional homicide, or what some other states call first-degree murder. Two other charges each carried over 60 years behind bars.

Kenosha County District Attorney Michael Graveley said his office respects the jury's decision, and he asked the public to "accept the verdicts peacefully and not resort to violence."

Ahead of the verdict, Democratic Gov. Tony Evers announced that 500 National Guard members stood ready in case of trouble. But hours after the jury came back, there were no signs of any major protests or unrest in Kenosha.

As he released the jurors, Circuit Judge Bruce Schroeder assured them the court would take "every measure" to keep them safe.

Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, who is Black and a Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate, denounced the outcome. He, like many civil rights activists, saw a racial double standard at work in the case.

"Over the last few weeks, many dreaded the outcome we just witnessed," Barnes said. "The presumption of innocence until proven guilty is what we should expect from our judicial system, but that standard is not always applied equally. We have seen so many black and brown youth killed, only to be put on trial posthumously, while the innocence of Kyle Rittenhouse was virtually demanded by the judge."

Other political figures on the right welcomed the verdict and condemned the case brought against Rittenhouse.

Mark McCloskey, who got in trouble with the law when he and his wife waved a rifle and a handgun at Black Lives Matter protesters marching past his St. Louis home in 2020, said the verdict shows that people have a right to defend themselves from a "mob." He is now a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Missouri.

Fifteen minutes after the verdicts, the National Rifle Association tweeted the text of the Second Amendment.

The Kenosha case was part of an extraordinary confluence of trials that reflected the deep divide over race in the United States: In Georgia, three white men are on trial in the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, while in Virginia, a trial is underway in a lawsuit over the deadly white-supremacist rally held in Charlottesville in 2017.

Protests

The bloodshed in Kenosha took place during a summer of sometimes-violent protests set off across the U.S. by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and other cases involving the police use of force against Black people.

Rittenhouse went to Kenosha from his home in nearby Antioch, Illinois, after businesses were ransacked and burned in the nights that followed Blake's shooting. He joined other armed civilians on the streets, carrying a weapon authorities said was illegally purchased for him because he was underage.

Bystander and drone video captured most of the frenzied chain of events that followed: Rittenhouse killed Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, then shot to death protester Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded demonstrator Gaige Grosskreutz, now 28.

Prosecutors portrayed Rittenhouse as a "wannabe soldier" who had gone looking for trouble that night and was responsible for creating a dangerous situation in the first place by pointing his rifle at demonstrators.

But Rittenhouse testified: "I didn't do anything wrong. I defended myself."

Breaking into sobs at one point, he told the jury he opened fire after Rosenbaum chased him and made a grab for his gun. He said he was afraid his rifle was going to be wrested away and used to kill him.

Huber was then killed after hitting Rittenhouse in the head or neck with a skateboard, and Grosskreutz was shot after approaching with his own pistol in hand.

Under questioning from the prosecution, Grosskreutz said he had his hands raised as he closed in on Rittenhouse and didn't intend to shoot the young man. Prosecutor Thomas Binger asked Grosskreutz why he didn't shoot first.

"That's not the kind of person that I am. That's not why I was out there," he said. "It's not who I am. And definitely not somebody I would want to become."

But during cross-examination, Rittenhouse defense attorney Corey Chirafisi asked: "It wasn't until you pointed your gun at him, advanced on him ... that he fired, right?"

"Correct," Grosskreutz replied. The defense also presented a photo showing Grosskreutz pointing the gun at Rittenhouse, who was on the ground with his rifle pointed up at Grosskreutz.

Grosskreutz, under follow-up questioning from the prosecutor, said he did not intend to point his weapon at Rittenhouse.

After the verdict, Huber's parents, Karen Bloom and John Huber, said the outcome "sends the unacceptable message that armed civilians can show up in any town, incite violence, and then use the danger they have created to justify shooting people in the street." Rittenhouse's mother, Wendy Rittenhouse, seated near her son on a courtroom bench, gasped in delight, cried and hugged others around her.

Richards, the defense attorney, said that Rittenhouse wants to be a nurse and that he is in counseling for post traumatic stress disorder and will probably move away because "it's too dangerous" for him to continue to live in the area.



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., celebrates in the chamber with her caucus after the House approved the Democrats' sweeping social and environment bill, giving a victory to President Joe Biden, at the Capitol in Washington, Nov. 19. (AP)

Legislation

'Vote was never a sure thing'

As bill advances, so does Pelosi's legacy

WASHINGTON, Nov. 20. (AP): Deep into the grueling negotiations over President Joe Biden's big domestic policy package, when it seemed that bickering among Democrats would never stop, Speaker Nancy Pelosi let everyone in on a little secret.

"This," she confided quite publicly to reporters some time ago, "is the fun part."

The grind of legislating, treacherous for some, a sport for others, and often unsuccessful in the slow-moving Congress, is where Pelosi resides, exerting relentless drive to advance Biden's roughly \$2 trillion package Friday through the House, sending it now to the Senate.

The House vote, with just one Democrat opposed, boosts momentum for Biden's signature legislation after months of start-stop negotiations and provides a down payment on the party's campaign promise to deliver competency in government and put it to work for Americans.

And for Pelosi, who breezed into the House chamber early Friday to gavel the vote closed after a nearly all-night session, the outcome serves as a career milestone and further cements her legacy as not only the nation's first female speaker, but among its most powerful - one who is working to secure massive federal investments that Biden and others have compared to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal or Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

"Congratulations," Biden told her in a phone call she took in the Gold Room off the House floor as the final tally rolled in.

Friday's vote was never a sure thing. The final action in some ways snuck up on lawmakers after frenzied weeks of negotiations, several false starts and high-profile setbacks that delayed, and threatened to derail, the entire enterprise.

First, there was the difficult process of compiling the 2,135-page "Build Back Better Act," with its far-reaching proposals to expand government support to help families afford health care and child care and lower the price of prescription drugs, alongside new efforts to tackle climate change.

Then, facing a solid wall of Republican opposition, the Democrats had to decide if they could actually approve the bill on their own, en-

gaging in multiple rounds of private meetings and public handwringing between centrist and progressive flanks.

Any step along the way could sideline a congressional leader, especially one without the political fortitude to push and pull lawmakers to fall in line. Her immediate predecessors, Paul Ryan and John Boehner, struggled to lead Republicans, and both retired and gave up the gavel.

Pelosi, who has represented San Francisco in Congress for more than 30 years, not only has the stomach for such gut-wrenching talks, she has turned the perils of legislating into political opportunities, showcasing the party's factions. "Diversity is our strength" is among her maxims.

And when she's heard and seen enough, she stiffens the spine and pushes ahead, relying on the other Pelosi maxim - "Unity is our power" - to reach resolution. Meeting privately with House leaders Monday evening, she signaled that it was time to move.

Drama

Pelosi told them there had been "a little too much drama for my taste," according to a Democratic aide familiar with the private meeting who was granted anonymity to discuss it.

The House had already approved the related \$1 trillion infrastructure package, a roads-bridges-and-broadband measure favored by centrist lawmakers after poor election showings in Virginia and New Jersey served as a wake-up call to Democrats. Now, according to Pelosi's strategy, it was time to make good on the commitment for Biden's broader vision preferred by the progressives.

"It was a long road because, you know, the sheer amount of impact we're trying to have is enormous," Rep. Andy Kim, D-N.J., said Friday. "It's always complicated, I mean, when you've got people representing every corner of this country, there's always going to be complexity, but that's the art of governing," Kim said.

Pelosi has been here before. A decade ago, she led House Democrats to passage of the Affordable Care Act, a year-long effort that consumed the Congress at the start of Barack Obama's first term and contributed to the party's electoral wipeout in the 2010 midterm election.

Pelosi lost the speaker's gavel after Republicans regained control of the House in 2011, and today's Republicans are expecting a repeat in 2022 as they heap criticisms on Biden's bill as big government overreach.

Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy, who is in line to become speaker if Democrats lose power next year, set the tone in an overnight speech full of vitriol and grievance against Biden, the Democrats and Pelosi in particular, as he chided her leadership and wished for her retirement.

If he sounded "angry," McCarthy said, it's because he was. His more than eight-hour speech set a new record, besting one set just a few years back by Pelosi. But his protest did not stop the vote.

Pelosi responded with one of the most politically biting strategies in her arsenal - she ignored him.

Early Friday morning, Pelosi paid almost no attention to McCarthy's record-setting rant and delivered a sunny speech in stark contrast to his dark mood.

"Under this dome, for centuries, members of Congress have stood exactly where we stand to pass legislation of extraordinary consequence in our nation's history and for our nation's future," Pelosi said.

The Capitol's setting reminds lawmakers, Pelosi said, that "we are part of history, that our words and actions will face the judgment of history and that we are part of the long and honorable heritage of our democracy."

Democrats cheered passage on the House floor, chanting "Nancy, Nancy, Nancy!" as sullen Republicans at one point belted out, "Hey, hey, goodbye," some mock-waving across the aisle.

One newcomer to Congress, Rep. Carolyn Bourdeaux, D-Ga., said the bill's programs for free prekindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds, alongside affordable health care options, are priorities policymakers have been trying to achieve for decades.

"We're addressing needs that have been around for a long, long time," Bourdeaux said after the vote. "People need to realize every other developed country in the world has a lot of these benefits, and it's time for us to have that, too." She added, "We have really accomplished something amazing."



Josiah McNuckles, 6, a tourist from San Francisco, looks at a replica of the Statue of Liberty at Grand Slam, a souvenir and sports apparel store, in Times Square, Monday, Nov. 15, in New York. (AP)



Sefcovic

Swealmeeen

Britain

EU awaits counterproposals: Another week of Brexit negotiations still left the European Union awaiting a firm counterproposal from the United Kingdom on Friday to ease a standoff over how to deal with the country's departure from the bloc.

Both sides are fighting over differences in how to regulate trade in Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK but also belongs to the EU's huge single market in a Byzantine deal that proved essential in the Brexit divorce negotiations.

Both sides recognize that deal is far from perfect and have been negotiating how to improve the movement of goods to Northern Ireland from Britain without giving London unfettered backdoor passage to the market of the 27-nation EU.

While EU Brexit negotiator Maros Sefcovic said there was a "change in tone" for the better in London, he added that last month's EU compromise proposal to cut down on red tape between Britain and Northern Ireland needed to be reciprocated.

"It is essential that the recent change in tone now leads to joint tangible solutions," he said after meeting with his UK counterpart, David Frost. (AP)

Govt favorite drops bid: The man who was once Britain's most powerful newspaper editor has dropped his bid to head the country's broadcasting regulator, in a blow to Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Former Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre was the government's favorite candidate to be chairman of Ofcom - so much so that when Dacre was rejected by the selection board, the government announced it would rerun the recruitment process.

In a letter published in Saturday's Times of London newspaper, Dacre, 73, said he was no longer interested in the job, "despite being urged to (re)apply by many senior members of the government." Dacre said he believed his conservative views meant he would not be selected. (AP)

Taxi bomb could have harmed: The homemade bomb that killed a man in a taxi in Liverpool contained ball bearings and would have caused "significant injury or death" if it had exploded in different circumstances, British police said Friday.

The suspected bomb-maker, Emad Al Swealmeeen, 32, died when a blast ripped through the cab in which he was a passenger as it pulled up outside Liverpool Women's Hospital on Sunday morning. The taxi driver was injured.

Russ Jackson, head of counterterrorism policing in northwest England, said Friday that the device "was made using homemade explosive and had ball bear-

ings attached to it which would have acted as shrapnel."

Jackson said police were investigating whether the bomb had exploded unintentionally as the vehicle moved or when it stopped.

Police said Al Swealmeeen, who was originally from Iraq, had spent at least six months buying components for a bomb

and appears to have acted alone.

Al Swealmeeen had applied for asylum in Britain in 2014, but was rejected, authorities said. Clergy at two Liverpool churches said Al Swealmeeen had converted from Islam to Christianity. (AP)

House fire cause unclear: Investiga-



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (center) and Senegal's Minister of Economy, Planning and International Cooperation Amadou Hott, (center right), pose for photographs at signing ceremony between American backed companies with Senegal at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Dakar, Nigeria, Saturday, Nov. 20. (AP)

tors are searching for the cause of a house fire in London that killed two women and two children, believed to be an infant boy and girl, the London Fire Brigade said Friday.

Around 40 firefighters and six fire engines were called to the scene in the Bexleyheath area of south-east London on Thursday evening, the brigade said.

Crews used breathing apparatus to take four people from the upper floor of the house using a 9 meter (30-foot) ladder, but all four, who are believed to have been related to each other, died at the scene.

British police are investigating the cause of the blaze but believe it is not suspicious, Detective Chief Superintendent Trevor Lawry said. No arrests have been made.

A man who left the building before firefighters arrived was taken to hospital. His condition is not thought to be life-threatening but he remains in hospital with injuries to his legs, police said.

Neighbor Scott James said he saw a "distracted" man collapse against a wall outside the house.

"The downstairs was on fire and then the whole house went up. It was engulfed in flames. There wasn't an explosion," he said. "It all happened so quickly. I have never seen anything like it." (AP)