

Obama collaborates in Florida attack on right to vote

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The Obama administration has agreed to cooperate with the state of Florida in a plan to purge from the state's voter rolls thousands of people who are allegedly noncitizens.

Last week, the federal Department of Homeland Security outlined to Florida Governor Rick Scott its willingness to let the state use a federal database to assist in the purge. The state had suspended the anti-democratic campaign after revelations of its discriminatory impact and targeting of likely Democratic Party voters.

Republican Governor Scott, who spent \$73 million of his personal fortune on his own gubernatorial campaign, began his attempt to purge noncitizens from Florida's voter rolls in May of this year by comparing names in the Florida Voter Registration System with a State Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles database, a process which initially flagged up to 182,000 people on the state's voting list as possible noncitizens.

The list was eventually pared down to around 2,700. Lists of persons in this latter group were sent to local election officials, with instructions to send letters to those identified, warning that they may have committed a felony and should request a hearing within 30 days if they wished to prove they were eligible to vote.

As it turned out, at least 500 of the 2,700 persons on the purge list, and perhaps many more, are US citizens. The election supervisor for Miami-Dade County advised state officials that the error rate in that county was at least 30 percent. Some 60 percent of those to be purged are Hispanic, while that demographic comprises only 13 percent of eligible voters in Florida. Two-thirds of all those on the list reside in Miami-Dade County, which is heavily Democratic.

There is no dispute that the methodology behind

generating the state's purge list is flawed. To begin with, the State Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles database contains out-of-date information. Immigrants who obtained a driver's license and subsequently became citizens would be flagged as noncitizens illegally registering to vote, for example.

Numerous accounts from Florida newspapers, including the *Miami Herald*, *Orlando Sentinel* and *Tampa Bay Times*, highlighted gross errors in the lists used for the purge, including the case of a 91-year-old Brooklyn native and decorated World War II veteran, Bill Internicola, who was compelled to bring his military discharge papers from 1945 to prove he was an American citizen entitled to vote.

Far from being some sort of design flaw, the overbroad and error-prone methodology was an essential element of the voter purge. Like the recent spate of voter ID laws and limitations on same-day registration and early voting, Florida's purge is intended to eliminate as large a number as possible of minorities, students, the disabled and elderly, and working class voters who tend to vote for the Democratic Party.

The Scott administration sought to legitimize the purging process by supplementing the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles database with the federal Department of Homeland Security SAVE (Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements) database.

On June 11, the Department of Justice announced plans to sue the Florida Secretary of State and end the purge. The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 bars systematic purges of voter rolls within 90 days of a federal election. Also on June 11, Governor Scott unveiled his intention to sue DHS to gain access to the

SAVE database.

A federal judge ruled against the Obama administration's effort to stop the voter purge. There was no court order requiring the Department of Homeland Security to give Florida officials access to the SAVE database, however.

According to the July 9 letter from Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the director of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services of the Department of Homeland Security, five counties in Arizona are already using the SAVE database for this purpose. Republican governors and elections officials in 10 other states, including the likely election battleground states of Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Michigan and Ohio, intend to follow Florida's lead in using the DHS data to purge their voter rolls.

The SAVE database contains around 100 million records relating to the immigration status of hundreds of thousands of people living in the United States.

The decision to collaborate with Florida's voter purge is the latest evidence that the 2012 presidential election will be the most antidemocratic election at least since the US Supreme Court helped George W. Bush steal the presidency by halting a state-required vote recount in the 2000 presidential election.

It is worth noting that in that election, Florida election officials, under the direction of Governor Jeb Bush, brother of then-candidate George W. Bush, targeted 12,000 supposed felons for removal from the voter rolls in a blatant attempt to keep African Americans away from the polls. Another 48,000 were targeted in 2004, again including huge numbers of eligible voters.

The Obama administration's backing down has profound political significance. First and foremost, it demonstrates once again that there exists no constituency within the ruling class that supports even the most fundamental of democratic rights. Democrats fear that any substantial protest or fight on the issue of democratic rights could touch off a broader social movement that could easily escape their control.

Second, the use of the federal SAVE database sets a dangerous precedent, allowing the federal police agencies to work with state governments to keep people from exercising the fundamental democratic right to vote.

On the issue of democratic rights, there exists no real difference between the Democratic president and the

Republican governor. In the face of a national Republican campaign to keep legitimate voters away from the polls, the Democratic Party refuses to take up any principled defense of democratic rights, even when it would serve its short-term electoral interests.



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