

Video of Kansas Republicans pummeling Biden effigy goes viral

# Trump consolidates power within party on way to securing Republican nomination for president

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More than three years after then-President Donald Trump ordered far-right militia members and his most ardent fanatics to march on the US Capitol in an attempt to block Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election, the would-be dictator is poised to clinch the Republican nomination for president.

As of this writing, Trump is expected to win virtually all 161 delegates available in Tuesday's primary contests in Georgia, Mississippi, Washington state and Hawaii. Trump has already secured 1,163 delegates, while former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, who dropped out last week, has 94. On the Democratic side, President Joe Biden secured the nomination on Tuesday after obtaining the requisite 1,968 delegates.

On his way to securing the Republican nomination, Trump has further consolidated his grip over the Republican party, transforming it into a personalist instrument in the service of his authoritarian aspirations.

Last month, Trump forced out Republican National Committee (RNC) Chairperson Ronna Romney McDaniel, who had held the post for seven years. McDaniel is the niece of former Massachusetts governor and retiring Utah senator Mitt Romney. At the urging of Trump, she dropped the Romney name after assuming the RNC chair position in 2016.

McDaniel formally resigned last Thursday. While she was a loyal soldier to Trump, including supporting his baseless claims that the 2020 election was stolen, Trump soured on McDaniel for allowing the RNC to host Republican presidential primary debates after Trump indicated he would not participate.

In McDaniel's place Trump installed Michael Whatley, chair of the North Carolina Republican Party, as the new RNC chair, with Trump's daughter-in-law, Lara Trump, serving alongside Whatley as co-chair.

Speaking in Houston, Texas on March 8, Whatley said that under his leadership the RNC would work "hand in glove" with the

Trump campaign. This includes backing Trump's stolen election narrative, which Whatley, as chair of the North Carolina GOP, promulgated following the November 2020 election.

Following Trump's defeat in 2020, CNN reported that Whatley went on radio stations and complained of "massive fraud" that allegedly took place in "Milwaukee and Detroit and Philadelphia."

Speaking on Friday, Whatley doubled-down on Trump's election lies. "The Republican National Committee will be focused like a laser on getting out the vote and protecting the ballot," said Whatley, adding that one of the top priorities of the RNC under his leadership would be protecting the "sanctity" of Republican voters.

Whatley's co-chair, Lara Trump, who is married to Eric Trump, was endorsed by her father-in-law last month. As co-chair she promised that "every single penny will go to the number one and the only job of the RNC—that is, electing Donald J. Trump as president of the United States and saving this country." Lara Trump has not publicly ruled out using RNC funds to pay for Trump's various legal affairs.

In addition to Whatley and Trump, CNN reported that top Trump campaign advisers Chris LaCivita and James Blair will also have senior positions at the RNC while remaining on the Trump campaign. LaCivita will reportedly be the RNC's chief operating officer, while Blair will be focused on "political strategy," per CNN.

On Monday, multiple news outlets, citing unnamed sources, reported that over 60 RNC staff members had been fired across multiple departments, many of whom had been previously hired by McDaniel.

On Monday night, Georgia Representative, QAnon fascist and Trump-surrogate Marjorie Taylor Greene tweeted on X, "MAGA is now in control of the Republican Party!!"

At a campaign rally held Saturday in Rome, Georgia, in Greene's home district, Trump doubled down on his standard fascistic campaign themes centered on immigration and the "stolen election" of 2020.

"Every day Joe Biden is deliberately releasing gang members and military-aged men into our communities by the tens of thousands," ranted Trump. In his speech, Trump blamed Biden for the killing of 22-year-old Laken Riley, allegedly carried out by an undocumented migrant.

"Biden has implemented a formal policy that illegal aliens who intrude into the United States are granted immunity from deportation," said Trump. "Thus, when this monster showed up at our border he was set free under the program that Crooked Joe created."

"I call it free to kill," Trump sneered, repeating it again for effect. "Free to kill."

Trump thanked "very brave" Greene for confronting "Biden... over this cruel policy" at the State of the Union address last week. He also singled out for praise several Republicans in attendance at the Rome, Georgia rally, including Ohio Representative Jim Jordan and Georgia Representatives Barry Loudermilk, Mike Collins and Andrew Clyde, along with Georgia Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones.

As he does at every rally, Trump promised if elected to carry out the largest deportation operation in US history. At the same time, he warned that the greatest threat to the country was not "outside threats," but the "threat from within."

"It's the radical left lunatics that we have in our country," Trump said. "That's a much bigger threat than outside threats."

The transformation of the Republican Party into a fascist organization is exemplified not only by the adoption of Hitlerian language and polices, but also by the party's normalization of far-right violence against its political opponents. At a Republican fundraiser in Overland Park, Kansas this past Friday, an effigy of Biden was erected and then assaulted by attendees.

The effigy featured a "Let's go Brandon" shirt, a Republican phrase that translates to "F\*ck Joe Biden." A mask of Biden was placed on the effigy's head. Video showing attendees punching, kicking and bashing the effigy was shared on social media, where it has garnered over five million views as of this writing.

In an interview with the Associated Press (AP), Mike Kuckelman, former chair of the Kansas Republican Party, called on current chair Mike Brown to resign over the incident. "This disgusting visualization of violence went viral," Kuckelman told AP. "This doesn't just go away."

Kuckelman said that the party leadership's attempts over the

weekend to claim that the effigy had been erected without its knowledge or consent were "disingenuous," because the party controlled the entire event, including all third party vendors.

"If this had happened when I was chair, if a vendor pulled a stunt like this, I would have immediately shut it down and had them escorted off the premises," he said. "This is so far over the line, you can't just say, 'Stop.'"

Tickets for Friday's fundraiser ranged from \$100 to \$300. The featured speakers for the event were the fascistic guitarist Ted Nugent and former Kansas attorney general Phil Kline.

Kline, who served as attorney general of Kansas from 2003 to 2007, was subpoenaed by the January 6 House Select Committee for his role in promoting and orchestrating Trump's failed coup. Following the November 2020 election, Kline filed lawsuits and appeared on right-wing media networks charging that the election was fraudulent because Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg donated money to civil organizations charged with collecting and counting mail-in and drop-off ballots.

Appealing to neo-Nazis and antisemites, Kline asserted then, and does to this day, that "Zuckerbucks" were part of an "insidious, coordinated and stealth campaign to manipulate" the election.

Kline, through a group called The Amistad Project, organized slates of fake electors in battleground states Trump had lost, including Michigan. Kline also worked with former top Trump coup lawyer Rudy Giuliani to try to convince legislatures in states Trump lost, including Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Arizona, to reject the electors chosen by the voters and instead have the Republican controlled legislatures submit their own pro-Trump slates.

Kline had his law license suspended in 2013 due to illegal actions he took while trying to investigate abortion providers in Kansas. A state disciplinary panel found that he presented false testimony and illegally acquired medical records of women planning to have abortions.

When he tried to appeal his suspension to the Kansas Supreme Court in 2013, the court ruled that "Kline's inability or refusal to acknowledge the line between overzealous advocacy and operating within the bounds of the law and his professional obligations; his selfish motives; and his lengthy and substantial pattern of misconduct—weigh more heavily than the mitigating factors and merit his indefinite suspension."



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