

Trump purge of Republican Party claims Liz Cheney in Wyoming

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Primary elections in Alaska and Wyoming Tuesday saw the culmination of the campaign by ex-President Donald Trump to purge the Republican Party of opponents, as his most prominent target, Representative Liz Cheney, went down to a landslide defeat in Wyoming.

The Trump-endorsed candidate, Harriet Hageman, a lawyer for ranching interests and former unsuccessful candidate for governor, won 66 percent of the vote compared to only 29 percent for Cheney. The incumbent carried only two counties, including Teton County in the far northwest, the only county to vote for Biden in 2020, thanks to a heavy crossover vote among Democrats who reregistered as Republicans to vote for her.

The entire state Republican Party was behind Hageman, having voted to censure Cheney last year for her public criticism of Trump and her vote to impeach him for instigating the January 6, 2021 mob attack on the US Capitol. State party officials worked to clear the primary field for Hageman and avoid a contest with multiple candidates of the kind that Cheney won in 2016, when she first ran for office.

A former critic of Trump in 2016, when she called him “racist and xenophobic” during the campaign for the Republican presidential nomination, Hageman had long ago dropped such language and became an acolyte of the fascist president. She echoed his claim that the 2020 election was “rigged,” and Trump in return endorsed her and traveled to Wyoming, which he had never done as president, to hold a rally to vilify Cheney.

The national Republican Party adopted the same stance as the state party. The House Republican Conference removed Cheney as its chair, the third-ranking position in the leadership, in May 2021. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy openly advocated her defeat in the primary.

Cheney raised \$14 million for her campaign but spent little of it and barely visited the state or campaigned, citing death threats and her responsibilities as vice chair of the House Select Committee investigating the January 6 attack. The day after the primary, she filed with the Federal Election Committee to establish a political action committee that can spend money on her future endeavors directed at preventing Trump from returning to the presidency, which could include Cheney herself launching a campaign for the Republican presidential

nomination in 2024.

In an interview Wednesday morning on the NBC “Today” program, Cheney said she was considering a presidential bid and would make a decision in the next several months. But she also said that it might take “several election cycles” for the Republican Party to break free of Trump’s domination.

In her concession speech Tuesday night, Cheney spelled out, without using the word, the fascist politics that increasingly dominates the Republican Party.

“Today, as we meet here, there are Republican candidates for governor who deny the outcome of the 2020 election, and who may refuse to certify future elections if they oppose the results. We have candidates for secretary of state who may refuse to report the actual results of the popular vote in future elections. And we have candidates for Congress, including here in Wyoming, who refuse to acknowledge Joe Biden won the 2020 election, and suggest that states decertify the result,” she said.

Of the 10 Republican House members and seven Republican senators who voted to impeach Trump in February 2021 for his actions in instigating and supporting the January 6 attack, 13 faced reelection this year. Ten have either been defeated in primaries or retired from office.

The three who survived all benefited from all-party primaries, in California, Washington and now Alaska, where incumbent Senator Lisa Murkowski led her Trump-backed challenger Kelly Tshibaka, 44 percent to 40 percent, with both advancing to the general election in November against two Democrats, who polled much smaller votes.

In the other high-profile contest in Alaska, for the state’s lone seat in the House of Representatives, former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin was running second to Democrat Mary Peltola, with another Republican, Nick Begich III, in third place narrowly behind Palin. All three will advance to the general election.

The two Republicans combined to win 60 percent of the vote, compared to Peltola’s 38 percent, but under the state’s new “ranked-choice” voting system, the outcome in November is uncertain. Trump had endorsed Palin, who embraced his “stolen election” lies. Begich is a conservative who ran on his opposition to corporate taxes and abortion but denied the 2020 election was rigged and said that Biden was “absolutely” the

legitimate president. Palin has suggested she will give her second-place preference to Peltola and not Begich.

The defeat of Cheney has been greeted with wailing over the outcome and praise for the right-wing Republican on the part of Democratic Party politicians and Democratic-aligned media outlets like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as appeals for Democrats to form an alliance with anti-Trump sections of the Republican Party.

“All policy differences aside, @Liz_Cheney is now and forever more will be known as an American hero,” Michigan’s Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel tweeted. Two Democratic members of Congress made appearances in campaign ads urging Wyoming Democrats to vote for Cheney.

Cheney has been the subject of unending praise by the Democrats and the media for her role on the House Select Committee investigating the January 6 attempt by Trump to block the certification of his election defeat by sending a mob of his supporters to attack the Capitol. She has been given a leading role at many hearings in order to demonstrate that there is a “good” and “democratic” section of the Republican Party, and that Trump and his faction are only a minority, although they dominate both the House Republicans and, increasingly, the Senate Republicans as well.

The *New York Times* published an editorial on the eve of the vote hailing the “political bravery” of elected leaders who defied popular sentiment. Significantly, in addition to Cheney, it praised Senator Mitt Romney and Senator John McCain—the last two Republican presidential nominees before Trump, as well as Senator Murkowski, while noting that Cheney had voted with Trump 93 percent of the time during his term in office. This was combined with similar praise for right-wing Senate Democrats Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, who eviscerated the social spending and corporate tax portions of the Biden “Build Back Better” legislation. The editorial concluded, “Democracy needs more profiles in courage like that.”

The *Washington Post* editorial, published just after the results in Wyoming were made public, was even more direct, carrying the headline, “The country needs more Liz Cheneyes.” It claimed to find the repudiation of Cheney “dispiriting” and noted that “candidates willing to spread the ‘big lie’ are winning GOP primary races across the country, such as gubernatorial candidates Doug Mastriano in Pennsylvania and Kari Lake in Arizona...”

The editorial concluded, “the nation needs a broad coalition united in defense of bedrock values such as free-and-fair elections and the peaceful transition of power. The country needs, regardless of their positions on tax hikes or deregulation or free trade, more Liz Cheneyes in government. Now, it will have one less.”

Despite Cheney’s rhetoric about the need to defend democracy against the threat of Trump, the real basis for the rallying of the Democrats and the corporate media behind her is

agreement on the war policies of the Biden administration, directed against both Russia and China. In Biden’s constant appeals for a “strong Republican Party,” he is seeking support from anti-Trump Republicans on the basis of a common program of militaristic confrontations in both Ukraine and Taiwan.

Cheney certainly fills the bill. She served as assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs in the Bush administration, in which her father was vice president, and she became well known on Fox News and other right-wing media outlets as a vitriolic critic of anyone opposed to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. She later went to work for Fox during the Obama administration, serving as a substitute host for Sean Hannity, among others, and only leaving when she announced her candidacy for a Senate seat in Wyoming in 2013.

As for her professed defense of “freedom and democracy,” right through the 2020 election she was a vicious opponent of protests against US military aggression overseas and police violence at home. During the Trump administration, Cheney said that FBI agent Peter Strzok and his FBI girlfriend, who exchanged text messages disparaging Trump, could be planning a “coup” and might be guilty of “treason.”

She denounced the protests that erupted after the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, signing a Republican leadership statement that declared: “riots are not constitutionally-protected protests. Those who are exploiting the protests, attacking our law enforcement officials, burning our cities, and assaulting innocent civilians must be arrested, prosecuted and face the full power of American justice.”

In September 2020, according to her Wikipedia entry, Cheney asked the Justice Department to investigate environmental groups, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council, Sea Change and the Sierra Club, from the standpoint of “Chinese and Russian attempts to influence environmental and energy policy in the United States.”



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