

Trump hosts Republican politicians, financiers, co-conspirators at premiere of election conspiracy film

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Nearly 16 months after Donald Trump launched a fascist coup aimed at overturning the 2020 election and establishing an authoritarian dictatorship in the United States, he has hosted Republican politicians, donors and co-conspirators for a private screening of a new far-right propaganda film justifying his claims that the 2020 election was stolen.

The 42-minute film, *Rigged: The Zuckerberg-Funded Plot to Defeat Donald Trump*, was produced by David Bossie, president of Citizens United and a longtime Republican operative. It was screened for the Republican elite at Trump's club in his Mar-a-Lago compound in Florida Tuesday night.

The film amplifies Trump's frequent diatribes against Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg for having financed election operations in many parts of the United States in 2020, when the billionaire and his wife gave \$400 million to the nonprofit Center for Tech and Civic Life to help election authorities cope with the problems posed by conducting nationwide voting under conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The film does not allege that Zuckerberg committed any illegal activity, instead claiming that the donations from the billionaire, who is Jewish, caused Trump to lose the "rigged" election, because they helped increase turnout and the ability of election officials to accommodate the surge of both mail-in and in-person voters. Trump has declared that the sharp increase of votes in "Democratic counties" led to his loss in the election.

In its report on the event, the *Washington Post* noted, "[a] hyperbolic poster advertising the movie, with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg devilishly grabbing cash, was perched by the pool for a cinematic sunset as guests strutted about clinking glasses."

Posters of the film, and the content contained within its short run-time, are dripping with anti-Semitic implications. The film claims that the Zuckerberg used his "Zuckerbucks" to "corrupt" the 2020 election in favor of Biden. This filth

has been a central element of Trump's recent campaign speeches and is baked into the Christian fascist movement he is trying to cultivate.

Prior to screening the film, David Bossie reaffirmed Trump's lies that the 2020 presidential election was stolen, the Biden government was illegitimate, and therefore the attack on Congress on January 6, 2021 was justified. He told the assorted guests: "Some of the people here say we shouldn't be talking about 2020, I think it's vital that we do. If we don't prove what happened in 2020, how can we stop it from happening again?" the *Post* reported.

Among those in attendance, according to the *Post*, included "a who's who of prominent advisers and election deniers ... donors and candidates." This included several of Trump's January 6 co-conspirators, such as coup lawyer Cleta Mitchell.

Mitchell, who features prominently in the film and trailer, urged Trump White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows to pressure the Department of Justice to investigate non-existent voter fraud in Georgia following Trump's defeat. She was also on the January 2, 2021 phone call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger when Trump urged Raffensperger to "find" the over 11,000 votes needed to overtake Biden's lead in Georgia.

Another notable guest at the event was Peter Navarro. The former Trump adviser has touted the role he and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon played in advancing Trump's coup through a plan they dubbed the "Green Bay Sweep." The plan called on Republican lawmakers and Vice President Mike Pence to reject the certification of the electoral votes of key states, forcing the election into the House of Representatives, where each state delegation would have one vote, insuring a Trump victory because the Republicans control 26 delegations even though the Democrats have a majority in the House as a whole.

On the eve of a vote to hold him in contempt of Congress for refusing to comply with a select committee subpoena,

Navarro nonetheless “walked into the ballroom for the screening before all other guests, seeming a man without a care in the world.” He knew that the Democratic Party and Attorney General Merrick Garland had no intention of holding Trump and his high-level accomplices accountable for attempting to overthrow the election.

Texas Senator Ted Cruz is also featured prominently in the film and trailer, saying at one point: “This was the biggest billionaire assault on election integrity we have ever seen.” Cruz, who was one of seven Republican senators who voted to overturn the election of Biden, characterized the funding provided by Zuckerberg as “a corrupt Democratic voter turnout operation.”

Other Republicans featured in the film include former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who earlier this year called for Trump’s political opponents to be jailed, as well as Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway, former Department of Homeland Security official Kenneth Cuccinelli and Georgia Representative Jody Hice.

Former Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman also appeared. For over a year the conservative ex-judge has been paid thousands of dollars by the state of Wisconsin to head a partisan effort aimed at “uncovering” fraud in order to illegally “decertify” the 2020 election.

The accusations against Zuckerberg and the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) are entirely groundless, one more lie in Trump’s litany of lies. According to a December 2020 investigation by APM Reports, CTCL sent out grants to more than 2,500 jurisdictions throughout the United States, run by Democratic, Republican and non-party officials, after the Trump administration and its congressional Republican allies rejected appeals from local officials for assistance in running the election during a pandemic.

In the months prior to the election leading Republicans, from Trump to his Attorney General William Barr, alleged that mail-in ballots were inherently fraudulent and should not be allowed, despite no supporting evidence and the fact that Trump himself usually votes via absentee or mail-in ballot. Before resigning from the Trump administration in December 2020, Barr admitted that there was no “widespread fraud” in the 2020 election, and over 60 lawsuits by Trump alleging fraud had been rejected by Democratic and Republican appointed judges alike.

In their article on the funding provided by CTCL, APM Reports states that “documents” obtained of “more than 30 grant agreements and applications” show “requests mainly focused on the logistics of the election: increased pay for poll workers, expanded early voting sites and extra equipment to more quickly process millions of mailed ballots.”

While the film posits that these donations artificially boosted Democratic turnout, APM’s analysis of “voter registration and voter turnout in three of the five key swing states shows the grant funding had no clear impact on who turned out to vote,” and that “counties in Pennsylvania, Georgia and Arizona that received grants didn’t have consistently higher turnout rates than those that didn’t receive money.”

Prior to screening the film the *New York Times* reported that two pro-Trump billionaires, Peter Thiel and Rebekah Mercer, met with Trump privately at Mar-a-Lago to lay out their dictatorial strategy. The *Times* wrote that the new coalition, dubbed the Rockbridge Network, “has laid out an ambitious goal—to reshape the American right by spending more than \$30 million on conservative media, legal, policy and voter registration projects, among other initiatives.”

In a brochure obtained by the *Times* the group lays out its initiatives, including a \$3 million “transition project” aimed at building a “government-in-waiting” to “staff the next Republican administration.”

Mercer is the daughter of billionaire hedge fund boss Robert Mercer. The Mercers have backed Steve Bannon’s projects and the far-right Breitbart News for at least a decade. The Mercers and Thiel have been some of the largest contributors to Trump’s 2016 and 2020 campaigns.

Thiel, who served on Trump’s 2016 transition team, is supporting 16 Republican House and Senate candidates in the 2022 election, including through substantial donations, \$10 million each, to super PACs supporting Senate candidates Blake Masters (Arizona) and J.D. Vance (Ohio).

While he is planning on leaving, Thiel still currently sits on the board of Meta, the parent company of Facebook.



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