

On the eve of the US election

Trump backs violence against Biden campaign

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In a tweet Saturday and then in comments Sunday at a series of campaign rallies, President Donald Trump hailed the attack by a flag-waving caravan of his supporters on a Democratic Party campaign bus in Texas.

The incident Friday was video recorded by numerous people, including some on the bus and others traveling in cars along with the bus. It involved a concerted action by dozens of Trump supporters driving cars and pickup trucks who surrounded the bus as it traveled north on Interstate 35 from San Antonio to Austin, then deliberately slowed the bus and attempted to bring it to a halt.

Some of the participants in what was called the “Trump train” brandished weapons in the course of their action, according to witnesses. At least one pickup truck sideswiped a car full of Democratic Party campaigners in order to get closer to the bus, causing visible damage and endangering all those involved.

On Saturday, Trump tweeted a video of the bus attack, adding, “I LOVE TEXAS.”

At a campaign appearance in Macomb County, Michigan on Sunday, Trump praised the action. “Did you see the way our people, they were, ya know, protecting this bus,” he said, “because they’re nice.”

Trump used similar gangster language to describe the plans of his followers in Pennsylvania, where he warned Democratic Governor Tom Wolf not to stand in his way. “We have very nice people,” he said. “They don’t want to do anything *before the election*. Very nice, very nice people.”

Trump supporters have responded to the green light from the White House, staging “Trump train” caravans in a number of cities, blocking or slowing freeway

traffic for hours at a time over the weekend. There are reports of such actions on the Mario Cuomo Bridge across the Hudson (the replacement for the Tappan Zee Bridge), on the Garden State Parkway in New Jersey, on several freeways in Houston, Texas, and in Louisville, Kentucky, where there were clashes between the right-wing caravaners and Black Lives Matter protesters.

Texas Republican Party Chairman Allen West, a former military officer and Florida congressman, dismissed the significance of the incident, declaring, “It is more fake news and propaganda.” He told reporters who raised the issue, “Prepare to lose... stop bothering me.”

He followed this up with an openly anti-Semitic slur: “Maybe Soros can cut y’all another check in 2022.” This is a reference to the Jewish billionaire George Soros, a well-known supporter of the Democratic Party, who is a central figure in ultra-right conspiracy theories such as QAnon.

According to Democratic Party officials, the bus, carrying a Biden-Harris banner, was part of a campaign across Texas that began on Wednesday in Amarillo, in northwest Texas, and passed through East Texas, then along the Gulf Coast and the border region from Brownsville to Laredo, before returning up I-35 through San Antonio to Austin.

Those on the bus at the time of the attack included former state senator Wendy Davis, who is in a tight race with Representative Chip Roy in the 21st Congressional District, which extends west from I-35.

Eyewitnesses said the Trump group was stationed in a long line of 40-50 vehicles along the interstate. They pulled off the side of the road and began following the

Biden-Harris bus, honking their horns, shouting and positioning their vehicles around the bus.

The attempted blockade of the Biden-Harris bus continued for about 40 minutes and was dispersed only after police finally responded to a 911 call from the Democrats on board the bus.

A local Republican Party official in San Marcos, Texas, one of the towns crossed by the interstate, tweeted, “We sent the @JoeBiden @KamalaHarris bus out of Hays! Your kind aren’t welcome here!”

San Marcos police claimed that the crash between the pursuing pickup truck and the white SUV driven by a Biden-Harris staff member was the fault of the Democrats. The police said that “the victim appears to be the black truck,” but continued cynically that the driver of the pickup had not filed a complaint.

The response of the Texas Democratic Party was to cancel three events in the area “out of an abundance of caution,” although an abundance of political cowardice might be a more accurate description. The Democrats’ spinelessness is highlighted by the grandiose title of the bus tour: “Battle for the Soul of the Nation.”

The threatened violence is a deliberate response of the Republican Party to the growing popular opposition to Trump, expressed in a particularly striking fashion in Texas, which has seen a massive outpouring of voters at the polls. More people have already voted in Texas, whether by mail-in ballots or early voting, than the entire vote in 2016.

The sharp increase in turnout is centered in cities like Houston, Austin and San Antonio, and among black, Hispanic and young voters, with the result that Texas is now classified as a “toss-up state” in national opinion polls, although its electoral votes have gone to every Republican presidential candidate since 1976.

Another measure of the desperation of the Texas Republican Party is the lawsuit filed in Houston seeking to invalidate 127,000 votes already cast by Houston residents at “drive-through” polling stations set up to accommodate early voters concerned about coronavirus. The Texas Supreme Court—whose members are all Republican-appointed—unanimously rejected the lawsuit on Sunday, but the Republican plaintiffs immediately shifted to federal court, with an emergency hearing set for Monday.

The Texas bus attack was only the most publicized of a series of violent attacks on Democratic voters and

Biden supporters across the country.

Police in Graham, North Carolina, outside Greensboro, pepper-sprayed a mostly black group of voting rights marchers, including many families with children, during a peaceful protest on Saturday. The crowd of 400 went to the Alamance County Courthouse for a rally to promote voting rights before going on to a polling station. There they were sprayed by local cops without warning.

Eyewitnesses said that people were listening to rally speeches about the importance of voting when the police attacked. The trigger may have been a nine-minute moment of silence to commemorate the length of time that a Minneapolis policeman knelt on the neck of George Floyd, leading to his death. At least a dozen people were arrested.

There were other incidents reflecting mounting political tensions and the increasing resort to violence by Trump supporters. In North Topeka, Kansas, a man was arrested after reportedly opening fire on three people he thought were stealing his pro-Trump signs. The three victims were taken to the hospital, one with potentially life-threatening injuries, police said.

A YouGov poll found that 56 percent of voters anticipate “an increase in violence as a result of the election.”

According to the FBI, background checks for handgun purchases are up 80 percent from last year, while the *Washington Post* reported that gun sales spiked in June and July in the midst of the protests against police violence that followed the George Floyd murder. Altogether, Americans have bought more than 18 million weapons this year. And as one analyst noted, “They’re not [for] hunting. Deer licenses have dropped by more than half in the past decade.”



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