

Assorted news stories tell of legal system's strength

For those who consume legal news, the past month has supplied an embarrassment of riches when it comes to headline-grabbing stories. Of particular note, each story has converged on the vitality of the American legal system – and the starring role that lawyers play in the part of peacemaker, problem-solver, and guardians of democracy.

Of utmost importance, the stories arising out of the January 6 hearings on the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol have provided much of the legal fodder, spelling out in graphic detail how close we came to a coup d'état on one of the darkest days in American history.

Fortunately, a number of courageous and strong-willed members of the Attorney General's Office and the U.S. Department of Justice helped prevent that from happening, taking a stand for the truth in the face of repeated and discredited attempts to peddle a false narrative that the presidential election was "stolen."

Equally brave were a number of judges in states across the nation who heard and then tossed claims of a grand election conspiracy, ruling in case after debunked case that no cause of action existed. As footnotes to those related stories, several of the perpetrators of that scheme to overturn the results of the presidential election are now in a legal pickle of their own for knowingly filing cases built on a foundation of falsehoods.

Another example of the strength of our legal system revolved around the contempt of Congress trial involving former White House aide Steve Bannon, a far-right provocateur who refused

to comply with a subpoena in the congressional investigation of the January 6 uprising.

A federal jury took less than three hours to return a guilty verdict for Bannon, sending him a clear message that it's unwise to thumb your nose at a legislative committee seeking information about possible criminal wrongdoing. The July 22 verdict, which found Bannon guilty of two counts of flouting the subpoena issued by the House select committee, should have served as a wake-up call for another defendant.

Alex Jones is the man who has made a vast fortune on concocting conspiracy theories and then selling them across his Infowars website to a gullible public.

On August 5, a Texas jury found Jones liable for \$45.2 million in punitive damages for defaming the parents of a 6-year-old boy killed in the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut. The jury's verdict came on the heels of \$4.1 million in compensatory damages that Jones was ordered to pay for spreading his outlandish claims that the school massacre in which 26 people were killed was nothing more than a "giant hoax" orchestrated by the anti-gun lobby in the U.S.

Together, the verdict against Bannon and the damages assessed Jones serve as prime examples of the price to be paid in our legal system for not playing by the rules. Or, to couch it in terms that defendants like Bannon and Jones may better understand, those "who live by the sword, die by the sword."

The owners of Fox Corp., the media conglomerate that operates Fox News,



may soon have their own legal reckoning for allegedly and repeatedly airing false claims that Dominion Voting Systems was part of a plot to steal votes in the 2020 presidential election.

Dominion is seeking \$1.6 billion in damages in the defamation case, charging that Fox News anchors and executives knew that claims the company engaged in a scheme of ballot-rigging and vote-stealing were fictitious.

The sum of those stories adds up to a decisive victory for the rule of law and those who believe in truth-telling.

But, sadly, that is not the end of this column, as an August 8 FBI search of a former president's estate may lead to criminal charges being brought for illegally possessing classified government documents. The fallout from that mess, however, is a story for another day, when perhaps the ultimate legal message will be sent:

No man is above the law.

Best regards,
Jack Buchanan, President