

Montana state representative calls for socialists to be shot

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Montana State Representative Rodney Garcia has called for socialists to be shot. His statement was made in Helena January 31 during the kickoff meeting for the state Republican election campaigns.

When asked Saturday by a reporter from the *Billings Gazette* to clarify his remarks, Garcia doubled down, claiming, “So actually in the Constitution of the United States (if) they are found guilty of being a socialist member you either go to prison or are shot.” He continued “They’re enemies of the free state. What do we do with our enemies in war? In Vietnam, (Afghanistan), all those. What did we do?”

While Garcia did not name anyone in particular, his diatribe was no doubt in part directed against Amelia Marquez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and his opponent in the 2018 state election in District 52, in the city of Billings. Marquez has made no mention of Garcia’s comments on her official candidate Facebook page, and neither she, the DSA nor the Montana Democratic Party responded when contacted by the WSWWS about whether or not they feared violence incited by Garcia against their former candidate.

Garcia’s threats of violence come in the context of mounting attacks on socialists by Republican politicians. New York Representative Elise Stefanik recently attacked her state’s Democrats as “far-left” for their “horrible and dangerous agenda.” Iowa Senator Joni Ernst trumpeted during her first reelection campaign meeting that America is “under attack” by the “radical left” spreading “socialism ... from coast to coast.” For their part, the Montana Republicans warn on their website of a “take-over” by liberals that will “turn America into a socialist nation.”

These sentiments have been most loudly espoused by President Donald Trump, who regularly denounces

socialism in his campaign rallies, and included such a diatribe in his State of the Union address last year and again on Tuesday night. Trump appeared at a Republican campaign rally in Billings in September 2018, where he made his usual appeals to the ultra-right over immigration, gun rights and abortion, among other issues, while supporting both state-wide candidates like Matt Rosendale, who was defeated by incumbent Democratic Senator Jon Tester, and local candidates like Garcia.

Trump has also tweeted support for numerous right-wing gatherings, including the gun-rights rally held in Richmond, Virginia in January and the fascist march in Charlottesville in 2017. After anti-fascist counter-demonstrator Heather Heyer was murdered by a neo-Nazi at the Charlottesville event, Trump declared that the far-right marchers were “very fine people.”

The leadership of the Montana Republican Party responded to Garcia’s remarks by calling for his resignation. In a letter signed by Speaker of the House Greg Hertz, Speaker Pro Tempore E. Wylie Galt and House Majority Leader Brad Tschida, the state party leadership wrote, “Your actions have irreparably undermined the body in which you serve and irrevocably broken the trust of those you were elected to represent.”

That is to say that they are not concerned as much with what was said, but how it will be perceived by working class voters in the coming elections. Their indifference is underscored by the fact that there will be no formal action against Garcia for inciting violence against political opponents. Hertz claimed that it would cost \$50,000 to call a special session of the Montana legislature in order to sanction the fascist representative. Nor did the Montana Republicans respond to a question from the WSWWS as to why they

condemned Garcia's remarks and not similar calls for violence made by Trump.

Garcia, 64, was previously a state representative in 1985-87 before going on to work in Montana's oil fields. Garcia has cited the reduction of jobs in the Bakken Formation as one of the main reasons tax revenue has decreased in the state. He ran in 2014 and 2016 for state senator in different Billings seats and is again currently running for state senator, using his election campaign to legitimize his threats of violence. Garcia stated to the Associated Press, "I'm going to run for the Senate and I'm going to win. People are going to have to eat their words."

In previous election cycles, he was forced to return a \$3,000 illegal campaign contribution and was widely criticized for accusing the state's Child Protective Services of kidnapping children. He also attempted to have the state of Montana raise \$500 million to buy the aging four-unit coal-burning Colstrip power plant. It was likely that it would then be sold to NorthWestern Energy, which wanted the cost of the plant reduced by \$300 million. He has also been arrested and convicted for a domestic dispute involving his ex-wife.



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