Trump prepares post-election crisis with threats in Alaska, California, Washington

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30 October 2026

Alaska's Republican governor, Mike Dunleavy, announced late Wednesday that he was ordering a criminal investigation into the campaign of Democratic Senate candidate Mary Peltola over the alleged recruitment of challengers to undermine the reelection campaign of Republican Senator Dan S. Sullivan. Dunleavy wrote that a *New York Times* report "reveals disturbing new evidence of an organized effort to manipulate Alaska's elections."

The challengers included Dan J. Sullivan, a retired teacher who is a registered independent, and Gerald Heikes, a long-shot candidate whom the *Times* says was also recruited. Both appear on the general election ballot. Under Alaska's system, the top four finishers in an open primary advance, and the general election is decided by ranked-choice voting. The non-incumbent Sullivan finished third in the August primary and Heikes fifth, but the fourth-place finisher, a Democrat, withdrew.

Governor Dunleavy said he was directing the Department of Public Safety "to investigate whether this scheme violated Alaska's laws." His action followed the filing of a lawsuit last week by the federal Department of Justice, seeking a court order to bar the certification of Alaska's Senate election in the event that the incumbent Sullivan lost narrowly to Peltola. The state government had opposed the federal lawsuit on constitutional grounds, as a violation of the state's authority to run its own elections.

When the Dunleavy administration sought to block Dan J. Sullivan from the ballot earlier this year, Alaska state courts overruled it, requiring only that the ballot clearly label the incumbent senator as such, to distinguish between them. The second Sullivan appeared on the primary ballot and, by virtue of his third-place finish, qualified for the general election ballot.

The campaign against the Democratic candidate—who denies any knowledge of the recruitment of the second Sullivan—was given a major boost by a *New York Times* report published Wednesday night that claimed that Peltola's campaign had recruited Dan J. Sullivan and assisted him in gaining ballot status, in order to divert votes away from Dan S. Sullivan.

Trump immediately seized on the report by the *Times*, a newspaper which he regularly denounces as "fake news," to demand that both Peltola and Dan J. Sullivan be removed from the ballot, effectively guaranteeing the Alaska seat for his favored candidate. The president has no legal authority to carry out this step, since the Constitution assigns election administration to the states. It is also a practical impossibility, as tens of thousands have already cast ballots in Alaska, many of them undoubtedly for Peltola.

The real aim of Trump and the DOJ is to overturn the result of the election if it is unfavorable to the Republican Party, either through an appeal to the US Supreme Court, packed with Trump supporters, or by having the Republican majority in the US Senate refuse to seat Peltola if she wins. Among those able to vote to bar Peltola would be the Republican incumbent she is challenging, Dan S. Sullivan.

The timing of the *Times* report, only five days before the election and just after the filing of the Department of Justice suit, is all the more extraordinary, since it throws gasoline on the fire and directly aids Trump's effort to overturn the election. It is largely based on extensive interviews with Peltola's disgruntled former campaign manager, who has since retracted her comments on the recruitment of the second Sullivan.

Even if true in every detail, the scheme outlined by

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the *Times* is not illegal, but part of the everyday manipulation of capitalist politics under the two-party system. Republican and Democratic operatives routinely intervene in the primary campaigns of the other party to boost candidates they believe will be weaker opponents. In general election campaigns, capitalists supporting the Democratic Party have financed Libertarian and other right-wing parties to divert Republican votes, while capitalists supporting the Republican Party have done the same with "left" third-party candidates.

In the Senate campaign in Ohio—as reported by the *Times* itself one day after its Alaska piece—a political action committee linked to the Republican Party has pumped $2.3 million into social media and direct mail supporting Greg Levy, the candidate of the pseudo-left Party of Socialism and Liberation, who is running against both Democrat Sherrod Brown and incumbent Republican Jon Husted. Levy told the *Times* he opposed the Republican-backed campaign as an example "that billionaires subvert the democratic process." At the same, the Democrats have spent smaller sums boosting the Ohio Libertarian candidate.

More broadly, the Trump intervention in Alaska is part of an effort to undermine the entire midterm election, in which the Republican Party is widely expected to lose control of the House of Representatives and possibly the Senate, although that contest is closer because only 33 of 100 Senate seats are at stake on November 3. Alaska is one of 14 seats considered closely contested, along with Republican-held seats in Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina and Texas, and Democratic-held seats in Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota and New Hampshire.

Responding to a question about whether he will accept the midterm election results, Trump replied dismissively Tuesday: "I will, if they are honest elections, yeah." Given his past record, including inciting the violent attack on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 in an attempt to overturn his defeat in the 2020 presidential election, that amounts to a pledge of all-out war to block the certification of the results in 2026.

The Justice Department followed up Thursday with dozens of subpoenas directed at Democratic election officials and campaign aides in Alaska and California. In the latter state, Attorney General Todd Blanche is spearheading an effort to block voting by tens of thousands of people who, he claims, are noncitizens and ineligible to vote. The DOJ filed a lawsuit earlier this month demanding that Los Angeles County and California state officials set aside 20,000 ballots allegedly cast by noncitizens, based on an internal listing developed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the department that includes Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Patrol.

State and local officials in California have rejected the demands and countersued, and a federal judge, in issuing a ruling October 28 blocking the DOJ suit, declared, "This request violates longstanding constitutional principles mandating that states have control over their elections." In addition to the Constitution, the DOJ demand would likely violate the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act and the National Voter Registration Act, he wrote.

The DOJ has sent letters to the states of California and Washington claiming noncitizen voting—only a tiny 400 in Washington out of 5.1 million registered voters. In July, DHS Secretary Markwayne Mullin claimed to have "identified 250,000 noncitizens registered to vote in just four states," California, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Nevada. Such registrations generally occur by mistake when noncitizens fill out applications for driver's licenses. There is little evidence that these noncitizens actually attempt to vote.

The lists compiled by DHS and sent to California are riddled with errors. A Los Angeles County election official who oversaw a manual cross-checking of the federal list said that out of 7,035 names of alleged noncitizen voters in the county, nearly 40 percent had been born in the United States, automatically making them citizens.

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