Fascist militias threaten officials, force shutdown of schools in Washington state

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Three Vancouver, Washington public schools were put into lockdown this past Friday after roughly 50 Proud Boy militia members and anti-mask protesters attempted to enter Skyview High School with a maskless student, in violation of public health guidelines. In addition to Skyview High School, Alki Middle School and Chinook Elementary were placed on high alert and locked down due to the fascist threat. Video recordings showed Proud Boys chanting "USA" while waving American flags and wearing their trademark yellow and black shirts, with the group's motto "F--k Antifa" displayed on their chests. Despite members of the group being recorded massing on school grounds, in breach of the law, local police apparently made no attempt to disrupt the fascist rally and appeared to look on approvingly. As of this writing, no arrests have been reported and no charges have been filed.

In a report from Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB), private security guards, who denied the Proud Boys entry into the school, said some of the women aligned with the Proud Boys accosted female students, calling them "derogatory names."

Writing to OPB, Pat Nuzzo, a communications director for Vancouver Public Schools (VPS), said the lockdown was instituted as a "safety precaution." VPS school board President Kyle Sproul told OPB that the lockdown was needed to ensure student safety. Sproul added that "protesting at our school campuses and disrupting the school day is not in the best interests of students."

In addition to the Proud Boys, members of the far-right Patriot Prayer militia group also took part in the provocation at Skyview High School. The rally itself was organized online by Patriot Prayer leader Joey Gibson, who falsely claimed in online posts building for the event that students who did not wear masks would be arrested if they attempted to go to school.

This is not the first time far-right Patriot Prayer members have tried to enter restricted spaces in order to violently pursue their agenda.

Last December, Gibson and fellow Patriot Prayer leader Chandler Pappas, in a prelude to the January 6 attack, lead a group of approximately 100 as they stormed the Oregon state Capitol in Salem in an attempt to disrupt a special legislative session.

While the Proud Boys were joined by a few parents from other schools protesting the mask mandate, students at the school organized an impromptu counter-protest in which they distributed masks and held up signs supporting public health measures aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus. A 16-year old student named Lucas told OPB, "All the learning gets disrupted. We have to sit down quietly, not make noise, and we were hunkered down in our classrooms for around an hour to an hour-and-a-half."

The very next day, a group of Proud Boys rallied approximately 100 miles north, in Olympia, Washington, in opposition to COVID-19 public health restrictions. The group attacked counter-demonstrators and journalists, assaulting independent journalist Alissa Azar. In a disturbing social media clip, Azar can be heard screaming as Proud Boys spray her with bear mace and shove her to the ground.

Following the assault on Azar, Proud Boy brawler Tusitala "Tiny" Toese was reportedly shot in the leg. Olympia police say they are investigating the shooting of Toese. No arrests have been made as of this writing.

In another assault on journalists carried out by far-right elements, on August 28 in Traverse City, Michigan, *Record-Eagle* reporter Brendan Quealy was attacked by anti-vaccine and anti-mask protesters while covering their rally at a public park. Quealy told police that two men shoved and pushed him before punching him in the face for recording audio at the rally. The attack is still being "investigated" by the Grand Traverse County Sheriff's Office.

The hands-off approach taken by local police towards the violent militia groups and their supporters mirrors the lax treatment Proud Boys members encountered when confronted by US Capitol Police during the January 6 attack on the Capitol. The assault, spearheaded by Proud Boys militia members, was aimed at blocking congressional certification of the Electoral College vote and officially

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recognizing Joe Biden as the president-elect.

Dozens of members of the group are facing some of most serious charges levied by federal prosecutors in connection with the attempted coup, but dozens more Proud Boys who participated in the attack and in subsequent violent rallies have yet be arrested. The far-right foot soldiers are deeply intertwined with the Republican Party and the capitalist state . Members of the group have admitted to being FBI informants and enjoy close relations with Republican Party operatives .

The incident in Washington state was not the only time last week when far-right elements attempted to storm schools in opposition to public health measures meant to stem the spread of the pandemic. The day before the Proud Boys rally in Vancouver, Washington, three Arizona men entered the Mesquite Elementary School in Tucson carrying zip-ties and attempted to perform a "citizen's arrest" on Principal Diane Vargo for having the temerity to enforce masking and quarantine mandates.

No injuries were reported and the three men left the school after police were called.

Forty-year-old Rishi Rambaran, the father of one of the children instructed to quarantine, was identified as one of the men who stormed the school. He is the only person arrested in connection with attack.

Another attacker who was identified is Kelly Walker, who live-streamed the incident on Instagram. According to *The Daily Beast*, Walker owns a coffee shop in Tucson that describes itself as "Tucson's hub of freedom and delicious coffee." The shop recently hosted a "Freedom Talk" event for Republican Party operative, convicted felon and far-right commentator Dinesh D'Souza. In October, the coffee shop is planning on hosting former Space Force Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Lohmeier.

Lohmeier was relieved of his command earlier this year after he appeared on a podcast promoting his self-published book, which warns of an impending "white genocide." Lohmeier claimed that a "neo-Marxist agenda" was being advanced in the military, cloaked in "Critical Race Theory," with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the US government and replacing it with a "communist dictatorship."

Fascists feel empowered to harass and intimidate educators, journalists and students because they have been allowed to by sympathetic police departments and have the support of Republican Party politicians. During a rally last Sunday, a Republican candidate for governor of Pennsylvania, Steve Lynch, evoked applause from the audience when he advocated "removing" by force "school board members" who adhere to masking and quarantining guidelines.

"I'm going in there with 20 strong men," he said. "I'm going to speak in front of the school board and I'm going to give them the option, they can leave or they can be removed. And then after that we are going to replace them with nine parents and we are going to vote down the mask mandates that evening. This is how you get stuff done, forget writing your legislators, forget it. They are not listening. You gotta do something."

Lynch added, "When I see criminals trying to take my rights and my beautiful children and everything they are going to do, you're going to have to take my life. There's no way, I'll die on this hill."

At a school board meeting in Buncombe County, North Carolina in early August, Hitler admirer, Trump co-conspirator and Republican Congressman Madison Cawthorn railed against "woke, liberal government officials" for imposing a mask mandate. Cawthorn, who recently threatened a second coup attempt, called mask-wearing "psychological child abuse" and accused board members of "muzzling" children.

While Republicans, working closely with their fascist militia allies, threaten violence against any who adhere to minimum public health guidelines, the Democrats and their trade union toadies do nothing to protect teachers and students, not only from the coronavirus, but from fascistic attacks as well. The Vancouver Education Association, the union that claims to represent Vancouver teachers, has yet to post anything on its website or on social media pages condemning the fascist rally on Friday.

On September 18, militia groups and Republican Party officials plan to hold a rally in Washington D.C. whose central demand will be the release of those imprisoned for participating in the fascist insurrection on January 6.

The "Justice for J6" rally is being organized by former Trump campaign employee Matt Braynard, who organized similar rallies earlier this summer, as well a July event outside the Washington D.C. Central Detention Facility in support of the imprisoned fascist insurrectionists. While no speakers list has been unveiled as of this writing, Texas Republican and coup supporter Louie Gohmert intimated to CNN last month that he might speak at the event in support of militia members who "have been so badly mistreated."

"So we haven't given up," added Gohmert.

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