

Trump tweets support for far-right protests against social distancing orders

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President Donald Trump on Friday posted a series of tweets promoting far-right groups that are holding demonstrations in state capitals against mainly Democratic governors to demand the immediate lifting of stay-at-home orders. In separate postings, he tweeted, “LIBERATE MICHIGAN,” “LIBERATE MINNESOTA,” and “LIBERATE VIRGINIA, and save your great 2nd Amendment. It is under siege.”

The incitement of such protests, carried out in violation of state stay-at-home orders and federal guidelines that extend until the end of April, coincides with the government's stepped-up push for a rapid return to work, under conditions of record infection and death rates and an absence of any centrally organized, large-scale testing program.

Having announced on Thursday his plan for the state-by-state reopening of the economy, in the face of ongoing strikes and protests by workers against being forced back to work without health safeguards, Trump is seeking to mobilize his far-right base to press for a rapid lifting of barriers to corporate profit-making.

Trump's tweets followed demonstrations Wednesday in Lansing, Michigan; Frankfurt, Kentucky and Raleigh, North Carolina, and protests Thursday in Richmond, Virginia and Austin, Texas. They coincided with demonstrations on Friday in St. Paul, Minnesota and Boise, Idaho.

A protest is scheduled for today in Olympia, Washington, and others are expected in the coming days in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and other states. Many of these states are considered to be swing states that could decide the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

The biggest demonstration thus far, still relatively small with some 1,000 participants, took place Wednesday in Lansing. Along with a car caravan that clogged the streets in front of the Capitol building, scores of demonstrators rallied in the open on the Capitol grounds. Defying orders

to wear masks and observe social distancing, they chanted “Lock her up,” referring to Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer, who last week extended state stay-at-home orders until May 4.

Most wore pro-Trump garb and some carried assault rifles. Some displayed Nazi insignia and carried Confederate flags. Dubbed “Operation Gridlock,” the event was sponsored by the Michigan Conservative Coalition, an ultra-right group of Trump loyalists. It was promoted by the Michigan Freedom Fund, an outfit financed by the billionaire DeVos family. Betsy DeVos, the wife of former Amway CEO Dick DeVos, is Trump's secretary of education.

Also involved were fascistic organizations such as the Michigan Proud Boys, the Michigan Liberty Militia, religious fundamentalists, anti-vaccination groups and other elements of the extreme right.

Republican National Committee Chair Ronna Romney McDaniel, who is from Michigan, tweeted greetings “from the police state of Michigan,” while denouncing the lockdown as “authoritarian” and a “power grab.”

The demonstration on Friday in Boise, Idaho against Republican Governor Brad Little was backed by the Idaho Freedom Foundation, which is funded by the Koch brothers and the fortune of the right-wing beer mogul Adolph Coors. Ammon Bundy, the leader of the militia occupation of the Malheur national wildlife refuge in 2016, which became a rallying point for the fascistic right in the US, publicly promoted the event.

The corporate media have given lavish and generally sympathetic coverage to the Lansing protest, using it to present a distorted narrative of a popular drumbeat to end anti-pandemic restrictions and reopen business activity. The networks and cable news channels—which have downplayed waves of wildcat strikes and protests by hospital workers, transit workers, Amazon workers, meat packing workers, grocery and Instacart workers, and

others—have concealed the far-right and fascistic groups behind the Lansing protest as well as the other “reopen America” demonstrations.

Fox News is openly promoting the events, and no doubt has had a hand, along with the White House and right-wing corporate groups, in staging them. Laura Ingraham tweeted on Friday: “How many of those who urged our govt to help liberate the Iraqis, Syrians, Kurds, Afghanis, etc. are as committed now to liberating Virginia, Minnesota, California, etc?”

The Democratic governors, whatever their tactical differences with the Trump administration, have fallen into line with the back-to-work drive. Just hours after the pro-Trump rally at the governor's mansion in St. Paul on Friday, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz issued an executive order reopening businesses such as golf courses and driving ranges, bait shops, marina services, outdoor shooting ranges and game farms, as well as public and private parks and trails.

The Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, Tom Wolf, announced a “framework” for reopening his state, as did Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott. Florida Governor Ron De Santis gave the green light for the reopening of beaches, and Jacksonville Mayor Lenny Curry promptly opened up the beaches in his city.

At his daily coronavirus press conference on Friday, Trump hailed the day's 704-point gain in the Dow Jones Industrial Average, concluding the blue-chip index's best two-week performance since the 1930s. The euphoria on Wall Street in the midst of an economic collapse without precedent since the Great Depression, including the loss of 22 million jobs over the past four weeks, is in response to the allocation of trillions of dollars in taxpayer money to bail out and further enrich the corporate-financial aristocracy. The misnamed CARES Act, which provides more than \$6 trillion to cover the bad debts and losses of the banks, corporations and hedge funds, was passed at the end of March with the near-unanimous support of the Democrats.

The stock market “is not far below its all-time high,” Trump boasted.

Trump and his far-right allies are seeking to exploit genuine anger and anxiety among workers and small business people over the catastrophic loss of jobs and income resulting from the ruling class's refusal to mount a serious response to the pandemic, and the wholly inadequate assistance being offered to workers and shop keepers, even as trillions are handed over to the corporate-financial elite.

But the mass of workers opposes being forced back to work only to face infection and possible death from the virus, and the prospect of infecting their coworkers, families and friends. The protests being organized by the Republican right are attracting few workers and are dominated by backward, disoriented and ultra-reactionary forces.

In contrast to the media narrative of a groundswell of support for lifting social distancing measures, a Pew Research Center poll released on Thursday showed that 66 percent of Americans are concerned that state governments will lift restrictions on public activity too quickly, more than double the 32 percent who believe the states are not moving quickly enough.

This includes more than half of Republicans, 51 percent, as compared to 46 percent who worry that restrictions will be lifted too slowly.

The poll also showed that 65 percent believe Trump was too slow to address the threat of the pandemic in the US, as opposed to 34 percent who say he moved too quickly.

The poll indicated that 73 percent of Americans believe the worst is still to come in the pandemic.

Within the framework of the capitalist system and its two-party political monopoly, there is no humane and rational way forward in the fight against the mass death and disease caused by the pandemic. But the alternative being presented of risk death on the job or face homelessness and starvation is a false alternative.

The real alternative for the working class, the vast majority of the population, is the mobilization of workers to expropriate the financial oligarchy and utilize the immense wealth of society to provide the medical care and testing needed to halt the pandemic, while insuring that workers suffer no loss in employment or income for the duration of the health crisis.



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