

Boise, Idaho health district meeting canceled by police after armed protesters threaten board members' homes

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At the insistence of the Boise, Idaho police chief and mayor, the Central District Health (CDH) board shut down its meeting Tuesday night before it could vote on a new public health order imposing limited COVID-19 restrictions. Roughly 600 anti-mask protesters had gathered outside the barricaded office building to oppose any measures to curtail the spread of the coronavirus, while separate groups of protesters, some carrying weapons, threatened the homes of board members.

While it did not appear that anyone inside the building where the members were meeting was in physical danger—dozens of police had surrounded the building—police insisted that the meeting be called off in the interests of “public safety.” After it was announced that the meeting would be canceled, the crowd packing the parking lot erupted in cheers.

The decision to cancel the meeting came shortly after Diana Lachiondo, the Ada County representative on the health board, informed her fellow board members and attending physicians that she had to leave because protesters outside her home were threatening her family.

“My twelve-year-old son is home by himself right now and there are protesters banging outside the door,” an emotional Lachiondo said. “I’m going to go home and make sure he’s okay.”

In a Twitter thread posted Wednesday morning, Lachiondo said that “armed protestors once again assembled outside my home: yelling, banging, firing air horns, amplifying sound clips from Scarface, accusing me of tyranny and cowering inside... And as many of you saw last night, my son called me in tears at the beginning of the meeting.”

In addition to Lachiondo’s home, protesters descended on the homes of at least two other board members, including Dr. Ted Epperly. Dr. Epperly also reported that

the protests were “not under control at my house.”

On Wednesday morning, it was reported that less than seven miles from the CDH building, fascists vandalized an Anne Frank Memorial located at the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights, defacing the memorial with Nazi stickers featuring swastikas and declaring, “We are everywhere.” The vandalism is believed to have occurred early Tuesday morning, the day of the canceled CDH meeting.

In a Wednesday morning Facebook post, the Wassmuth Center stated: “The Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial was built as a physical statement of our shared values. One of those values includes standing up to confront hate.”

The disgusting vandalism provoked outrage in the community, with social media commenters vowing to stand up to fascism. “The 4th reich isn’t going to rise to power,” read one comment beneath a picture of one of the vandalized memorials. Another poster replied to the fascist claim of being “everywhere” with the statement, “so are we, show your faces you cowards.”

While it is unknown at this time if any of the anti-mask protesters were involved in the vandalism, with the police continuing their “investigation,” there is no doubt that anti-Semites, racists and fascists were involved in the protests. In addition to signs proclaiming the pandemic to be overblown or an outright hoax, many protesters carried American flags and wore pro-Trump apparel.

Just over a month ago in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a Jewish cemetery was desecrated with pro-Trump graffiti prior to his final campaign rally in the state. The more than 100-year-old cemetery was spray-painted with pro-Trump slogans. As of this writing, no arrests have been made in either instance.

Since Trump’s defeat in the presidential election and

his ongoing refusal to concede, election workers, officials and politicians across the country have been subjected to increasingly violent and intimidating threats at their homes. Last Saturday night, armed protesters threatened Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson outside her home, parroting unfounded and demonstrably false claims of “election fraud” that have been promulgated by Trump and repeated by Republican politicians throughout the country.

Election officials and their families in swing states won by President-elect Joe Biden, such as Wisconsin, Georgia, Arizona and Michigan, have reported having their cell phones and email inboxes flooded with violent, sometimes sexualized threats for their alleged participation in “stealing” the election from Trump.

Trump’s incitement of fascist violence against his political opponents comes on top of his open support for far-right, armed vigilantes who have demonstrated against coronavirus restrictions imposed by state and local officials. Last spring, Trump welcomed armed demonstrations outside—and even inside—state capitol buildings demanding the lifting of lockdown orders aimed at containing the pandemic. He tweeted at the time for far-right militia groups to “liberate” Michigan, Virginia and Minnesota.

Just last month, Dr. Scott Atlas, a leading member of Trump’s White House Coronavirus Task Force, advocate of “herd immunity” and opponent of any measures to contain the virus, called on people in Michigan to “rise up” against new restrictions announced by Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Atlas’ call came some five weeks after a fascist plot to kidnap and murder Whitmer was broken up by the FBI and state police.

In response to Trump’s refusal to concede the election and incitement of far-right violence, Biden and the Democrats have played down or ignored the threats, while pleading for an accommodation with the Republicans.

In keeping with the pattern established in previous far-right protests across the country, the police in Boise did nothing to disperse the protesters who threatened the homes of health board members. Only one person, who staged a provocation inside the health board building, has been arrested. That individual has been charged with misdemeanor trespassing.

The police noted that the lone arrest was the result of a “citizen’s arrest” carried out by a CHD worker, who detained the woman after she made her way through the barricades into the building. “BPD [Boise Police Department] took custody of the citizen’s arrest and took

the subject to the Ada County Jail,” the department said.

One of the groups involved in organizing the anti-mask protests, People’s Rights, is a formation created by Ammon Bundy, the son of the anti-government Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy. In 2016, Ammon and his brother Ryan led a 41-day occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, located in Oregon.

According to a report jointly authored by the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights (IREHR) and the Montana Human Rights Network, Bundy and his allies have expanded People’s Rights from a few dozen at the beginning of April to over 15,000 contacts in 16 states as of September. Among those involved with People’s Rights, according to the IREHR, are anti-vaccine groups, Three Percenters, Patriot Prayer and assorted anti-Semitic and white supremacist elements.

Bundy and his group have been leading protests against any measures to curb the spread of the virus throughout the year, including staging demonstrations at the Idaho state Capitol, leading to Bundy’s being arrested twice in August. In July, a planned Southwest District Health (SDH) meeting to discuss a mask mandate was interrupted by Bundy and members of People’s Rights. A video of the event shows Bundy shoving an SDH worker who denied him entry to the building.

“You’re gonna cancel the meeting, or you’re gonna let us in, or you’re gonna call the officers to arrest us,” Bundy says in the video. Despite the meeting being canceled and clear video evidence of the physical assault, police made no arrests.

On November 23, roughly 30 members of People’s Rights protested outside Democratic Boise Mayor Lauren McLean’s home in response to a previous health order. The largely unmasked crowd, carrying lit tiki torches, threatened the mayor, charging that the coronavirus restrictions were part of a “communist plot.”



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