

Republican campaign rally in Virginia draws Trump, Bannon and fascist supporters

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A political rally last week in support of Glenn Youngkin, the Republican nominee for governor of Virginia, was headlined by fascistic former President Donald Trump, who phoned in his support, and his former top adviser, Stephen Bannon, who appeared on stage.

Held in Glen Allen in the suburbs of Richmond, the rally demonstrated the degree to which fascist elements have come to dominate the Republican Party in the months following Trump's electoral loss to Democrat Joe Biden and his January 6 coup attempting to block the congressional certification of the Electoral College vote.

In a blatant effort to legitimize the January 6 coup, event coordinator Martha Boneta opened the rally by leading the audience in a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance before an American flag, which she declared had been on hand "at the peaceful rally with Donald J. Trump on January 6."

One of the main speakers, acting as a surrogate for Youngkin, was Republican state Senator Amanda Chase, who participated in the January 6 rally outside the White House, where Trump whipped up the crowd and then directed them to march on the Capitol. Chase, a gun-toting self-proclaimed "Trump in heels," has stumped for Youngkin on several occasions and appeared with him at rallies in the Richmond suburbs earlier this month.

In his telephone message to the rally, Trump focused on claims of election fraud. "We won in 2016. We won in 2020—the most corrupt election in the history of our country, probably one of the most corrupt anywhere," he claimed.

Bannon, speaking from the stage, chimed in, "We're going to build the wall. We're going to confront China...We're putting together a coalition that's going

to govern for 100 years." He promised that Trump would return for a presidential run in 2024.

While Youngkin was not in attendance, citing time "conflicts," the Republican candidate for lieutenant governor, Winsome Sears, was. According to the *Washington Post*, Sears "had been billed as a speaker and showed up, but she ducked out before the program began."

Voters cast separate votes for governor and lieutenant governor, and Sears, unlike the wealthy hedge fund investor Youngkin, is trailing badly in the polls. In early September, she laid off her campaign manager and much of her staff for lack of funds.

Images of a crowd saluting an insurrectionists' flag near the former capital of the Confederacy provoked a backlash in local and state media, leading Youngkin to declare in an interview, "[w]e shouldn't pledge allegiance to that flag. And, oh, by the way, I've been so clear, there is no place for violence—none, none—in America today."

But hundreds of Youngkin supporters attended the event, which epitomized the Republican candidate's strategy of appealing both to the fascist wing of the party, associated with Trump, and the party establishment, which views his ties to Wall Street with favor. Youngkin is a former Carlyle Group hedge fund executive who is bankrolling his own campaign to the tune of millions of dollars.

In 2020, Trump lost Virginia by a 10 percent margin, with Democrat Joe Biden winning by large margins in the suburbs of Washington D.C. and Richmond. Youngkin has sought to have it both ways on the false claims of a "stolen election," acknowledging that Biden won the 2020 election, while still attending Republican Party-sponsored events promoting "election integrity" and publicly embracing that slogan.

The “Take Back Virginia” rally took place in the final weeks of the Virginia race for the governor’s mansion. Virginia and New Jersey traditionally hold their state elections in the off-years following presidential contests. Their elections are viewed as critical gauges for the two big business parties’ electoral prospects in the oncoming midterms.

The campaign of Democratic nominee and former Governor Terry McAuliffe has been sliding in the polls, reflecting broader disenchantment with the policies of the Biden administration, particularly its failure to pass any significant social reform measures. According to 538.com, the election on November is “either candidate’s race to win.” The poll aggregation website states that the candidates are nearly neck and neck, with McAuliffe and Youngkin commanding 48.1 percent and 45.5 percent of the vote, respectively.

The *Washington Post* states that Democratic officials “fear that a loss in an increasingly blue state—where they have won every statewide contest since 2012—is a growing possibility, and one that would erode confidence in the Biden presidency.”

McAuliffe also has his own right-wing record during a previous term as governor, 2013-2017, hanging around his neck. In keeping with his close ties to the Clinton family and to corporate interests, the Democrat has outraised his hedge fund millionaire opponent. The two candidates combined have raised more than \$88 million so far this year, compared to \$66 million in total for the 2017 gubernatorial race. Over the summer Youngkin began to catch up outraising McAuliffe, \$15.7 million to \$11.5 million but only by gifting his campaign \$4.5 million from his own personal funds.

In July McAuliffe welcomed Biden on the campaign trail before the reopening of schools led to a massive fifth wave of coronavirus infections and deaths. However, the candidate has recently stated that Biden was “unpopular” in Virginia and urged Democrats at the national level to “quit talking” and “get something done.” In the meantime, his campaign has announced appearances by numerous high-profile Democratic Party figures, including former President Barack Obama at a Richmond rally later this month and a fundraising event with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

By attacking congressional Democrats from the right and urging they make concessions to the party’s right-

wing congressional holdouts, the McAuliffe campaign is signaling that any electoral loss will be blamed on so-called “progressive” overreach, which will be used by the Democratic Party as a whole as an excuse to swing even further to the right.

This occurs under conditions in which the state’s population has suffered immensely throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, with tens of thousands still out of work and many living on the brink of starvation. Throughout the pandemic, the Democratic state government of Ralph Northam has subordinated the health and safety of the population to the financial interests governing the state. For their parts, both campaigns have pledged to keep schools open in the face of the coronavirus.



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