

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA** :  
 :  
 v. : **No. 21-MJ-236**  
 :  
**LUKE RUSSELL COFFEE,** :  
**Defendant.** :

**GOVERNMENT’S MEMORANDUM IN  
SUPPORT OF PRE-TRIAL DETENTION**

Luke Coffee used a crutch to attack law enforcement officers as they guarded a Lower Terrace entrance to the U.S. Capitol during the insurrection on January 6, 2021. Coffee’s assault, captured on video, included charging at these United States Capitol Police and Metropolitan Police Department Officers using the crutch and, in at least one instance, using the crutch in an attempt to strike the upper chest/head area of one of the officers. He did so as a member of the mob attacking the Capitol during its constitutional responsibility of confirming the results of the 2020 Presidential Election. U.S. Const. Amend XII. This gravely serious conduct constituted an act of domestic terrorism, *see* 18 U.S.C. § 2331(5), and resulted in the government charging Coffee with multiple felonies, including a crime of violence with a dangerous weapon. The defendant should be detained pending trial pursuant to 18 U.S.C. §§ 3142(f)(1)(E) and (f)(2)(A).

**I. FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

**A. Coffee Traveled from Texas to the District of Columbia to Participate in the Insurrection**

On January 5, 2021, the defendant was interviewed on a program called “Conspiracy Castle” about, among other things, his plans for his trip to the District of Columbia. *See*

“Conspiracy Castle Live with Actor & Producer Luke Coffee on his Journey to DC,” available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8KlrJh2Wz4>. Quoting Steve Bannon, Coffee offered that “all hell is gonna break loose tomorrow.” *See id.* at 38:30 minutes. He also shared that he expected to see “people hang themselves literally” and that 200,000 indictments would be unsealed. *See id.* at 41:49 minutes.

**B. Coffee’s Role in the January 6, 2021 Attack on the U.S. Capitol**

On January 6, 2021, a joint session of the United States Congress convened at the United States Capitol, which is located at First Street, SE, in Washington, D.C. The U.S. Capitol is secured 24 hours a day by U.S. Capitol Police. Restrictions around the U.S. Capitol include permanent and temporary security barriers and posts manned by U.S. Capitol Police. Only authorized people with appropriate identification are allowed access inside the U.S. Capitol. On January 6, 2021, the exterior plaza of the U.S. Capitol was also closed to members of the public. During the joint session, elected members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate were meeting in separate chambers of the United States Capitol to certify the vote count of the Electoral College of the 2020 Presidential Election. The joint session began at approximately 1:00 p.m. Shortly thereafter, by approximately 1:30 p.m., the House and Senate adjourned to separate chambers to resolve a particular objection. Vice President Mike Pence was present and presiding, first in the joint session, and then in the Senate chamber.

As the proceedings continued in both the House and the Senate, and with Vice President Mike Pence present and presiding over the Senate, a large crowd gathered outside the U.S. Capitol. As noted above, temporary and permanent barricades were in place around the exterior of the U.S. Capitol building, and U.S. Capitol Police were present and attempting to keep the crowd away from the Capitol building and the proceedings underway inside.

At such time, the certification proceedings still underway and the exterior doors and windows of the U.S. Capitol were locked or otherwise secured. Members of the U.S. Capitol Police attempted to maintain order and keep the crowd from entering the Capitol; however, shortly after 2:00 p.m., individuals in the crowd forced entry into the U.S. Capitol, including by breaking windows and by assaulting members of the U.S. Capitol Police, as others in the crowd encouraged and assisted those acts.

Shortly thereafter, at approximately 2:20 p.m. members of the United States House of Representatives and United States Senate, including the President of the Senate, Vice President Mike Pence, were instructed to—and did—evacuate the chambers. Accordingly, the joint session of the United States Congress was effectively suspended until shortly after 8:00 p.m. Vice President Pence remained in the United States Capitol from the time he was evacuated from the Senate Chamber until the sessions resumed.

During that time, Coffee was among a group of insurrectionists attempting to gain entry to the Capitol through an entrance on the Lower Terrace. Numerous officers with the United States Capitol Police (“USCP”) and Metropolitan Police Department (“MPD”) guarded that entrance and sought to protect themselves as well as the Capitol building and its occupants.

As reflected on videos capturing the events, at approximately 4:28 p.m., Coffee picked up a crutch and raised it over his head, turning first to face the crowd of rioters and then turning to face the law enforcement officers at the entrance. *See* Figure 1 (screen shot from a video posted to YouTube).

Figure 1.



Coffee then lowered the crutch to waist height and proceeded to push the crutch into the line of MPD and USCP officers, making contact with at least one officer. *See* Figures 2-5 (screen shots from police officer body cam video).

Figure 2



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



In the midst of Coffee's attack, one MPD officer appears to grab Coffee in an attempt to push Coffee back. After being forced back from the officers, Coffee charged at the officers while still holding the crutch. This time Coffee held the crutch in a more aggressive manner, positioning it directly towards the officer's upper chest/head area. *See* Figures 6-8 (screen shots from police officer body cam video).

Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



**C. Coffee's Conduct Following the January 6, 2021 Attack**

Coffee returned to his home state of Texas following the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol. On January 11 and 14, 2021, a close family member of Coffee's sent him messages through a social media platform. In one exchange, the family member asked, "For the Q storm does that mean you will arm yourself and war? . . . Did the Feds already talk to you? Or rumor?" Coffee responded on January 15, "Yap to both." In another exchange, on January 14, the family member asked, "Can you tell us where you will be thru Tuesday??" Coffee responded the next day, "Nope can't tell you where." On January 15, Coffee sent a message to the same close family member saying, "Don't worry. I'm being taken care of. I'm hidden."

On January 15, 2021, Coffee was again interviewed on the "Conspiracy Castle" program. See "Conspiracy Castle Friday Night Lights with Fellow Texan Luke Coffee," available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9n\\_eFKKgoo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9n_eFKKgoo). During this roughly three-hour interview, Coffee identified himself in a video of the attack on the Capitol (at 24:50) and stated:

- he is "part of this Q mission" (at 1:02:50);

- “It’s game over bitches and you’re going to be fucked if you don’t come forward. You’re going to be killed.” (at 1:50:00);
- “I was ready to die, I thought I’d die [at the Capitol]” (at 2:09:00); and
- “When I was walking up there. . . I was completely at peace. . . God gave me supernatural peace. . . This is a battle. . . When I was walking up there, bro, it’s like the heavens opened up and there were these strips of paper with verses on it and each verse was encouraging me to walk forward. I’m not a crazy person. It was like the spirit of 1776. . . We were going to bust in there.” (at 3:15:00)

On January 17, 2021, Coffee was interviewed yet again on the “Conspiracy Castle” program. See “Conspiracy Castle Sunday Stream with Luke Coffee,” available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXqLtkDsnyM>. During this interview, Coffee spoke both of his attack on the Capitol and the FBI’s investigation of him:

- Referring to the MPD officer who was viciously attacked by the mob mere feet from where Coffee stood, he said the officer looked like a “CPR dummy” (at 46:35);
- Coffee refused to say where he was. “I’m not going to tell you where I am at. . . I’m ready to go to jail. Take me to jail. . . I’m not even going to fight. I was going to have a shotgun and they were going to take me down” (at 1:45:00);
- “I was ready to die. . . These were not regular cops. . . I did charge them, just pushed them back.” (at 1:14:45); and
- When speaking of the FBI poster featuring Coffee’s picture and seeking information about him and other Capitol rioters, Coffee proclaimed that it was a “privilege” to be on that poster. (at 1:51:05).

In late January, Coffee granted an in-person interview to a reporter with *Texas Monthly*. In an article published after Coffee's arrest, Coffee is reported to have resided for several weeks at an undisclosed resort in Texas where he was, in the reporter's words, "hiding from the law." *See Ex. A*. Coffee posed for a picture for the article, and the person who owned the resort indicated that he "offered to shelter [Coffee] at a discount for as long as he wanted." *See Ex. A*.

On February 25, 2021, Coffee was arrested in the Northern District of Texas and his apartment and truck in Dallas were searched by the FBI. Among other things, agents recovered what appears to be the same camouflage jacket Coffee was seen wearing in the videos depicting his attack. The jacket still smelled of pepper spray. Agents also obtained evidence that Coffee was on the verge of moving out of his apartment, including that agents observed clothes laid out around the apartment as if about to be packed.

## **II. Procedural History**

On February 16, 2021, the United States filed a complaint and a magistrate judge issued an arrest warrant based on alleged violations of 18 U.S.C. §§ 111(b) (Assault of Federal Law Enforcement Officer with Dangerous Weapon), 231(a)(3) (Interference with Law Enforcement Officer During Civil Disorder), 1512(c)(2) (Obstruction of an Official Proceeding), and 1752(a)(1) and (2) (Unlawful Entry on Restricted Grounds), and 40 U.S.C. § 5104(e)(1) (Disorderly Conduct on Capitol Grounds). On February 25, 2021, Coffee was arrested in the Northern District of Texas and he had initial appearance in that District the next day. That court held a preliminary and detention hearing on March 8, 2021, after which the magistrate judge found the government had established probable cause. The court ordered the defendant released on certain conditions but stayed that order pending appeal.

## ARGUMENT

In assessing whether pretrial detention or release is warranted, the judicial officer must “take into account the available information concerning” the following four factors: (1) “the nature and circumstances of the offense charged, including whether the offense is a crime of violence”; (2) “the weight of the evidence against the person”; (3) “the history and characteristics of the person, including . . . the person’s character, physical and mental condition, family ties, employment, financial resources, length of residence in the community, community ties, past conduct, history relating to drug or alcohol abuse, criminal history, and record concerning appearances at court proceedings”; and (4) “the nature and seriousness of the danger to any person or the community that would be posed by the person’s release.” 18 U.S.C. § 3142(g). In consideration of these factors the government respectfully submits that there are no conditions or combinations of conditions which can effectively ensure the safety of any other person and the community and the defendant’s appearance at future proceedings.

### **A. Nature and Circumstances of the Offenses Charged**

During the course of the violent siege of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, over 100 law enforcement officers reported being assaulted or injured by the violent mob while attempting to protect the U.S. Capitol and the individuals inside of the building. These assaults occurred both inside of the Capitol, as well as on the steps outside of the Capitol and the grounds of the Capitol, where the enormous mob included numerous individuals with weapons, bulletproof vests, and pepper spray who were targeting the officers protecting the Capitol. Additionally, the violent crowd encouraged others in the crowd to work together to overwhelm law enforcement and gain unlawful entry into the U.S. Capitol.

As a result of this conduct, defendant is charged with several serious felony offenses and,

if convicted, the defendant faces a substantial period of incarceration. One of the felony charges he faces, of Assault of a Federal Law Enforcement Officer with a Dangerous Weapon, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 111(b), poses an inherent risk of danger to the community as a “crime of violence.” See 18 U.S.C. § 3142(g)(1); *id.* § 3156(a)(4) (defining a “crime of violence” under the BRA as “an offense that has an element of the offense the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against the person or property of another”). That offense alone carries a maximum penalty of 20 years’ incarceration. This considerable punishment gives the defendant “a substantial incentive to flee the United States.” *United States v. Vo*, 978 F. Supp. 2d 41, 43 (D.D.C. 2013) (finding detention appropriate for defendant facing stiff penalties for bribery and visa fraud); *United States v. Ali*, 793 F. Supp. 2d 386, 391 (D.D.C. 2011) (denying release pending trial and noting lengthy sentence that would accompany conviction was factor that increased flight risk of defendant).

The defendant’s conduct constituted an act of domestic terrorism, a fact that should be considered by this Court in assessing the nature and circumstances of the offenses. Domestic terrorism is defined as:

activities that--

(A) involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State;

(B) appear to be intended--

(i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population;

(ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or

(iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and

(C) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.

18 U.S.C. § 2331(5).

Coffee’s conduct involved an attack on the United States Congress while it was in session to perform its constitutionally mandated duty of counting the votes cast by the electoral college

that determine who shall be chosen to be the President of the United States. The defendant's attack on the Capitol included the use of a dangerous weapon to assault law enforcement officers who, grossly outnumbered, bravely sought to protect the Capitol and its occupants. The defendant's conduct meets the statutory definition of domestic terrorism since his actions (a) involved act dangerous to human life that violated federal criminal law, (b) were undertaken to influence the policy of the government, and (c) and occurred in the territorial jurisdiction of the United States—in fact, at the seat of our government.

The nature of Coffee's offenses reflect a clear disregard for the law and efforts to injure or otherwise impede law enforcement, both of which indicate that he poses a danger to the community. The nature and circumstances of the offenses weigh heavily in favor of detention.

**B. The Weight of the Evidence Against the Defendant**

The second factor to be considered, the weight of the evidence, also clearly weighs in favor of detention. As noted above, the defendant was observed on U.S. Capitol surveillance cameras, social media videos, and police officer body cam video. The defendant can be seen on these videos picking up a crutch and then using it to attack several police officers. Coffee was identified in the various pictures and videos capturing the events by, among others, a Special Agent with the FBI who was a college classmate of Coffee's. Coffee also admitted that he had been at the Capitol on January 6, 2021 to an FBI agent who interviewed him, a close family member with whom he exchanged messages on a social media platform, and to at least one reporter. *See* Ex. A. As described above, in a series of interviews on "Conspiracy Castle," Coffee openly discussed his presence at the Capitol during the insurrection and even admitted that he "charged" at police officers. Finally, during a search of the defendant's home on the day he was arrested, law enforcement recovered what appears to be the same camouflage jacket Coffee was seen wearing

in the videos depicting his attack. The jacket still smelled of pepper spray. The evidence against the defendant is overwhelming and this factor weighs heavily in favor of detention.

### C. Coffee's History and Characteristics

This offense constitutes the defendant's first known arrest, a fact that is to the defendant's credit when considering this factor. But his conduct before, during, and after the insurrection evidences that he is both a danger to the community and a serious risk of flight. To begin with, his attack on law enforcement officers with a dangerous weapon shows the lengths to which he is willing to go to disrupt the peaceful transfer of power in the United States and his complete disdain for law enforcement. *See United States v. Dodge*, 846 F. Supp. 181, 185 (D. Conn. 1994) (detention proper where the evidence suggested a "significant disrespect for lawful authority"). Moreover, in the over two months since the attack, the defendant has not exhibited any remorse for his actions. He has given many hours of interviews in which he has discussed his role in the attack and repeated the various ways in which he felt his participation in the mob attack was justified. If anything, these interviews show that the defendant is *proud* of his conduct, not remorseful. On one of the worst days in American history, the defendant was a central player, a role he relished.

Although Coffee turned himself in once his lawyer was contacted by the FBI and told of the arrest warrant, the defendant evidenced that he was hiding from law enforcement for at least several weeks. The *Texas Monthly* article published after his arrest revealed that Coffee had a cheap place to stay well out of Dallas. When contacted by the FBI, the defendant refused to say where he was. When asked by a close family member, the defendant refused to say where he was. His "fixed" address is a home owned by Coffee's parents, as Coffee was moving out of his apartment the day he was arrested.

**D. The Nature and Seriousness of the Danger to Any Person or the Community that Would be Posed by his Release.**

The nature and seriousness of the danger to the community posed by the defendant's release, also weighs heavily in favor of detention. The defendant armed himself with a crutch and assaulted law enforcement officers with the intent to unlawfully enter the U.S. Capitol and stop the functioning of our government as it met to certify election results. The danger the defendant caused by participating in the attack of this violent mob cannot be overstated. His assault also evidenced a disregard for the safety of others and for the rule of law. In the time since the insurrection, the defendant has not expressed remorse for his actions or disclaimed the beliefs which motivated his unlawful actions in the first place. In fact, he has told even his mother of his readiness to arm himself for war. He therefore remains a danger to the community.

Respectfully submitted,

CHANNING PHILLIPS  
ACTING UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

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**POLITICS**

# He Rioted at the Capitol. Then for Weeks He Lived in Luxury While Hiding From the FBI.

Luke Coffee, a director and actor who appeared on NBC's 'Friday Night Lights,' found QAnon during the pandemic and then spent a month trying to evade the consequences of the path it led him down.

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**BY**      **PETER HOLLEY**

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**DATE**      **FEB 26, 2021**

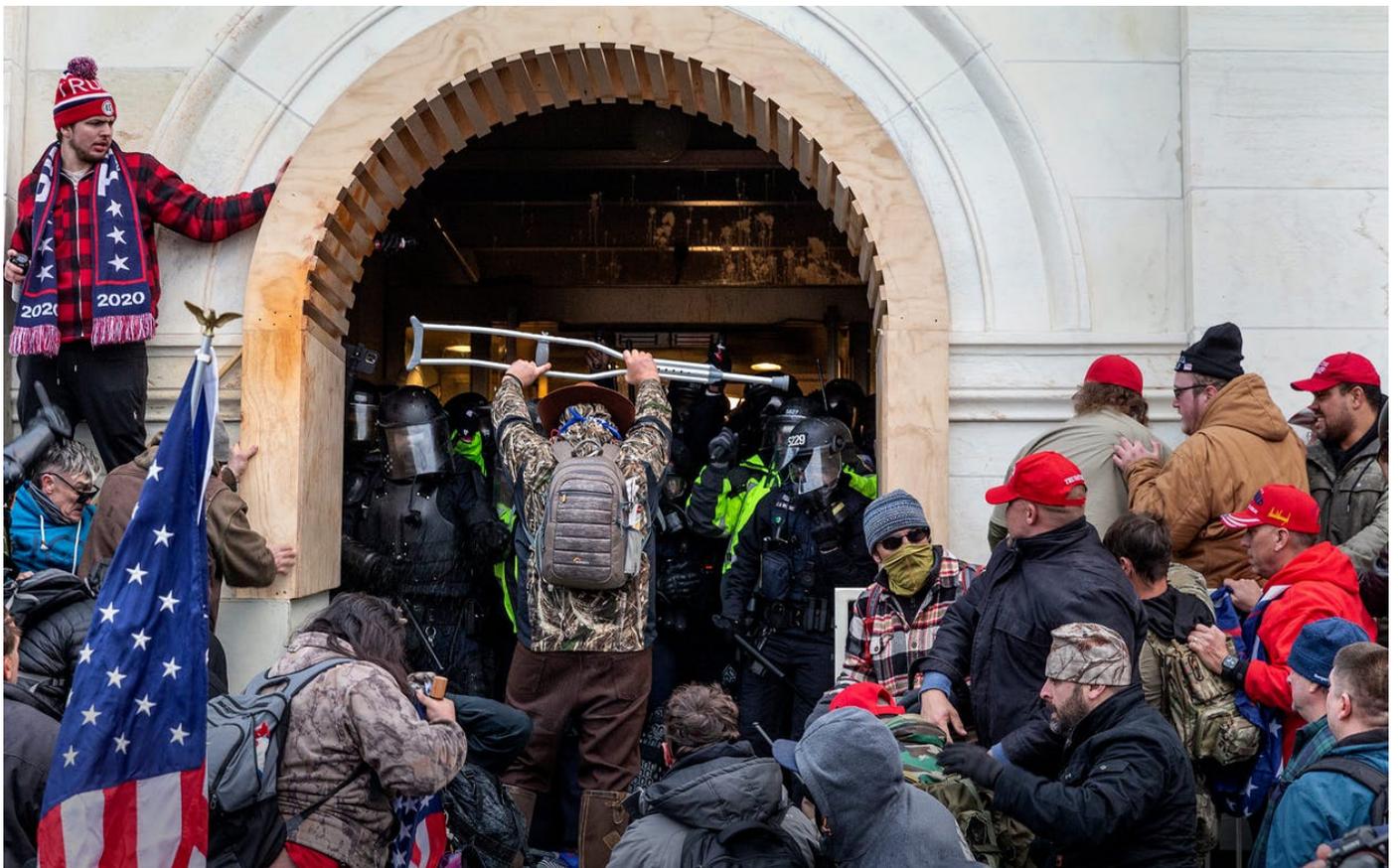
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**NOTES**      **19 COMMENTS**

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**Luke Coffee, a 41-year-old Dallasite, raises a crutch above his head as he faces off with a line of police officers at an entrance to the U.S. Capitol building on January 6, 2021.**

*Lev Radin/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty*

**O**n a warm day in late January, Luke Coffee invited me to join him on the patio of an Italian eatery at a fancy Hill Country resort and take in the view. The sprawling landscape, with orchards, vineyards, and horse stables, offered guests a rustic Central Texas take on the Tuscan countryside. But Coffee, a director and actor who appeared on NBC's *Friday Night Lights*, could never fully relax. Though he was living an Instagrammable vacation dream, he was in fact a man in hiding from the law, someone resisting reality until that was no longer possible.

Just three weeks before, Coffee had been more than 1,500 miles away—in Washington, D.C. On January 6, he participated in the riots at the U.S. Capitol, overnight becoming one of the most recognizable faces in the throngs of Donald Trump supporters there. An image of Coffee at the entrance to the Capitol—right arm extended as if about to give a high five—had been plastered on FBI posters seeking identifying information about the rioters. His cowboy hat and camo jacket had made him easily identifiable among the crowd, and on Twitter, a group of amateur investigators calling themselves Sedition Hunters had promised to ruin the career of the man they called the #HighFiveCowboy.

After the riot, Coffee went home to Dallas. In short order, his image began circulating on Twitter, the FBI asked him for a meeting, his father publicly urged him on Instagram to turn himself in, and his college roommate, who had remained one of his best friends, called Coffee a domestic terrorist on social media. The 41-year-old Dallasite decided to go somewhere peaceful to “clear his head.”

During our interview, Coffee sidestepped questions about how he chose the place he'd been hiding, but the resort's owner, who'd posted on social media that the rioters weren't insurrectionists but merely victims of a media smear campaign, was sympathetic to his case, he said, and had offered to shelter him at a discount for as long as he wanted. “It's ridiculous,” the owner told me during dinner service at the Italian restaurant, referring to the possibility that Coffee might face jail time for his role at the riot. “The whole thing is just ridiculous.”

Coffee told me he wasn't on the run from the FBI, but during his six-plus weeks at the resort, which is not being identified as a condition of our meeting there, he kept hearing from the bureau. He says one agent from the Dallas field office urged him to return to that

city to meet “face to face.” “You need to understand,” the man wrote in a text shared with *Texas Monthly*, “that this situation is not getting better.” Coffee responded with defiance and hoped to stay at the resort indefinitely. Weeks later, however, the gravity of his situation would finally set in, and Coffee would turn himself in to authorities and face a litany of charges.

There was little doubt about why the FBI was eager to sit down with Coffee. Footage recorded by journalists and attendees of the rally captures him near the top of the stairs leading to the building’s entrance, fewer than twenty seconds after rioters dragged D.C. police officer Michael Fanone out of a police line and into their midst and repeatedly assaulted him. In one clip, Coffee passes within several feet of a rioter beating the officer with an American flag and another who appears to pick Fanone’s black helmet off the ground and place it atop his own head.

Coffee told me that he never saw officer Fanone in distress, and that he went to the head of the crowd to try to de-escalate the situation. On video, Coffee can be seen lingering in the battle zone and at one point appears to yell at rioters to “stop.” But moments after, he picks up a crutch another protester had been wielding and holds it above his head, before lowering his shoulders and ramming into multiple officers.

Video footage analyzed by the *New York Times* also shows that, seconds before Coffee charges the officers, rioter Rosanne Boyland lies collapsed on the ground near his feet. The paper concluded that a protester holding a crutch—a man *Texas Monthly* can identify as Coffee—made it “virtually impossible for officers to give her aid, if they were able to notice her at all.” Coffee later told me he noticed a woman resembling Boyland who was trapped beneath the crowd at one point, but insisted he was unable to calm those around him enough to rescue her. By the time he pushed into police, he said, neither he nor the officers were aware of Boyland’s exact location. “If I had known she was nearby I would’ve grabbed them and said, ‘Let’s help this woman,’” he said. “But it was just confusion and chaos.”

Friends and family wonder how Coffee ended up in the middle of the violent scrum at the Capitol. Relatives have scolded him via text for trading his career, his family’s happiness, and potentially his freedom for the sake of his extreme political beliefs. Though Coffee’s circumstances are somewhat unique from other rioters—he spent his youth in a prosperous Dallas enclave and achieved modest celebrity as a TV actor—his story provides insight into how a Texan who had no previous interest in extremist politics could be pulled into the hall of mirrors of QAnon conspiracy theories and election deniers. It shows the key role that

scholars who study extremist movements say is often played by personal misfortune: in Coffee's case, a tragic hit-and-run accident, and the gutting of his business by the pandemic.

When we talked at the resort, Coffee obsessively rationalized and excused his actions on January 6, when he said he found himself "in the middle of a storm." "I didn't do anything wrong," Coffee told me during a rambling six-hour interview. He insisted he wasn't so much in hiding at the resort—"if the FBI wants me I'm sure they can easily find me," he said—as on an extended vacation. But like all vacations, it eventually had to come to an end. On February 25, Coffee turned himself into authorities at the Earle Cabell federal courthouse in Dallas. A day later he was charged on numerous counts, including assaulting a federal law enforcement officer with a dangerous weapon, interfering with a law enforcement officer during a civil disorder, obstructing an official proceeding, unlawfully entering onto restricted grounds, and engaging in disorderly conduct in the Capitol. For the first time after months of retreating into an online echo chamber, Coffee was forced to contend with the consequences of his extreme beliefs and actions.



**Luke Coffee.**

*Peter Holley*

**The Justice Department has charged** more than three hundred “Stop the Steal” rally attendees for their participation in the riot, according to Reuters. At least twenty of the charged rioters are Texans, a significant chunk of whom arrived from the Dallas–Fort Worth area. They include Paul Davis and Jenna Ryan, a lawyer and a real estate broker, respectively, from Frisco, and Larry Rendell Brock Jr., a retired Air Force officer from Grapevine. Like so many of his fellow rioters, Coffee is middle-aged and upper middle-

class, a business owner lacking prior ties to far-right extremist movements but with a radical, grievance-filled outlook on the world around him.

**RELATED:** *Who Were the Texans Who Traveled to the Capitol to Challenge the Election Results?*

Coffee spent most of his youth in Highland Park, one of the most affluent enclaves in Texas, located just north of downtown Dallas. His father worked in real estate and later as a full-time prison minister and missionary in Cuba. His mother taught preschool before becoming a stay-at-home parent. The family was one generation removed from something approaching Texas royalty. One of Luke's grandfathers, Russell Coffee, served as an assistant University of Texas football coach to Darrell Royal from 1959 to 1967. Luke's grandmother, Wynelle Watson Coffee, was married to longtime politician John C. White, who served as Texas agriculture commissioner, and later as U.S. deputy secretary of agriculture and chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Asked to provide insight into Coffee and his decision to riot at the Capitol, multiple family members and friends defended Coffee privately but declined to comment on him publicly.

Growing up, Coffee played football and eventually walked onto the Baylor football team as a defensive back his sophomore year of college, but he found himself drawn to filmmaking. After graduating, Coffee landed a job in postproduction on the Warner Bros. lot in Hollywood, and made a prime-time television appearance on an NBC drama. He began dating a fellow Dallasite and, after a few years, planned on marrying her. But early one Sunday morning in November 2006, while crossing the street as they left a Hollywood bar, the two were hit by a driver who fled the scene. Coffee's girlfriend was killed instantly. Recovering in the hospital from eleven broken ribs, two collapsed lungs, a broken leg, and a torn ACL, he wasn't able to attend her funeral.

Family members say Coffee became distant after the accident and that it made him more withdrawn, unleashing a years-long struggle with symptoms resembling post-traumatic stress disorder that Coffee has acknowledged battling. "Luke wasn't the same Luke after the wreck," a close relative, speaking on the condition of anonymity, recalled. "He became withdrawn and depressed and was never entirely himself again." Wracked by survivor's guilt, Coffee said, he planned to visit his girlfriend's grave before hanging himself at his family's ranch in Central Texas. He didn't follow through and today is making a movie about the traumatic experience, *Texas Angel*. Though it's framed as an uplifting tale about the world testing one man's faith, the experience hardened Coffee's outlook. "We live in a

world that is not a fair world and it's a rigged system," he said. "We're living in a broken, fallen place, and there are people that get away with evil."

After the accident, Coffee returned to Texas to work as an actor—appearing as a right-wing extremist on NBC's *Chase* and later as a heavily accented, over-the-top Texan in a series of commercials for Amarillo National Bank. He also launched a studio, Coffee Productions, which he said has done commercial work for Doritos, Gold's Gym, and the YMCA. Coffee said his business was thriving until last March, when the pandemic struck and commercial work dried up almost overnight.

Though conservative, Coffee had never been a die-hard supporter of Donald Trump, whose bullying demeanor he found off-putting. But that changed as his livelihood felt more and more threatened. He began to believe that shutdowns—which Trump opposed—were oppressive. He grew particularly distrustful of Dr. Anthony Fauci after the immunologist walked back his statements from late February advising against mask-wearing, and he became disgusted watching leaders, such as California governor Gavin Newsom, violate the orders meant to prevent the spread of COVID that they put in place. But Coffee's views on the virus seem to shift according to convenience. Though he regularly posts anti-mask memes on Instagram and suggests that fears of the virus are greatly exaggerated, he texted an FBI agent that he would not even consider meeting up until the agent had been "covid cleared."

Several months into the lockdown, Coffee found himself isolated, unable to work, and with lots of time to conduct deep dives on the dark web. He encountered QAnon, or as he puts it, "They found me." Relatives, who have limited contact with Coffee these days, say he quickly became "brainwashed" and began to refuse to engage with those who contradicted his new worldview.

In September Coffee began actively posting about QAnon conspiracies and releasing Instagram videos alleging the world was controlled by an all-powerful cabal of politicians, billionaires, propagandists, and Satanists, and that God had anointed Donald Trump to root out evil in the body politic. He often posted that there was a vast, child-trafficking ring run by pedophilic global elites. It's a belief that he traces all the way back to his own experience working in the Los Angeles entertainment industry years earlier, where he told me he was subjected to sexual harassment regularly, met many young actors who claimed to be preyed upon, and witnessed grooming of potential victims by sexual predators. "One thing I discovered early on was that elites play by different rules in Hollywood," Coffee said. "It was eye-opening." Coffee also grew to believe another conspiracy—that the election had

been stolen from Donald Trump—despite the lack of any evidence of fraud and the fact that courts repeatedly dismissed lawsuits challenging the validity of Joe Biden’s win.

**Coffee told me he went to D.C.** in early January to “be part of history,” to fight human trafficking, and to “bring all of this criminal behavior to light.” But as he drove from Dallas to Washington with a friend, he told his followers—who number more than 3,300 on Instagram—that he was “not a serious person.” When we met, he told me the Stop the Steal rally didn’t feel entirely serious either. Early on, Coffee said the gathering had a celebratory, festival-like atmosphere. He spent his time several hundred yards from the Capitol, bouncing from person to person, filming, taking photos for Facebook, and connecting with others.

He says he only stormed the building when he overheard an older man asking for reinforcements to “hold the line” near the front of the crowd, where rioters were attempting to overwhelm police on a second-level promenade by collectively pushing against them like a human battering ram. In Coffee’s telling, he innocently moved toward the front of the crowd, where some rioters were choking on tear gas and being trampled, to help “patriots” being victimized by police. Coffee told me he tried to de-escalate the situation by reciting Abraham Lincoln’s words: “A house divided against itself cannot stand!”

“There were people that were getting smothered,” he recalled thinking at the time. “The cops were moving forward and throwing tear gas and we needed to hold them back so we could get people out of there.” He added, “I kept saying, ‘Stop, we’re all Americans,’ and the cops kept beating me with their batons. I had a fight-or-flight response.”

In the days immediately after the riot, Coffee struck a proud tone about the crowd, posting videos on his Facebook account boasting about his experience at the Capitol. (Soon after, he was banned from the platform.) While in hiding, he also made multiple appearances on a YouTube talk show, *Conspiracy Castle*, and continued to post on Instagram—where his account remains active—about the incoming “QStorm” and his frustration with “cancel culture.”

In recent weeks, Coffee began to worry about his future, even though he called his actions at the Capitol “self-defense.” He hired a lawyer, and while he wished to stay longer at the resort, he grew to believe he would soon be arrested and charged. Reached by phone the night before he was planning to turn himself into authorities, Coffee said he’d been back in

Dallas for about a week. He tried to sound confident but seemed noticeably shaken. Prison didn't seem to be his primary concern. He'd accompanied his father as he ministered to inmates on at least four occasions and had some sense of what a future behind bars held; he even told me he'd accept a sentence, if it comes, as God's will. Instead, Coffee worried, voice quivering, that he had "brought shame" to his family. "I have liberal friends who think that I've lost it and that I'm a right-wing extremist, which is not the case."

It echoed a sentiment he'd shared in a rare moment of remorse when we met in person in late January and chatted behind his quaint, one-bedroom cottage. "I just don't want to be forever known as the Capitol riot guy."

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