

Texas governor appoints former Trump lawyer as chief election officer

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On Thursday, Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced his appointment of John Scott, a Fort Worth attorney, to be the next Texas secretary of state.

The announcement of Scott's appointment came a day after Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick posted a statement on Twitter urging Abbott to call legislators back to the capital for a fourth special session focused on passing an election "forensic audit" bill.

As secretary of state, Scott will oversee election administration in Texas. His appointment comes amid widespread claims of election fraud from Republicans following the directions of the would-be-dictator Donald Trump. Trump has tried to sow as much uncertainty around the 2020 elections as possible, calling the election "rigged."

Texas is one of several Republican-led states that tightened election laws this year on the spurious pretext of "election integrity." The new law, which takes effect in December, gives numerous new powers to the secretary of state. The law empowers the secretary to fine counties up to \$1,000 a day for not properly maintaining their voter lists and allows him to audit potentially years' worth of county elections. The secretary of state will also have broader ability to forward information on alleged voter fraud to or missteps by election officials to the state attorney general, who has declared prosecuting election violations as top priority.

"John Scott is a proven leader with a passion for public service, and his decades of experience in election law and litigation make him the ideal choice for the Texas Secretary of State," Abbott said in a statement announcing his appointment. "John understands the importance of protecting the integrity of our elections and building the Texas brand on an

international stage. I am confident that John's experience and expertise will enhance his oversight and leadership over the biggest and most thorough election audit in the country."

The announcement, however, did not mention Scott's previous work representing Trump in his effort to overturn the election results in Pennsylvania.

On November 13, 2020, Scott joined a team of lawyers to file a lawsuit by Trump attempting to block the certification of Pennsylvania's election, a state Biden won by 80,555 votes—a narrow victory, but twice the margin by which Trump won the state over Hillary Clinton in 2016. However, when it became clear that the judge would not accept the claims of voting fraud, Scott resigned from his position three days later.

Scott is no stranger to election law. When Abbott was the Texas attorney general, Scott defended the state's voter ID law against lawsuits from civil rights and voting rights organizations. The law was eventually struck down after district and federal courts found the law intentionally discriminatory. He also worked as the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's chief operating officer.

The top elections position has been open since the end of May, when Secretary of State Ruth Hughes resigned. Scott will eventually have to be confirmed by the Legislature, which is not scheduled to meet again until 2023. Until then, Scott will serve as interim secretary of state and will oversee next year's statewide races, in which Abbott, Patrick and all state legislators are on the ballot.

Scott's appointment must be understood in the context of Trump's efforts to solidify Republican control across the South and build a fascist movement in the country's second most populous state. In September, Trump publicly called on Abbott to add an

election audit bill to the agenda of a special legislative session, despite his winning the state by a margin of 5 percent. Trump has repeatedly claimed he actually won the traditionally Republican state by a wider margin. Last month, Trump wrote Abbott a letter urging him to back the legislation

“Despite my big win in Texas, I hear Texans want an election audit! You know your fellow Texans have big questions about the November 2020 election,” read the letter.

Hours after the letter was made public, Abbott quickly responded with a short statement saying that a “full and comprehensive forensic audit” had already begun in four urban counties: Harris County, which includes Houston, and Collin, Dallas and Tarrant, comprising the bulk of the Dallas-Ft. Worth metro area. Abbott underscored that the secretary of state’s office would oversee the review, and that no outside contractor would be brought in, as occurred during the recent review in Arizona, a bogus effort that nonetheless reaffirmed President Biden’s win in the state.

According to Abbott’s announcement, Scott also serves as senior adviser and liaison to the governor for Texas border and Mexican affairs and serves as chief international protocol officer for Texas.



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