

As neo-Nazis head to Richmond, Trump boosts gun-rights rally

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On the eve of a planned right-wing gun-rights rally in Richmond, Virginia, fascists and white supremacists are reportedly heading for the Virginia state capitol, hoping to create a “second Charlottesville,” modeled on the neo-Nazi riot in 2017 which killed one anti-fascist demonstrator and attracted the praise of President Donald Trump, who called the fascist marchers “good people.”

Trump signaled his support for the Richmond event, tweeting Friday that the Democratic-controlled state government in Virginia was engaged in violating the Second Amendment rights of the state’s gun owners. “Your 2nd Amendment is under very serious attack in the Great Commonwealth of Virginia,” he wrote. “That’s what happens when you vote for Democrats, they will take your guns away. Republicans will win Virginia in 2020. Thank you Dems!”

Trump’s tweet was a gesture of open encouragement to ultra-rightists and neo-Nazis only days before the president’s trial before the US Senate begins, on impeachment charges brought by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. It is a clear demonstration that Trump is not relying merely on the Republican majority in the Senate to safeguard his hold on power but aims to mobilize forces entirely outside the existing two-party structure of capitalist politics.

Monday’s rally was called by the Virginia Citizens Defense League, a gun-rights organization that is well to the right of the National Rifle Association. The NRA has declined to join the planned demonstration, urging its supporters to take part in a separate effort to lobby the state legislature against prospective gun regulations that have passed the Virginia state Senate and are now before the General Assembly.

Hundreds of neo-Nazis and white supremacists have indicated on social media that they are traveling to

Richmond, either to participate in the rally on the capitol grounds—where firearms are now prohibited under a state of emergency declared by Governor Ralph Northam—or in the crowd that will assemble just outside the rally perimeter, where gun possession will be legal.

Under the state of emergency, which extends from 5 p.m. Thursday to 5 p.m. Tuesday, the area around the state capitol has been turned into a fortress. State police have fenced off the capitol grounds, with a single point of entry for protesters, where they must divide into lines to pass through 17 metal detectors in order to enter a pie-shaped pen. Those found to be in possession of firearms will be denied admission.

Northam has banned not only firearms, but torches, bats, laser pointers and scissors from the capitol grounds. The Virginia state Supreme Court upheld the temporary ban on Friday after it was challenged by several gun rights groups.

The Federal Aviation Administration has imposed temporary flight restrictions for Richmond’s airspace, making it illegal to fly drones or small planes anywhere near the state capitol. Northam said that officials were concerned about possible threats from weaponized drones.

The actual gun regulations being enacted by the Virginia state legislature are quite modest. There are several separate bills limiting handgun purchases to one per month, banning military-style weapons and silencers, allowing local governments to ban guns in certain public spaces, and expanding background checks.

Democrats won control of the state legislature in November and pledges to adopt such legislation played a major part in the final months of the election campaign. Governor Northam, a Democrat, has said he will sign the restrictions into law. None of the measures

violates the Second Amendment to the Constitution, even under the current interpretation by the US Supreme Court as an individual right to bear arms, and most of them are in effect in several other states already, without a noticeable effect either on gun ownership or on gun violence.

The initial response of right-wing groups and the Republican Party has been the adoption of “Second Amendment sanctuary” proclamations, in which officials of villages, towns and counties have pledged not to enforce the restrictions, claiming they are unconstitutional. These proclamations have been adopted by more than 110 local jurisdictions in the state, most of them small and rural.

In his annual State of the Commonwealth Address to the state legislature last week, Northam sought to appease the right-wing campaign over the gun regulations. He declared, “No one is calling out the National Guard. No one is cutting off your electricity or turning off the internet. No one is going door-to-door to confiscate guns.”

The birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has become the customary day for various groups, both liberal and conservative, to lobby the Virginia state legislature, but the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, which supports the gun restrictions, canceled its planned rally because of the danger of a confrontation with the ultra-rightists.

The holiday is now suffused with the threat of violence by the gun-rights demonstrators, either directly against the state capitol itself, or, more likely, against any counter-protesters who may attempt to challenge them, as was the case in Charlottesville, some 60 miles away, three years ago.

In an indication of the lack of popular support for the white supremacists, barely 100 people took part Friday in a Lee-Jackson Day parade in Lexington, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Valley about 40 miles west of Charlottesville. The parade was supposedly a staging ground for Monday’s much larger rally in Richmond.

At least seven neo-Nazis were arrested in three separate operations by the FBI last week. Three were arrested in Delaware, suspected of planning a violent provocation during the Richmond rally. Three more were arrested in Georgia, on suspicion of plotting to “overthrow the government and murder a Bartow County couple,” according to a police statement. The

fascists targeted the Florida couple because they believed they were members of the anti-Nazi Antifa group. It was not known whether the three men in Georgia had been planning to travel to Richmond.

In Racine, Wisconsin, another member of the same group, which calls itself “the Base,” was arrested on charges of vandalizing a synagogue.



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