

Obama denounces recount effort

Eric London
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The Obama administration is opposing efforts to recount the presidential election vote in the three key states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan.

The *New York Times* reported Friday that a “senior Obama administration official” issued a statement that read, “We stand behind our election results, which accurately reflect the will of the American people.” The official said the administration is “confident in the overall integrity of electoral infrastructure, a confidence that was borne out. As a result, we believe our elections were free and fair from a cybersecurity perspective.”

This statement is extraordinary on several levels. First, the fact that the *Times* identified the official as a senior figure means that the president—either personally or through a close advisor—is denouncing an entirely legitimate legal action to verify the outcome of the election in states where the result was exceptionally close.

Second, the claim that the election “accurately reflects the will of the American people” is contradicted by the fact that Clinton’s lead in the popular vote has swelled to over 2.2 million and is expected to climb even higher. Trump won the November 8 election despite his popular vote defeat because of the arcane and anti-democratic American Electoral College system.

Clinton won the popular vote by a wider tally than the victorious candidates in four post-World War II elections: 1948 (Truman over Dewey), 1960 (Kennedy over Nixon), 1968 (Nixon over Humphrey) and 1976 (Carter over Ford). Al Gore lost the Electoral College to George W. Bush in 2000 due to the anti-democratic intervention of the Supreme Court, which halted a recount in Florida that would have given the decisive state to Gore. The Democratic candidate won the popular vote by 500,000—a quarter of Clinton’s margin in 2016.

Yet the Democratic Party and its main spokespeople, from Obama and Clinton to the supposedly “left” Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, are virtually ignoring the divergence between the popular vote and the electoral vote and quietly accepting Trump’s fraudulent claim to have won a massive popular mandate for the implementation of a far-right agenda.

Third, growing calls for a recount follow legitimate appeals by attorneys and election scientists for a review of possible fraud. On Wednesday, Professor J. Alex Halderman of the University of Michigan issued a statement calling for a recount on the grounds that electronic voting machines may have been hacked, resulting in Trump winning key states.

Halderman wrote: “The only way to know whether a cyberattack changed the result is to closely examine the available physical evidence—paper ballots and voting equipment in critical states like

Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, nobody is ever going to examine that evidence unless candidates in those states act now, in the next several days, to petition for recounts.”

On Friday, Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein filed paperwork for a recount in Wisconsin and is expected to file recount petitions in Michigan and Pennsylvania this week. These will likely be accepted and recounts will move forward. Should the results be overturned in all three states, Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton would pass the threshold of 270 electoral votes required to become president.

Wisconsin

Trump’s present lead is 22,000 votes out of 2.9 million cast. A recount will now begin with a deadline of December 13. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Attorney General Brad Schimel are both Republicans. Several precincts in Sauk and Outagamie County posted results that showed more votes for presidential candidates than total votes. Local official election web sites then updated the figures, eliminating thousands of votes for Trump. A Democratic Party-aligned group filed an election complaint with the Wisconsin Elections Commission to investigate the discrepancies.

Michigan

Trump leads by roughly 10,000 votes out of 4.8 million cast. Unlike Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, Michigan does not conduct a manual audit of precincts to compare reported election totals with ballots cast. Michigan Governor Rick Snyder and Attorney General Bill Schuette are both Republicans.

Pennsylvania

Though the vote margin in Pennsylvania is larger than in the other two states—68,000 votes out of 6 million—most Pennsylvania counties use electronic voting machines that Halderman

characterizes as “insecure.” These machines do not print a paper record of the vote. Halderman explains that such machines can be “infected” by “bugs, misconfiguration, or malicious software” aimed at altering the result. They have been labeled the highest risk for fraud by the voter-protection non-profit organization Verified Voting.

The Clinton campaign issued an official response on Saturday through its general counsel, Marc Elias. The statement reads, “Because we had not uncovered any actionable evidence of hacking or outside attempts to alter the voting technology, we had not planned to exercise this option ourselves [i.e., initiate a recount], but now that a recount has been initiated in Wisconsin, we intend to participate in order to ensure the process proceeds in a manner that is fair to all sides.”

Elias wrote that the Clinton campaign “will take the same approach” in Pennsylvania and Michigan. “We do so fully aware that the number of votes separating Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in the closest of these states—Michigan—well exceeds the largest margin ever overcome in a recount.”

The Obama administration remains openly hostile to any recount effort.

The *Hill* reported: “Obama allies are dead-set against the multi-state recount effort. Former Obama White House Communications Director Dan Pfeiffer mocked it on Twitter: ‘The amount of Democratic energy and money being wasted on recounts instead of trying to win the Louisiana Senate Race is mind-boggling.’”

Just six weeks ago, the Obama administration took the unprecedented step of officially accusing Russia of interfering in the elections. The October 7 denunciation by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Department of Homeland Security read: “The US Intelligence Community is confident that the Russian Government directed the recent compromises of emails from US persons and institutions, including from US political organizations... These thefts and disclosures are intended to interfere with the US election process.”

Attempts by the Obama administration and the Clinton campaign to downplay the coming recount exposes the fraudulence of their pre-election effort to generate hysteria over “Russian hacking.”

According to a forthcoming book by Amie Parnes and Jonathan Allen, Obama pressured Clinton to concede relatively early on election night. Three high-level Clinton sources say Obama called Hillary Clinton on election night and told her: “You need to concede.”

“There was a lot of discussion about Michigan and Wisconsin and whether the numbers could flip it,” one of the sources close to Clinton said. “If anybody knew what actually happened that night, no one would have conceded.”

Clinton has come under substantial pressure to go along with the Green Party’s recount effort due to the scale of her popular vote margin and the narrowness of her defeats in these three states. The fact that the effort to rescue the Democratic Party has fallen to the Green Party speaks both to the spinelessness of the Democrats and the pro-capitalist, pro-establishment character of the Greens. This opens the door for a more prominent role for the Greens within the political establishment in the period ahead.

The Trump campaign has responded to the recount in a defensive

and provocative manner. In a series of tweets, Trump attacked the recount as a vindictive political stunt and claimed he lost the popular vote because of “millions of people who voted illegally.” The latter completely unsubstantiated claim actually undermines his argument against the recount, since such widespread fraud would clearly necessitate an extensive review and recalculation.

On Sunday, Trump’s former campaign manager and current transition leader Kellyanne Conway implied on ABC News’ “This Week” program that Trump might revoke his decision not to prosecute Clinton for her use of a personal email account while serving as secretary of state if she does not oppose the recount effort. Conway accused Clinton of joining “this ridiculously fantastical recount that Jill Stein is engaging in in Wisconsin and perhaps elsewhere.” She added, “So you’ve got the president-elect, Donald Trump, being quite magnanimous to Hillary Clinton and you’ve got her responding with joining into this recount...”

Underscoring the support of the Obama administration for Trump’s ultra-right government-in-waiting, Conway noted later in the interview, “President Obama and President-Elect Trump speak regularly. They spoke yesterday at length. They’re trying to move on and form a government.”

Senator Bernie Sanders appeared on the same ABC News program and said the recount was “not a big deal.” He added, “I don’t think that anybody, Secretary Clinton or anybody else, thinks that there’s going to be profound changes.”

The pathetic role played by the Democrats cannot be explained merely as the product of their congenital spinelessness and cowardice, although these traits are on full display. Rather, the Democratic Party represents a capitalist class whose priority in the transition of power lies in limiting social opposition in the working class and imposing the reactionary policies planned by the incoming administration.



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