

Fighting the Big Lie

By Matt Rothschild

On the afternoon of June 15, there was a great protest on Sherman Avenue in Madison, right outside Kavanaugh's Esquire Club, where members of the Republican National Committee and officials of the Wisconsin Republican Party were launching their nine-city "election integrity" tour.

"Election integrity" from the GOP? Give us a break!

Speakers at the protest, sponsored by the SEIU, Souls to the Polls, the South Central Federation of Labor, and the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, pointed out that the Republican National Committee has absolutely no credibility on election integrity after it referred to the Jan. 6 coup attempt as "legitimate political discourse."



And the Wisconsin Republican Party has no credibility here, either, after Republican legislators passed one bill after another in the last session that would have interfered with our freedom to vote had Gov. Evers not vetoed them.

One bill would have prohibited the Wisconsin Elections Commission from sending out absentee ballot applications, en-masse, to registered voters during this pandemic and any future pandemic. Another bill would have made prohibited someone in a nursing home from getting help from a care assistant in registering to vote.

On top of that, Speaker Robin Vos has gerrymandered the maps even more grotesquely than last time around to assure that Republicans have a built-in advantage in races for the Legislature.

Vos also was the guy who hired Michael Gableman, now held in contempt, to run a partisan fishing expedition into the Nov. 2020 elections, which has cost us taxpayers more than \$1 million.

And Vos promoted Representative Janel Brandtjen to chair the Assembly committee on elections, which she has turned into a hotbed of conspiracy mongers. She has held one "public" hearing after another where the public couldn't testify; the hearings were by "invitation only." And the only people she invited to testify were those who tried to cast doubt on the accuracy of the 2020 vote count in Wisconsin. One "expert" she invited was a felon who himself had been convicted of fraud. He testified for two hours about his baseless claim that there was that a "sect" of Milwaukee officials who illegally printed ballots for Biden.

What's more, every Republican running for governor wants to abolish the Wisconsin Elections Commission and give its duties either to the Legislature itself or to the Secretary of State, if a Republican wins that office. Either way, Republicans would then be in charge not only of administering the elections but certifying them! This has the potential to be worse than voter suppression; it could lead to voter nullification, with Republican officials choosing the winner, not the voters.

But they haven't given up on voter suppression, either.

A few days after our protest, Republican partisans in Wauwatosa held an “election integrity summit,” with a focus on “recruitment, training and deployment” of poll watchers. One of the prime movers behind the summit was attorney Cleta Mitchell, who promoted Trump’s bogus theories on the election, helped cook up the scheme to have false electors, and was in on the infamous call to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger when Trump begged him to find 11,780 votes.

The push in Wisconsin to recruit, train, and deploy (note the military jargon) is part of a national GOP effort to get as many hyper-partisan poll workers and election observers to sign up for duty, especially in Democratic precincts, to challenge as many Democratic voters as possible.

A recent article in Politico outlined “a multi-pronged strategy to target and potentially overturn votes in Democratic precincts: Install trained recruits as regular poll workers and put them in direct contact with party attorneys.” One GOP official bragged, “It’s going to be an army.”

The partisan poll workers and election observers could challenge voters by the thousands, which would totally disrupt polling places, lead to extra-long lines, and result in the disenfranchisement of some voters, either over a technicality or because they got discouraged by all the delays and had to leave.

So there’s a reason the Big Lie just won’t die. And it won’t die because Republicans are weaponizing it as a way to motivate their base and to recruit people to harass voters in Democratic areas.

The protesters on June 15 recognized this plot and called it out. They held up a huge sign that said, “Voters Decide.”

That’s what’s supposed to happen in a democracy, after all.

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