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# Activist Convicted Of Disrupting Senate Committee

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Elena Sassower found out yesterday that disrupting court doesn't do you much good when you're trying to beat a charge that you disrupted Congress.

After watching her interrupt, disobey and generally infuriate Judge Brian Holeman over the course of a week-long trial, a D.C. Superior Court jury took only a couple of hours yesterday to convict Sassower of disrupting a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing last spring. She faces up to six months in jail when she is sentenced June 1.

Sassower is a founder of a New York group that believes that ordinary citizens should have a greater say in the selection of federal judges, and she had wanted to testify against a nominee for a seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit. Such testimony is typically not permitted, and Sassower had been warned that she would face arrest if she disrupted the Senate hearing. Undeterred, she tried to speak anyway and was taken into custody by U.S. Capitol Police.

Last week, nearly a year after the episode, she went on trial, serving as her own attorney. The case jacket, as thick as two phone books and spilling into a second volume, was filled with one defense motion after another. It was a hint of what was to come in a misdemeanor trial that would end up lasting as long as many a more complicated and more serious felony case.

Sassower, 47, did not take the verdict quietly, voicing her disagreement as she was being told when to return for sentencing.

Holeman, who at one point in the trial had Sassower locked up briefly for repeatedly disregarding his instructions, made it clear that he would do it again.

"You will not disrupt my courtroom again," he said. "Keep your mouth shut and leave."

Sassower quieted down—until she was outside the courtroom, where she launched into a tirade about the conduct of the judge and the government and an alleged conspiracy between them.

"This is a politically explosive case," she exclaimed, fingers pointing.

She said the matter did not belong in Superior Court because the court is funded through an annual appropriation from Congress. She tried—and failed—to have the trial moved and the judge replaced. "He had to get a guilty verdict," she said of Holeman.

Sassower accused the judge of derailing her case, calling his conduct "indefensible." Frustrated by the slow pace, the judge frequently told Sassower to make her point during the trial and limited her opening statement to the jury.

A court spokeswoman said Holeman had no comment on the case because it remains pending.