

Michigan attorney general indicts 16 Republicans in 2020 fake elector scheme

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19 July 2023

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel charged 16 Republicans on Tuesday with multiple felonies for portraying themselves fraudulently as a slate of presidential electors as part of the conspiracy to keep Donald Trump in the White House after his defeat in the 2020 election.

Nessel charged the defendants, all of whom are GOP political activists, with eight felony counts apiece, including one count of conspiracy to commit forgery, two counts of forgery, one count of conspiracy to commit uttering and publishing, one count of uttering and publishing, one count of conspiracy to commit election law forgery and two counts of election forgery.

After being notified of the charges, the 16 defendants have been given one week to turn themselves in or face arrest before they are individually arraigned in District Court in Ingham County. If convicted, they can be sentenced to terms of five to 14 years in prison.

In a press statement, Nessel said the defendants “are alleged to have met covertly in the basement of the Michigan Republican Party headquarters on December 14, and signed their names to multiple certificates stating they were the ‘duly elected and qualified electors for President and Vice President of the United States of America for the State of Michigan’.”

She continued, “The evidence will demonstrate there was no legal authority for the false electors to purport to act as ‘duly elected presidential electors’ and execute the false electoral documents.” She added, “Every serious challenge to the election results had been denied, dismissed or otherwise rejected by the time the false electors convened.”

Nessel also said there was no legitimate legal purpose for the fraudulent document prepared by the 16 defendants other than a “desperate effort” to overturn the election and defraud millions of Michigan voters.

The evidence against the Republicans was presented by Nessel in a complaint that details the laws and process by which the State of Michigan certifies votes for President and Vice President of the United States. It also spells out the procedures in the US Constitution by which each state “shall select Electors who will elect the persons to serve as the President and Vice President.”

The document states that Michigan law provides that “any person who utters and publishes as true a false, forged, or counterfeit record, instrument, or other writing ... knowing it to be false, altered, forged, or counterfeit with intent to injure or defraud is guilty of a felony ...”

The complaint, submitted by Special Agent Investigator Howard Shock of the Department of Attorney General, says that the investigation “discovered that a fraudulent ‘Certificate of Votes of the 2020 Electors from Michigan’ was created; that none of the sixteen signatories to this document were lawfully selected electors for the offices of President and Vice President; and that the document was made and published with the intent to defraud the National Archives, President of the U.S. Senate, and others.”

After the general election on November 3, 2020, the Michigan Board of State Canvassers met and certified the results: The Democratic Party Biden-Harris ticket had won the election with 2.8 million votes to the Republican Trump-Pence ticket’s 2.65 million votes. That same day, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed a certificate that the people nominated by the Democratic Party as presidential electors had been duly elected.

The selection of electors by each US state is a component of the Electoral College system that determines who becomes President and Vice President,

as opposed to the popular vote. Due to the continued existence of this arcane and undemocratic system, it is possible for a candidate to win the popular vote and not become president, as happened in 2000 when Democrat Al Gore lost to George W. Bush even though he had 500,000 more votes, and in 2016 when Democrat Hillary Clinton lost to Trump even though she had 2.8 million more votes.

The individuals indicted on Tuesday are Meshawn Maddock, 55, Kathy Berden, 70, Marian Sheridan, 69, Kent Vanderwood, 69, Stanley Grot, 71, Amy Facchinello, 55, Mari-Ann Henry, 65, Michele Lundgren, 73, Clifford Frost, 75, John Haggard, 82, Timothy King, 56, Rose Rook, 81, Mayra Rodriguez, 64, Hank Choate, 72, Ken Thompson, 68, and James Renner, 76.

These people are by and large functionaries within the Michigan Republican Party apparatus. Of note is Meshawn Maddock, a previous co-chair of the Michigan Republican Party and the spouse of Matt Maddock, GOP member of the Michigan House of Representatives. CNN reported that Ms. Maddock bragged publicly about the Trump campaign's involvement in the fake elector scheme. Meshawn was in Washington D.C. on January 6, 2021, though she was not at the US Capitol.

Kathy Berden is one of the Republican National Committee members representing Michigan and previously a Trump delegate to the Republican National Convention in the summer of 2016. Kent Vanderwood is the current mayor of Wyoming, Michigan, a large suburb of Grand Rapids, and formerly the chair of the 2nd District Republican Party.

The Michigan charges are the first to be brought against the elaborate scheme organized across the country to switch electoral votes in swing states from Biden to Trump during the certification process that took place in December 2020. The other states where similar efforts were mounted include Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

In total, there were 84 people who signed their names to bogus documents claiming that Donald Trump had won the 2020 election in their states. These people were on the lists of phony electors that were sent from the seven states to the National Archives as part of the effort to force the congressional certification of Trump as president instead of Biden on January 6.

The indictments in Michigan arrived just as Donald Trump revealed he was informed that he is a target of special counsel Jack Smith's investigation into his efforts to overturn the 2020 election. The assembly of fake electors in the swing states was one of the elements in the elaborate scheme hatched by Trump and his inner circle that also included bogus legal challenges and, ultimately, the effort to kidnap or kill Vice President Mike Pence to prevent the certification of Biden on January 6. Special counsel Smith has yet to specify the charges being considered against Trump or any of his cohorts, but the false elector scheme is clearly a central aspect of the federal investigation.

Stunned by the Michigan indictments, the defendants and the Republican Party establishment had little to say on Tuesday. Meshawn Maddock talked to CNN and delivered several Trump talking points including, "This is part of a national coordinated lawfare to stop Trump" and that Nessel and Smith are "constructing a banana republic" where "voter fraud has now morphed into their prosecutorial fraud."

Others among the 16 were more cautious and defensive. Wright Blake, a lawyer for two of the defendants, said, "If they want to charge my client, how come they didn't charge Trump and the Trump lawyers that he sent here to discuss with the delegates what to do?"

Michele Lundgren from Detroit told the *Detroit News* she was distraught over the charges but questioned what evidence prosecutors had. Lundgren said she received a phone call on December 13, 2020 and was asked to be in Lansing the following day. She went and signed what she claimed was a sign-in sheet, saying, "We signed a blank piece of paper, and that's all I can tell you."



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