

Republicans back fascist militias threatening school board members, teachers, students

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1 November 2021

Last Tuesday, October 26, members from two fascist militia groups, the Proud Boys and People's Rights, stormed a Portland Public School board meeting and refused to wear masks, leading to the cancellation of the in-person meeting. The subject of the meeting was whether or not to mandate vaccinations for students 12 years and older.

After the meeting was moved online, members and supporters of the fascist militia groups, roughly 30 people, held their own maskless meeting inside the vacant school board room, which they occupied for a little over an hour. Despite refusing to wear masks inside the building, violating a statewide mask requirement, none of the intruders was arrested.

Michelle DePass, chair of the Portland Public School board, told KOIN 6 News that members of the Proud Boys and People's Rights, "are organized and they're willing to drive, you know, 20 miles or so to get here."

A "call to action" was sent to Portland members of People's Rights, a reactionary militia group founded Ammon Bundy, son of anti-government Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, the day prior to the meeting. Emulating the storming of the US Capitol on January 6, the statement called for members to arrive early in order to "be able to physically be in the building."

This is not the first time Bundy's group has threatened public officials in opposition to public health measures. Last December, the Idaho Central District Health board had to end a meeting discussing COVID-19 mitigation measures because Bundy's group had massed outside the building, threatening health officials, including at their homes.

Before the Portland meeting could get started, members and supporters of the fascist militia groups, the majority of whom did not live in Portland or have children enrolled in the district, took off their masks. Once members of the board announced that the meeting would be suspended due to noncompliance with the mask mandate, one fascist, wearing a hat that read "Shoot your local pedophile," erupted in rage, yelling, "You fucking cowards!"

Support for the mandate among students was made clear

the morning of the meeting. Over 200 students walked out of class at Portland's Grant High School in support of the measure, which will be voted on by the board next month.

"This body of students has assembled to demonstrate our support for student vaccine mandates," student Jordan Gollaway told the crowd, which loudly cheered in agreement, according to KGW8. "We as students know that we see crowds every day in the lunch lines, in the hallways and in congested stairwells. These crowds are our reality, which is precisely why we need a COVID-19 vaccine mandate," said Galloway.

Speaking in support of the mandate, sophomore Tesla Chin said, "I believe that you are free to do things that only damage yourself. But refusing to get a vaccine can harm not only yourself but all of the people around and especially vulnerable parties such as old people or people who are immunocompromised."

Following the far-right provocation in Portland, on Friday, aspiring Arizona Republican gubernatorial candidate and ardent supporter of Trump and the "Stop the Steal" movement, Kari Lake, along with fascist Arizona state senator Kelly Townsend, and Trump-endorsed Arizona state senate candidate Anthony Kern, attempted to hold an anti-mask and anti-vaccine rally at an elementary school parking lot.

The school district refused to allow the meeting to take place on school property, but this did not stop the Republican politicians from holding their rally nearby, during which they falsely claimed that the school board was using police to "target parents" who opposed public health measures.

The use of supposed concerned "parents" to object to any public health measures is, and will continue to be, a major talking point for Republican politicians, acting on behalf of corporate America. They are "done" with enacting any mitigation measures to stop the virus, which continues to claim the lives of more than 1,500 people in the US daily and recently surpassed 5 million official deaths globally.

Defending "parents" during a Wednesday Senate Judiciary

Committee hearing featuring Attorney General Merrick Garland, Republican Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas attacked Garland for “sicking the feds on parents across America.”

Ignoring and downplaying the thousands of threats levelled at school boards and teachers, Cotton railed against a memorandum issued by Garland on October 4, instructing the Federal Bureau of Investigation to hold “meetings” with federal, state, local and Tribal authorities to discuss “strategies” for “addressing threats against school administrators, board members, teachers and staff.”

Joining Cotton in propagating the fiction that fascist militiamen and Republican politicians threatening school boards are simply “concerned parents” was Texas Senator Ted Cruz, one of seven Republican senators who voted to overturn the election of president Joe Biden following the attack on the Capitol. Cruz attacked Garland for creating an “abusive memo targeting parents” who are simply “upset about Critical Race Theory, about masks in schools.”

While students and a majority of the population, especially workers and youth, support masks and vaccine mandates, fascist militia groups such as the Proud Boys are encouraged and incited by Republican politicians, themselves bought and paid for by right-wing billionaires to agitate against any public health measures, including by threatening, intimidating and harassing school board members, teachers and students.

The propagators of these anti-science and deadly campaigns include organizations such as Turning Point USA, (TPUSA) whose founder Charlie Kirk, started a “School Board Watchlist” which posts the names and photographs of school board members who have been accused of anything from teaching “critical race theory” to promoting mask wearing or “cultural literacy and sensitivity.”

Kirk founded TPUSA, in 2012, the same year he began writing for the far-right *Breitbart News*, whose former editor, Steven Bannon, has been found in contempt of Congress for refusing to appear before the January 6 Select Committee.

From 2014 to 2016 the Ed Uihlein Foundation gave Turning Point USA \$275,000. The Ed Uihlein foundation is named after the father of billionaire Richard Uihlein, a Republican mega-donor. Richard and his wife Liz’s recent donations included giving \$4.3 million last year to the political action committee of the Tea Party Patriots. The Tea Party Patriots were listed on the marchtosaveamerica.com website as one of the 11 groups “participating in the March to Save America,” as part of the “#StopTheSteal coalition.”

On the same day that the Senate Judiciary hearing was held, Bannon, who has yet to be criminally charged for his

leading role in facilitating Trump’s attempted coup, called for the arrest of school board members on his fascistic “War Room Podcast.”

“It’s time to start locking up these people on these school boards,” said Bannon before adding, “if they’re going to oversee this and let children be raped and sodomized,” a reference to the Loudoun County School Board in Virginia, which has been the target of a right-wing campaign following an alleged sexual assault of a student.

The whipping up of backwards and reactionary elements against public education is part of a definite political strategy by the Republican Party. On his podcast in May, Bannon, Trump’s former White House adviser, said, “The path to save the nation is very simple—it’s going to go through the school boards.”

In October, the *Washington Post* revealed the billionaire Charles Koch, along with Dick DeVos, heir to the Amway fortune and husband of former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, and the Walton Family Foundation, founded by the family that controls Wal-Mart, had all given “financial and institutional support” to the Independent Women’s Forum. The Independent Woman’s Forum, the *Post* revealed, was responsible for drafting a document which purported to be from “concerned parents” but was in fact a template created to be used by Republican-aligned groups around the country to harass school boards against implementing masking requirements.

The promotion of anti-vaccine and anti-mask perspectives by the ruling class, particularly the Republican Party, demonstrates that the fight to end the pandemic on a scientific basis cannot be achieved through the present social order. As Republicans openly cater to fascists, religious zealots, and bigots, the Democratic Party continues the same homicidal “herd immunity” policy as Trump while preaching “unity” with his fascist party.

While the capitalist ruling elite, who have seen their stock portfolios rise in concert with the pandemic death toll, pollute the working class with anti-scientific conceptions in order to justify their homicidal and criminal reopening policies in the interest of profit, the Socialist Equality Party seeks to bring a scientific understanding of not only the pandemic, but of social reality to the working class. The highest expression of this was seen at the October 24 international webinar, “How to end the pandemic.”



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