

Video recordings reveal Republican strategy to suppress the vote in US election

Jacob Crosse
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Recordings made earlier this year and provided to the *Washington Post* from meetings held by the secretive Council for National Policy (CNP), a close-knit group of ultra-wealthy conservative and far-right extremists, reveal the high-level coordination between the Trump administration and Republican efforts around the country to suppress the vote and facilitate a presidential coup in the 2020 election.

Due to the raging pandemic, which has claimed over 221,000 lives in the US as of this writing, millions in the US are planning or already have begun to vote through the mail. Professor Michael McDonald of the University of Florida estimates that over 15 million ballots have already been returned in early voting states, a sign of the profound groundswell of support for democratic rights within the population.

Despite using absentee ballots himself, President Donald Trump has repeatedly denigrated mail-in ballots as fraudulent, using it as a pretext to question the overall integrity of the election and therefore not accept the results. In response to Trump's threats to subvert the democratic rights of millions of people and the US constitution, his Democratic challengers, former Vice President Joseph Biden, and Senator Kamala Harris have merely urged their supporters "to vote," avoiding any discussion of what the Democrats would do in the event Trump defies the vote.

However the CNP recordings reveal that a key element in the Trump's coup is to enlist the hundreds of federal judges appointed by his administration, including the newest nominee, Amy Coney Barrett, to ensure a rigged playing field for legal challenges to the outcome of the vote. The goal is to repeat the Republican "success" in the 2000 election, when the Supreme Court halted vote-counting in Florida and awarded the state's decisive electoral votes to George

W. Bush, but on a nationwide scale.

Tom Fitton, president of Judicial Watch, one of the organizations affiliated to CNP, was recorded on August 21 urging members to brainstorm legal tactics for preventing mail-in ballots from being sent out to voters. "We need to stop those ballots from going out and I want the lawyers here to tell us what to do," Fitton said. In follow-up remarks to the *Post*, Fitton did not back down from his comments. "The left has war-gamed this out," said Fitton. "And it could cause civil war."

The CNP's goal, according to its 2014 vision statement, is to install a government that, "restores religious and economic freedom, a strong national defense and Judeo-Christian values under the Constitution." Since its founding during the Ronald Regan administration in 1981, the far-right secret society has served as a nexus for conservative networking in government, business and media.

Members of the CNP as of 2014 included billionaire Steve Forbes and Ginni Thomas, wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. CNP member Rachel Bovard described Ginni Thomas in her remarks to attendees as a vital conduit to the White House, remarking that she is "one of the most powerful and fierce women in Washington," and the "tip of the spear in these efforts."

J. Christian Adams, a former Department of Justice attorney under the George W. Bush administration, is president of the Public Interest Legal Foundation which has described mail-in voting as "the number one left-wing agenda." He was also a member of Trump's short-lived Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity.

In his remarks to CNP members Adams told attendees they should not be "afraid of the accusations

that you're a voter suppressor, you're a racist and so forth." In a follow-up with the *Post*, Adams confirmed, "I stand by what I said because it is accurate."

Demonstrating the close ties between the CNP and the Trump White House, Paul Teller, director of strategic initiatives for Vice President Mike Pence, boasted on the recordings of the influence of the Conservative Action Project, a CNP-affiliated group that helps choose heads of federal agencies and coordinates messaging between the administration and affiliated "nonprofits" to support the Trump administration and its policies. This "little secretive huddle ... meets every Wednesday morning," according to Teller.

The legal battleground is being prepared both for challenges against measures that provide greater access to the polls, such as expanded mail-in voting, early voting, and more numerous polling sites, and to defend restrictive measures enacted by Republican administrations in key states.

Republican efforts to purge eligible voters from the rolls and limit drop off locations for absentee ballots are already under way. On Monday night, the 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals, upheld Texas Governor Greg Abbott's executive order which limited counties to only one mail-in ballot drop-off location. This means for the over 4.7 million residents of Harris County, which includes the city of Houston and is the third most populous county in the US, only one drop-off location is available. All three judges were appointed by Trump.

A legal battle is brewing in California between California Secretary of State Alex Padilla and the California Republican party for their role in placing illegal drop-off locations in at least 3 counties including Fresno, Los Angeles and Orange counties. The boxes have been spotted at gas stations, gun stores and Republican party headquarters.

California GOP spokesman Hector Barajas in an interview with CBS confirmed that the party had set up the unofficial drop-off locations and would continue "ballot harvesting." There is little prospect of such tactics affecting the outcome of the presidential race in California, but the Republican Party is seeking to regain or defend at least seven congressional seats in those three counties.

In Georgia, where Republican Governor Brian Kemp has led the charge in instituting voter identification

laws and purging nearly 200,000 registered voters from the rolls for alleged discrepancies, early voters were forced to wait up to 11 hours in Atlanta, and 6 hours throughout Cobb County, in the Atlanta suburbs, on the first day of early voting.

The heavy turnout in Georgia demonstrate the determination of working people and young people to defend their hard-won right to vote and to put an end to the Trump administration. The long lines are the product of deliberate under-resourcing of the election administration in order to create more obstacles.

The tactics go well beyond what could be called passive-aggressive, and in some states foreshadow open violence against those seeking to vote.

On October 9 the *Washington Post* reported that private security company Atlas Aegis, based out of Tennessee, is recruiting current and former US military Special Operations soldiers to staff, "security positions in Minnesota during the November Election and beyond to protect election polls, local businesses and residences from looting and destruction." There is not a single recorded instance of left-wing or "Antifa" attacks on polling stations, the pretext for this deployment of military thugs.

Trump has called for an "army" of poll watchers to intimidate and guard polling stations, a federal crime, ahead of the election. These "watchers" will of course be challenging those thought more likely to be voting against Trump, including African American, Hispanic and other voters of color, particularly immigrants, as well as young voters in areas near colleges and universities.



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