

Republican operatives indicted in voter suppression scheme in Michigan

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Two Republican political operatives are facing multiple felony charges for their role in orchestrating an automated voter intimidation scheme that sought to dissuade working class voters from submitting mail-in ballots for the November election. The allegations highlight the illegal, unconstitutional and racist methods by which the Trump administration is seeking to suppress turnout, particularly among big-city African-American voters, ahead of the election.

Jack Burkman, 54, and Jacob Wohl, 22, are each being charged with four felonies, including voter intimidation, conspiracy to commit an election law violation, using a computer to commit an election law crime and using a computer to commit a conspiracy crime. Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat, announced the charges on October 1.

They carry a combined total of up to 24 years in prison if convicted. In practice, however, each of the defendants would, at most, face 12 years.

Potential voters reported receiving voicemails that identified the caller as “Tamika Taylor from Project 1599,” described as a “civil rights organization founded by Jack Burkman and Jacob Wohl.” The voicemail from “Tamika” warned that if the individual chose to vote by mail, his or her personal information would be uploaded to a public database “that will be used by police departments to track down old warrants.”

The message also threatened that “credit card companies” would use the database to “collect outstanding debts.” It added that “the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] is even pushing to use records for mail-in voting to track people for mandatory vaccines,” and advised, “Don’t be finessed into giving your private information to the man, stay home safe and beware of vote by mail.”

The phone number allegedly used to make the

calls—(703) 795-5364—belongs to a John Burkman, whose address is the same as Burkman’s lobbying firm. Within the last three weeks, the phone number has been reported as a robo-call on the website nomorobo.com, with an accompanying voicemail denouncing Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden’s role in crafting the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, “which locked up millions of black people for non-violent drug crimes,” and the record of his running mate, Kamala Harris, as a “corrupt prosecutor where she kept black people in jail beyond their sentences for free prison labor.”

The message continued, “Joe and Kamala DO NOT stand with black people,” and concluded with a call to vote for “Kanye West November 3,” adding, “This message was paid for by Jack Burkman and Jacob Wohl Project 1599.”

In the statement announcing the charges, Nessel’s office confirmed with attorneys general in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois that residents in those states also reported receiving robo-calls from Project 1599. Wohl and Burkman have yet to make any public statements regarding the felony charges, but have previously declared their innocence.

Nessel alleges the pair directed as many as 85,000 calls nationally, and 12,000 within the Detroit 313 area code, which includes the enclaves of Highland Park and Hamtramck.

The Highland Park Ford Plant was built in 1910, and on October 7, 1913 it became the first automobile assembly plant in the world to implement the moving assembly line. This historic milestone increased the productivity of labor exponentially and laid the foundations for Highland Park’s meteoric rise, boasting one of the highest standards of living in the US in the early 20th century.

After decades of deindustrialization, financialization and corporate raiding, overseen by Democratic politicians and their criminal conspirators in the United Auto Workers union, Highland Park, which once had over 50,000 residents, is now home to less 15,000 people, with the last high school, a for-profit academy, closing in June 2015.

Burkman, currently a K Street lobbyist and conspiracy theorist, began his career in politics as a staffer for Republican New York Congressman Rick Lazio after graduating from Georgetown Law School. He then worked at Holland & Knight, an elite law firm that boasts on its homepage of its “bipartisan ties” and “long standing relationships on both sides of the aisle.” In the late 1990s and 2000s he made appearances on cable television, including Fox News, CNN and MSNBC.

After starting his own lobbying firm, J K Burkman and Associates, Burkman gained notoriety in 2014 when he proposed that the National Football League ban gay players. In that year, the then-St. Louis Rams drafted Michael Sam from the University of Missouri, who had recently come out as gay, making him the first openly gay NFL player. Through his organization, dubbed “American Decency,” which Burkman falsely claimed had over 3 million members, Burkman threatened a mass protest and boycott of the league.

As for Jacob Wohl, by the age of 18 he had already been under investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission for defrauding investors. In 2015, during a Fox Business News appearance, Wohl claimed to be the 17-year-old principal of a \$500,000 asset fund. A handicapped Arizona man, who was watching Wohl’s appearance, gave him \$75,000 to invest. Within a year, the man made a complaint to the Riverside County District Attorney’s Office stating that Wohl and his business associate, Matthew Johnson, had lost all of his money. The investor killed himself shortly thereafter.

Wohl was charged on September 4, 2019 with unlawful sales of securities, and pleaded not guilty to two felony charges of selling unregistered securities on February 24 of this year. The settlement hearing was scheduled for April 21, but due to COVID-19 it has been postponed.

Jacob’s father, David Wohl, is a Riverside criminal defense attorney and was a political surrogate for the

Trump campaign in 2016. The elder Wohl’s Twitter banner currently features a picture of him and Jacob with Trump in the middle. One of Wohl’s current clients is a virulent Islamophobe, Republican congressional candidate Laura Loomer. Loomer is running in Trump’s home district in Florida.

In November 2018, following the midterm elections that saw the Democrats’ gubernatorial candidate in Florida, Andrew Gillum, lose to Ron DeSantis by less than 0.5 percentage points, triggering an automatic recount, Loomer and members of the Proud Boys flocked to the Broward County Board of Elections to protest the recount, reprising the Republican “riot” during the stolen election of 2000.

Burkman and Wohl began conceiving political hoaxes and right-wing disinformation campaigns in the service of President Donald Trump beginning in 2018. What followed was a series of “dirty tricks” campaigns exemplifying the degradation of bourgeois politics, in which Wohl and Burkman attempted to coerce and trick unknowing participants into sexual scandals against perceived enemies of Trump, including former FBI Director Robert Mueller and former Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg.



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