Michigan, Ohio Republicans embrace pro-Trump fascists

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The Republican Party in two key Midwest industrial states is moving to select fascistic advocates of former President Donald Trump's "stolen" election lies as their candidates for statewide office.

In Michigan, delegates to the state Republican convention Saturday voted to endorse Matthew DePerno for state attorney general and Kristina Karamo for secretary of state, the principal state election official.

These are two of the four top statewide offices up for election in November, along with the governor and lieutenant governor, where candidates will be chosen in August 2 primary elections. After the primary, there will be a second Republican convention to ratify the nominations of all four candidates, but that is considered a formality.

DePerno and Karamo were both endorsed by Trump and appeared alongside him at a recent rally in southeast Michigan. The two are fanatical supporters of Trump's claim that the 2020 election was stolen, and their political standing within the Republican Party is based entirely on that issue, as neither has ever held public office before.

Karamo is the first election denier to win a Republican nomination for secretary of state in this election cycle. A dozen other such candidates are seeking the nomination in upcoming primaries. In some cases, as in Georgia, they are directly challenging incumbent Republicans who refused Trump's pleas to overturn the results of the November 2020 election and "find" enough votes to tip the state's Electoral College votes to him.

The purpose of this coordinated campaign is to seize control of the electoral machinery in key "battleground" states ahead of the 2024 presidential election, to ensure that Trump or some other fascistic Republican candidate will prevail.

DePerno, a Kalamazoo lawyer, came to prominence through a lawsuit challenging the 2020 election results in Antrim County, a small, predominately Republican county in the northwest part of the state. Antrim initially reported that Democrat Joe Biden defeated Trump in the county. After investigating the unlikely result, local officials found the next morning that the county clerk, a Republican loyalist, had made a number of mistakes in tabulating the votes, which had been correctly counted at the precinct level. The results were corrected immediately, and accurate results were submitted to the state government in Lansing.

The mistake was rapidly fixed and had no impact on the outcome of the Michigan contest, which Biden won by 154,000 votes. Trump carried rural Antrim County by 9,748 votes to Biden's 5,960, a margin of just under 4,000 votes.

But because this was perhaps the only case in the entire United States where election totals for Trump and Biden were reversed, and because Antrim County used machines manufactured by Dominion Voting Systems, the target of pro-Trump conspiracy theorists, the Michigan county became a banner waved by Trump, his top election lawyers Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell, and the fascist right as a whole.

DePerno defeated two other candidates, former Michigan House Speaker Tom Leonard and state Representative Ryan Berman, in the second round of convention voting. Leonard was the unsuccessful Republican nominee for the same office in 2018 and was backed by the party establishment, whose influence has dwindled.

Karamo is a community college instructor from Oak Park, in the Detroit suburbs, and a member of the black leadership committee of Right to Life Michigan, the main anti-abortion group in the state. She became a prominent voice of the "stolen election" campaign, making bogus claims of fraud in the counting of ballots in Detroit, where she was a Republican observer.

Fox News and other far-right media outlets portrayed

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her as a “whistleblower,” and Trump embraced her claims of vote fraud in Detroit, although he actually received more votes in the city in 2020 than he did in 2016, when he narrowly carried the state. The shift towards the Democrats in 2020 came mainly in the Detroit suburbs, and in suburban areas around other cities, including Grand Rapids and Lansing.

The Republican hopefuls who opposed DePerno and Karamo argued that the two were running so far to the right, including embracing the conspiracy theories peddled by the QAnon internet tendency, that the two would alienate independent and moderate voters and lose in the general election to the Democratic incumbents, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson.

DePerno has called for investigating and prosecuting Nessel, Benson and Governor Gretchen Whitmer on charges of official misconduct relating to the 2020 elections and the enforcement of mitigation policies against the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the pandemic issue that made Whitmer the target of a fascist kidnap/murder conspiracy in 2020.

In neighboring Ohio, Trump announced his choice for the Republican nomination for a vacant US Senate seat: J.D. Vance, author of the wretched *Hillbilly Elegy*, a 2016 memoir of his rise from Appalachia to the Marine Corps to Yale Law School to investment banker, which prescribes religion and hard work and is unreservedly hostile to the working class.

Vance attacked Trump in 2016, proclaiming himself a “never-Trumper,” but he quickly reconciled himself to the new Republican savior, becoming a vocal supporter of measures like the US-Mexico border wall, the mass round-ups of immigrants and the promotion of all forms of religious and cultural backwardness.

Trump eventually decided to reward Vance’s obsequiousness—and his celebrity—with an endorsement, although several other Republican candidates were equally determined to obtain the nod from the exiled would-be führer in Mar-a-Lago. These included Josh Mandel, the former Ohio state treasurer, an Iraq War veteran endorsed by the ultra-right Club for Growth, and Mike Gibbons, a multi-millionaire banker whose campaign is self-financed.

Before the Trump endorsement was announced last week, Vance was running third in the polls, well behind Mandel and Gibbons. Now he has reportedly pulled ahead, a week before the May 3 primary.

Trump focused on the endorsement of Vance at a campaign rally Saturday night in Delaware, Ohio, the county seat of Delaware County, which comprises the upscale northern suburbs of Columbus (with an average household income of $111,000, according to US Census estimates).

The rally was sparsely attended, with only a few thousand people, an indication of Trump’s lessening ability to attract large crowds. He gave his usual 90-minute fascistic rant, spending most of his time on lies about the “stolen election,” praising the police and the Border Patrol, and denouncing the Democratic Party—a conservative party of Wall Street and American imperialism—as “radical communist socialist Democrats.”

He denounced ongoing efforts to bring civil charges against his business operations in New York City and to investigate the January 6 attempted coup in Washington, saying that “prosecuting your politicians … is communism, this is the beginning of communism.”

There was one significant addition to Trump’s litany of fascist bile. He attacked transgender swimmer Lia Thomas, who recently won an NCAA national championship, prompting the crowd to erupt in a QAnon chant, “Save our kids, save our kids.” QAnon portrays the Democratic Party as a promoter of child sexual abuse and sex trafficking, a grotesque smear that has been increasingly taken up by sections of the Republican Party.

Three candidates were trundled out to bask in Trump’s endorsement and receive plaudits from the crowd: Vance for Senate; Max Miller for Congress in the 7th District, where he would replace Anthony Gonzalez, one of the 10 Republicans who voted for Trump’s impeachment; and Madison Gesiotto Gilbert, a candidate for Congress in the 13th District and a former Miss Ohio.

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