

# Colorado Republican election officials indicted

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A Colorado grand jury has indicted two Colorado election officials following a months-long investigation into a security breach involving Mesa County's voting machines.

Tina Peters, the county clerk of Mesa County, and her deputy clerk, Belinda Knisley, face a litany of felony charges alleging their involvement in a conspiracy to breach the security of county election operations and leak secure information.

Peters has been charged with 10 counts, including three felony counts of attempting to influence a public servant, two felony counts of conspiracy to commit criminal impersonation, one felony count of identity theft, and several misdemeanor counts of first-degree official misconduct, violation of duty and failing to comply with requirements of the Colorado secretary of state.

Knisley is charged with six counts, including three felony counts of attempting to influence a public servant, one felony count of conspiracy to commit criminal impersonation, and additional misdemeanor counts for violation of duty and failing to comply with the requirements of the secretary of state.

The central focus of the investigation is the alleged conspiracy of Peters and Knisley to facilitate a security breach of the county's election hardware last May. According to the indictment, Peters and Knisley "devised and executed a deceptive scheme which was designed to influence public servants, breach security protocols, exceed permissible access to voting equipment, and set in motion the eventual distribution of confidential information to unauthorized people."

In pursuit of these aims, both women allegedly stole the identity of local resident Gerald Wood in order to grant unauthorized access to an as yet unnamed person to ballot-counting machines.

Wood is a local employee of the Department of Motor Vehicles. He testified to the grand jury that he had been

contacted by Peters to do IT work for the county and that he was issued an official ID on May 19, which he returned that same day. The unidentified person was then granted access as a "temp employee" using Wood's secure access badge.

The indictment notes that county records show that a person used that badge to access secured areas of the county election offices on May 23, two days before an annual software update and a few days after security cameras at the office were turned off at Knisley's request.

Further allegations from the indictment claim that Peters and the unidentified person copied the hard drives of the county's voting machines and stole secure passwords to their software.

Information from these machines and their passwords were then shared on the right-wing website Gateway Pundit. Soon after, the software of the Mesa County ballot machines was shared on large monitors at a South Dakota election symposium organized by the fascistic My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell, who has frequently expressed support for Trump's lie that the 2020 election was stolen through vote fraud.

Lindell has been a vocal proponent of a right-wing conspiracy theory that the ballot machine manufacturer Dominion Voting Systems was behind an elaborate fraud scheme to steal the 2020 election from Donald Trump. In an interview with Trump last November, Lindell proposed that all Dominion voting machines be melted down and turned into prison bars, further stating that he wanted to investigate voter rolls and ballot machines, saying he wanted to look "right into their routers."

Peters, who has also made public comments questioning the validity of the 2020 election, was also in attendance at the event, where she stated, "Something didn't seem right in our county from years ago to the 2020 election. And they wanted answers. And I said, 'You know what? If there's a there there, we'll find it'

And I've made that pledge to the citizens of Mesa County and all over Colorado."

Dominion is the supplier of voting machines to Mesa County.

Peters has denied the accusations and rejected the indictment as a Democratic Party plot against her. "Using a grand jury to formalize politically-motivated accusations against candidates is a tactic long employed by the Democrat Party," said Peters in a statement. "Using legal muscle to indict political opponents during an election isn't new strategy, but it's easier to execute when you have a district attorney who despises President Trump and any constitutional conservative like myself who continues to demand all election evidence be made available to the public."

By making election material "available to the public" she means assisting the fascistic attacks of figures like Lindell. During a Facebook Live event, Peters reportedly said that "we've got to get those machines so they are transparent to the people and they're not able to do what they're designed to do." The implication of such a statement is that voting machines are rigged, and that only the intervention of right-wing forces into the election process can prevent that.

The indictment of Peters and Knisley, and their connection to far-right elements perpetuating Trump's lie of widespread fraud during the 2020 election, has far-reaching implications for the ongoing assault by the Republican Party on voting rights.

Nearly two dozen states have already passed laws restricting the ability of citizens to vote over the past year, based on entirely bogus claims of mass vote fraud. Now, as mid-term elections draw close, many states are seeing candidates who publicly endorse this conspiracy theory run for secretary of state, the chief administrator of elections in most states.

This year 27 states will have elections for Secretary of State, and in nearly half of them a Republican candidate is running who either questions the validity of Joe Biden's presidential victory or has explicitly declared it to be fraud.

Arizona Republican State Representative Mark Finchem, who was present at the attempted coup on January 6, is running for Arizona secretary of state this year and has reportedly received strong support from Trump, who publicly endorsed his candidacy.

Trump also endorsed Kristina Karamo, a leading member in attempts by the Michigan Republicans to block the casting of the state's electoral votes for Joe

Biden, for Michigan secretary of state, and Nevada's Jim Marchant, who attempted to sue to have his congressional loss to a Democrat overturned.

In Georgia, he has also endorsed Representative Jody Hice, another proponent of Trump's big lie, who also attempted to block Georgia's casting of electoral votes for Biden. Hice is running against incumbent Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who opposed Trump's attempts to interfere in Georgia's ballot counting during the 2020 election.

Significantly, Peters herself announced her candidacy for Colorado secretary of state in February of this year. State Republicans have encouraged her to suspend her campaign until her trial is complete, but she has so far refused.

The growing assault on democratic rights, and the revelations of a conspiracy by local election officials in support of far-right claims of vote fraud, present a serious threat to the voting rights of the working class. Fascistic elements within and around the Republican Party are becoming increasingly brazen in their attempts to challenge, subvert and repeal the limited democratic rights won by workers over decades of struggle.

According to Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold, the investigation into Peters and Knisley uncovered "one of the nation's first insider threats where an official, elected to uphold free, fair, and secure selections, risked the integrity of the election system in an effort to prove unfounded conspiracy theories."

As the investigation continues, it may reveal broader connections between local election officials and the developing fascistic forces operating within and around the Republican Party.



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