Trump supporters stage armed protest at home of Michigan secretary of state

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Donald Trump and his far-right supporters are stepping up their threats against election officials in key states where the US president seeks to overturn the results of the November 3 election, which he lost to Democratic candidate Joe Biden. Officials in Michigan, Georgia and Arizona have all reported menacing, armed demonstrations, death threats, or both, over the outcome of the election.

On Saturday night, several dozen protesters, some of them armed, stood outside the Detroit home of Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, shouting slogans in support of Trump and demanding a "forensic audit" of the election results—a demand that is linked to baseless allegations that Detroit election workers stuffed ballots and otherwise engaged in vote fraud.

A security car was stationed near the Benson home, and Detroit and Michigan State Police responded within minutes of the arrival of the demonstrators. However, they made no effort to remove them or interfere with those who were openly armed. Had these been left-wing protesters or people associated with groups like Black Lives Matter, the police would have undoubtedly moved in swiftly and violently to disperse them.

Instead, the cops allowed the gunmen and other demonstrators to remain in close proximity to the home. Some protesters carried weapons that could have riddled the secretary of state's residence with bullets, and they used bullhorns to shout curses, threats and demands that could clearly be heard by Benson and her four-year-old son.

A spokesman for the Michigan State Police dismissed the significance of the protest, saying, "I wouldn't even call it a demonstration. It was just a small event and nothing came of it."

Benson, however, issued a statement the next day declaring, "The demands made outside my home were unambiguous, loud and threatening… They targeted me in my role as Michigan's chief election officer. But the threats of those gathered weren't actually aimed at me—or any other elected officials in this state. They were aimed at the voters…

"Through threats of violence, intimidation and bullying, the armed people outside my home and their political allies seek to undermine and silence the will and voices of every voter in this state, no matter who they voted for."

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel and Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy denounced the protest as "mob-like behavior," calling it "an affront to basic morality and decency." They added that at times, people in the crowd could be heard yelling "'you're murderers' within earshot of her child's bedroom."

A livestream video made by one of the right-wing protesters promised further such demonstrations. "We will not stand down, we will not stop, we will continue to rise up, we will continue to take this election back for the president that actually won it by a landslide," she said. "This is not over. It is far from over—in fact, it's just beginning."

The language is significant, particularly the promise to "rise up," which echoes words used by Trump in his own speeches since the election, as well as some of his most prominent supporters, including former national security advisor Michael Flynn, a retired general, who has urged Trump to declare martial law and defy the results of the November 3 vote.

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer condemned both the armed action outside Benson's home and the death threats made to Representative Cynthia Johnson, the African-American who is the lead Democrat on the state legislative panel that heard testimony last week from Rudy Giuliani, Trump's principal election lawyer, and other witnesses.

But shamefully, Whitmer made no connection between the ongoing threats of violence over the election and the overall climate of violence created by Trump and the Republicans, directed initially at her personally in retaliation for executive orders she issued last April and May that imposed lockdowns to contain the coronavirus. On October 8, state police arrested 13 men on charges of plotting to kidnap and murder Whitmer, an action that was timed to occur just before the November 3 election and assist Trump in his election coup attempt.

Instead, in keeping with the line espoused by Democratic

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President-elect Joe Biden, Whitmer made no mention of the murder plot against her or Trump's role in inciting right-wing violence. She appealed to the Republican Party, which is overwhelmingly backing Trump's coup operation, to "put the election behind us."

There is a very real connection between the fascist plots against Whitmer during the summer and the fascist agitation today against the election outcome. This was underscored by the intervention of Sheriff Dar Leaf of Barry County, a largely rural area outside Grand Rapids, Michigan. Leaf had appeared publicly with several of those involved in the plot to kidnap Whitmer, and he suggested at the time that they were merely planning a "citizen's arrest" of the governor for allegedly exceeding her powers by ordering the COVID-19 lockdown.

On Sunday, the day after the armed protest at Benson's home, Leaf filed the latest in the innumerable right-wing lawsuits against the November 3 election. He filed in federal court, asserting, without providing any evidence, that "multifaceted schemes and artifices... resulted in the unlawful counting, or manufacturing, of hundreds of thousands of illegal, ineligible, duplicate or purely fictitious ballots in the state of Michigan."

A federal judge threw out another Republican lawsuit in Michigan on Monday morning. US District Judge Linda Parker wrote that the suit filed by six Republicans, represented by ultra-right attorney Sidney Powell, asked for a court order that would award the state's electoral votes to Trump and "ignore the will of millions of voters."

The judge wrote that the purpose of the suit seemed "less about achieving the relief" sought by the plaintiffs and "more about the impact of their allegations on people's faith in the democratic process and their trust in our government." In other words, it was bad-faith litigation aimed at generating headlines that would discredit the election, regardless of its outcome. She concluded, "The people have spoken."

On Friday, the Michigan Court of Appeals rejected an appeal from the Trump campaign challenging the Michigan results, noting that the certification of the results by the Board of State Canvassers had made the lawsuit moot. The 2-1 ruling noted that the Trump campaign could have requested a recount, but did not. According to the official result, Biden won the state by 154,000 votes.

In Georgia, where Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has faced almost daily pro-Trump protests outside his home over the past two weeks, and thousands of threatening and obscene messages to himself and his family, officials on Monday finalized the certification of the state's 16 electoral votes for Biden. The Democrat carried the state by about 12,000 votes, a margin that was virtually unaltered after two full recounts.

Raffensperger and his top election aide, Gabriel Sterling, held a press conference where they reiterated their opposition to Trump's claims of vote fraud and said there was no doubt about the final result. "We have now counted legally cast ballots three times, and the results remain unchanged," Raffensperger said. It was Sterling who captured national attention last week with an impassioned plea to Trump and other Republicans to stop inciting violence against election workers. "Someone's going to get killed," he warned.

On Sunday, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp and Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan issued a joint statement rejecting Trump's demand that they call a special session of the state legislature to overturn Biden's victory and award him the state's electoral votes. While they had endorsed Trump and campaigned for him in the November 3 election, Kemp and Duncan said they had to respect the majority vote for Biden because "to select a separate slate of presidential electors is not an option that is allowed under state or federal law."

In Arizona, where Trump supporters have sent hate mail and death threats to both the Democratic secretary of state and the Republican governor, as well as Republican officials in Maricopa County, the state legislature suspended work for an entire week as a precaution after Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani tested positive for the coronavirus and was hospitalized. Giuliani had spent hours, unmasked, speaking in front of Republican state legislators in Arizona in an attempt to convince them to overturn the result of the election, which Biden won by more than 10,000 votes.

The Republican speaker of the state house, Rusty Bowers, issued a statement rejecting the demands of the Trump campaign. "Our state's canvass was completed on Monday, and Joe Biden and Kamala Harris received the most votes, so those are the candidates whom the state's presidential electors must vote for," he said. "Nothing in the US Constitution or the decisions of the US Supreme Court even suggests that the Arizona Legislature could retroactively appoint different electors who would cast their ballots for two different candidates… I voted for President Trump and worked hard to reelect him. But I cannot and will not entertain a suggestion that we violate current law to change the outcome of a certified election."

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