Trump administration threatens to imprison state officials who resist federal takeover of elections

Jacob Crosse
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The Trump administration escalated its conspiracy to overturn the 2026 midterm elections and establish a presidential dictatorship Friday, with Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin threatening to prosecute and imprison state election officials who refuse to comply with federal demands.

Mullin spoke from the Eisenhower Executive Office Building one day after Trump delivered a fascistic nationally televised address aimed at manufacturing a new conspiracy theory that the 2026 midterms were already under foreign and domestic attack, above all from China. The purpose of Trump's speech was to establish in advance a pretext for interfering in the elections and overturning Republican defeats. Mullin announced that the administration would use federal grants, the Department of Homeland Security's immigration databases and the threat of criminal prosecution to impose its dictates on state election systems.

Mullin's most direct threat was aimed at states that refused to use the Department of Homeland Security's Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements database, known as SAVE.

"If the election officials, once we gave them the information they need to secure their elections, and they chose not to, then those individuals can also be held accountable by fines, by penalties, and even, depending on how far it goes, prison time," Mullin said.

"Working with Secretary Lutnick, we are going to make our security enhancements mandatory," he continued. "Meaning that if these states want a grant and want to be reimbursed to run federal elections, they are going to have to implement security issues."

Mullin's threats of federal prosecution and financial blackmail are a direct assault on the Constitution, which leaves the administration of elections to the states, subject to laws passed by Congress. The executive branch has no authority to unilaterally dictate state voting procedures or prosecute election officials for refusing presidential orders.

Mullin declared that voting machines must be "secured" and state voter-registration lists "scrubbed." He repeated Trump's lie that the intelligence agencies had concealed evidence of Chinese interference in the 2020 election.

"What's frustrating is that the Biden administration knew this and our intel community knew this," Mullin claimed.

Neither Trump nor Mullin has produced evidence that China changed votes or manipulated election systems in 2020.

Multiple states are resisting Trump administration demands for unredacted voter files and expanded use of the database. Nevada Secretary of State Francisco Aguilar rejected Mullin's claims asserting thousands of non-citizens registered to vote as "wildly speculative," and said DHS had supplied no evidence to support them.

Earlier this month, Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon, the Trump loyalist placed in charge of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, sent letters to election officials in all 50 states and Washington D.C. warning of possible criminal prosecution over alleged noncitizen voting.

The letters were sent after federal courts repeatedly rejected attempts by the administration to seize complete, unredacted state voter rolls. Noncitizen voting is already illegal and exceedingly rare. This will not prevent the Justice Department and the Trump administration from using the fabricated specter of mass illegal voting to reject election results if they lose.

Mullin also announced that Trump had ordered the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, a component of DHS, to produce an updated election infrastructure plan. According to Mullin, it will be released within 30 days, that is, less than 75 days before the November elections.

The response from the Democratic Party to Mullin's threats to imprison election officials has been muted and commensurate with its political cowardice and complicity in the growth of presidential dictatorship.

On CNN's *State of the Union* Sunday, host Jake Tapper interviewed Pennsylvania Democratic Senator John Fetterman. Before raising Trump's attack on the elections, Tapper and Fetterman spent several minutes discussing the Democratic senator's virulent support for the US war against Iran.

Attacking Michigan Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed, Fetterman declared:

> When candidates like you have had on just before me won't criticize Iran. In fact, he will warn his supporters, well, we can't just be talking about that the leader of Iran was eliminated, which I think I'm proud to say that's a great thing.

"Eliminating Hamas leadership, eliminating Hezbollah leadership or Iran, that makes things safe and more just," Fetterman continued, "and that's entirely appropriate views."

Tapper then turned to Trump's speech and Mullin's claim that more than 250,000 noncitizens were registered to vote in California, Nevada, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. He asked Fetterman about

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Mullin's threat to fine or imprison election officials who refused to comply.

Fetterman responded by appealing for bipartisanship. Referring to his position as Pennsylvania lieutenant governor during the 2020 election, he said:

> That election was absolutely secure, fair and accurate. And now, I defended Al Schmidt, a Republican out of Philadelphia, and he described those circumstances absolutely fair and safe.

Fetterman did not denounce Mullin's threats as illegal or demand that election officials refuse the administration's orders. Instead, he left open the possibility that Trump might persuade him:

> Now, until I see evidence that over a quarter-million migrants that are voted, are registered to vote, then, yes, that would make me reconsider some of these things.

The senator then offered Trump political advice, urging him to abandon discussion of the 2020 election and concentrate on the Republicans' and Democrats' shared priority of imperialist war.

"I don't know why the president is dragging up all of this stuff," Fetterman said. "You're the president. Do something positive, and you are talking about 2020. That's been settled over six years ago. It's deeply unhelpful, and that distracts important things, especially like the Iranian war right now."

Other Democratic officials have issued equally impotent statements. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer asserted that the SAVE America Act would not pass the Senate. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries mocked Trump as "feeble" and "unhinged." Democratic governors released a general statement declaring that elections are secure, but made no commitment to refuse the administration's demands or defend election workers threatened with prosecution.

Senator Mark Warner warned Sunday that Trump "intends to interfere in this year's elections," calling Thursday's speech an "opening shot." Warner declared that Trump's policies would be rejected in a "free and fair election," while proposing no action to ensure such an election takes place.

Bernie Sanders has issued no statement on Mullin's threats. His last comment, posted during Trump's Thursday address, dismissed the speech as conspiracy-mongering and appealed for "all of us, regardless of our political views," to unite in defense of "American democracy."

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani have maintained their silence on Mullin's threats, with the latter finding the time to post photos of himself at the World Cup. Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez spent the weekend campaigning in Michigan for El-Sayed.

The silence extends to the organizations surrounding the Democratic Party. As of this writing, *Jacobin*, Socialist Alternative and the Party for Socialism and Liberation's *Liberation News* have published nothing on Mullin's threats.

Left Voice published a translated article on Trump's speech that referred to the January 6, 2021 coup attempt merely as the "take-over of the Capitol building by right-wing election deniers." Its perfunctory criticism of the Democrats was relegated to its final paragraph, with no examination of the trade union apparatus and its suppression of the working class.

The union bureaucracies have been equally silent. United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain, promoted for years by Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America, has issued no statement on the threat of dictatorship to the union's hundreds of thousands of members.

Teamsters President Sean O'Brien, who endorsed Mullin's nomination as DHS secretary and attended one of his confirmation hearings to demonstrate his support, has also said nothing.

Those who respond to Trump's conspiracy by telling workers to wait and vote for Democrats in November are selling political snake oil.

There is no guarantee that elections will take place under anything resembling normal conditions. The Trump administration is preparing to determine which states have "secure" voter rolls, which voting machines may be used, which voters are eligible, and which state officials may be prosecuted.

At the same time, masked and heavily armed Immigration and Customs Enforcement death squads continue to roam American cities with impunity. None of the federal agents responsible for murdering Renée Good, Alex Pretti, Lorenzo Salgado Araujo or Johan Guerrero has been charged with a crime. Most of the killers have been identified only through independent journalism, not government disclosure.

The Democrats will not protect workers, citizens or longtime residents from Trump's immigration Gestapo. There is no reason to believe they will defend democratic rights or oppose the transformation of the presidency into a dictatorship.

The Democratic Party surrendered the 2000 election after the Supreme Court installed George W. Bush. It paved the way for Trump's first election, defended the institutions responsible for his rise and refused to prosecute Trump and his leading co-conspirators for the January 6 coup.

The Democrats' passivity is not the result of confusion or a failure to appreciate Trump's intentions. They are far more frightened of an independent movement of the working class than they are of Trump. Such a movement would threaten not only the fascist president, but both parties of Wall Street and the capitalist system they defend.

The defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to the Democratic Party, the courts or the trade union bureaucracy. It requires the independent political mobilization of the working class against dictatorship, imperialist war and the capitalist system that produces both.

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