

Trump running mate attacks black voter registration effort

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While Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump repeats his warnings of systematic vote fraud in every campaign stop, one of the most significant efforts to rig the November 8 election has been authorized by his running mate for vice president, Indiana Governor Mike Pence.

Indiana state police raided the offices of the Indiana Voter Registration Project on October 4, one week before the deadline for submitting registration forms, and seized computers, cellphones and an estimated 45,000 completed voter registration applications.

According to Craig Varoga, president of Patriot Majority USA, a Democratic Party-aligned group, most of those whose applications were seized are African-American, and they may not be able to vote November 8 because they lack the necessary paperwork.

“Mike Pence has a well-oiled political machine that is using the Indiana State Police to suppress African American votes and violate the Constitutional rights of tens of thousands of Hoosiers,” said Varoga in a statement, calling it “voter suppression at its worst.”

A spokesman for the Indiana State Police issued an unusually harsh statement attacking the voter registration campaign, declaring, “Every allegation by Patriot Majority USA against the Indiana State Police is completely false. In fact, it is clear from evidence documented to date that we have uncovered intentional acts of fraud by representatives of Patriot Majority USA.”

However, the spokesman, Captain David Bursten, admitted only 10 applications had been deemed questionable out of the 28,000 that were seized. Most of these involved incorrect ZIP codes and other peripheral information. There was no evidence that applications had been forged or otherwise altered.

After this admission provoked a wave of public

criticism, Bursten issued a new accounting, claiming, “there are more than 300 copies of voter application forms that fall within the categories of being fraudulent or forged.” Even if true, this would amount to barely 1 percent of the total number of applications seized.

And these would involve the registration of nonexistent people—likely the result of Patriot Majority paying people to collect registration applications—without anyone actually voting improperly. In-person vote fraud is so rare that one study found only 31 cases out of more than 1 billion votes cast.

The myth of massive in-person vote fraud has been a staple of Republican Party propaganda for more than a decade, used to justify antidemocratic laws that restrict early voting and other efforts to increase turnout by making voting easier for minority workers and the poor.

Indiana has been a pioneer in the adoption of strict voter ID laws requiring a photo ID as a condition of registering and voting. The Indiana law was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2008 on a narrow 5-4 vote, against a challenge by civil rights and civil liberties groups who pointed to the openly avowed intention of sponsors of such legislation to reduce minority turnout and aid Republican candidates.

According to press reports, the state police investigation began in late August, after county election officials in suburban Hendricks County claimed that some applications that were turned in for processing were missing information or otherwise inaccurate. The investigation expanded to Marion County, the state’s largest, home to Indianapolis and to the state’s largest African-American community.

Officials said that the investigation into possible vote fraud was initially expanded to seven other counties,

including Lake County, which includes Gary, and Allen County, which includes Ft. Wayne, and is now being conducted in 56 of the state's 92 counties.

Governor Pence, whom Trump selected as his running mate in July, issued a statement after the state police investigation became public, urging supporters to monitor the polls on November 8. "If you are concerned about voter integrity and you haven't signed up to be a poll watcher, to volunteer at a polling place to be a part of the integrity of that process, then you need to do it," he said.

Patriot Majority USA claimed that the state police deliberately intimidated voter registration workers during the raid October 4, prohibiting them from videotaping the raid, handcuffing one African-American worker and denying him the right to call his attorney.

The Indiana Voter Registration Project issued a statement saying that it "has reviewed tens of thousands of applications and identified a small handful that may have had incomplete or inaccurate information and, in those instances, we immediately informed the Registrar and asked them to double check those forms for accuracy."

Both groups are run by longtime Democratic Party operatives, and are funded by Senate Majority PAC, a campaign fund-raising group established by associates of Senator Harry Reid, the current Democratic leader in the Senate. Indiana has a closely contested Senate seat, after incumbent Republican Dan Coats announced his retirement.

Meanwhile Trump has repeated his unsupported allegations of widespread vote fraud at the polls, attacking Republican Party officials who have denied that such claims have any basis. Since the Republican Party controls state government in Ohio, North Carolina, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin and other "battleground" states, Trump's charges amount to suggesting that Republicans are seeking to steal the election from him.

One factor increasing the desperation in the Trump campaign is the rising Democratic turnout among early voters in Florida, North Carolina and other states, after court decisions overturned efforts by the Republican-controlled state governments to reduce such access to the polls.



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