

The plot to sabotage our elections

By Chuck Newman

Editor's Note: Chuck Newman hosts a biweekly series of "Conversations," presented by the Jewish Cultural Arts and Education department of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor. The talk show format of the Zoom presentations highlights Chuck's easygoing style and deep curiosity about science, politics, and connections between our local environment and the world. You can find these interviews and other previous shows at <https://jccannarbor.org/event/conversations>.

The threat is real.

Politico recently reported obtaining tapes in which Republican National Committee National Election Integrity Director Josh Findlay identified conservative elections attorney Cleta Mitchell as the "quarterback" of the effort to create a permanent workforce to thwart "efforts by nonprofit groups aligned with Democrats to create a 'new American majority' of young voters, people of color, and unmarried women."

Said Mitchell, "They bring democracy to your doorstep. I wanna pause right here. We don't live in a democracy," Mitchell said, to a round of applause from the crowd. "But to the left, everything is about democracy, the democracy fund, the democracy this, the democracy that."

"We live in a constitutional republic," she said.

Closer to home Matthew Seifried, RNC Michigan Election Integrity Director, said "We are going to recruit and truly, it's going to be an army, right? We are going to try to recruit lawyers. We are going to have more lawyers than we've ever recruited, because let's be honest, that's where it's going to be fought, right? We're going to have lawyers that work early to build relationships with different judges so that when that happens, we're going to have lawyers that have relationships with the police chiefs in different areas so that when that happens with preexisting relationships already established so that they can't lie."

An additional threat comes from an influential network of conservative activists fixated on the idea that former President Donald J. Trump won the 2020 election and is working to recruit county sheriffs to investigate elections based on the false notion that voter fraud is widespread.

"I'm absolutely sick of it," said Pam Palmer, the clerk of Barry County, where the sheriff has carried out an investigation into the 2020 results for more than a year. "We didn't do anything wrong, but they've cast a cloud over our entire county that makes people disbelieve in the accuracy of our ability to run an election."

Another group attempting to sabotage elections is the dark-money group, the America First Secretary of State Coalition. Its goal is to elect Trump puppets to the top elections administrations in critical swing states so that in 2024, they will have the power to declare Trump the winner regardless of the election results.

According to a Brennan Center analysis, yet another group, the Conservative Partnership Institute, is working to plant people who believe that the 2020 election was decided by voter fraud at all levels of our electoral machinery. "We are arming the army of patriots, that's our goal," operative Cleta Mitchell told Steve Bannon on his popular podcast.

It provides this "army" with a handbook urging followers to label staffers in state

attorneys general's offices as "friend or foe." It equips readers with just enough information to be dangerous, but not nearly enough to be helpful. Its election workers are instructed to find "bad addresses" on voter rolls, but it doesn't instruct them on how to differentiate an incorrect address from a student away at college. Their goal is to create chaos by overwhelming the people who know what they are doing, the professional election officials, with baseless challenges to voter registrations.

Another tactic to create chaos is to harass and replace the principled people who conduct the elections. Monica Palmer was a Republican member of the Wayne County Board of Canvassers who certified the 2020 election. In the weeks after the 2020 election, she received death threats and text messages with photos of dead naked women and others mentioning her daughter. She was subsequently replaced by someone who said that they didn't trust the results of the 2020 election.

Republican leaders in Michigan have also purged their canvassers in eight of the largest counties, including Macomb, Washtenaw, Ingham, Kalamazoo, Livingston, Saginaw, and Genesee, according to a report by the *Detroit News* last year. At least half of them have been replaced with people who have publicly cast doubt on the 2020 election results.

The Justice Department's Election Threats Task Force is prosecuting people who have threatened election officials. To date, the task force has investigated more than 1,000 complaints and has prosecuted five people. A recent national survey found that one in five election officials say they are somewhat or very unlikely to stay in their jobs through 2024 due to the increased threats and political pressure.

The common goal of all activities is to have enough votes in Democratic areas set aside so Republican candidates can win elections and failing that, create enough chaos to have the public lose faith in the fairness of the election or even not have results certified.

Fortunately, there are robust safeguards and dedicated organizations capable of seeing that we have free and fair elections, but it requires us to get involved. Next month I'll be detailing what these organizations are, how they do their work and how you can help. If you want to know how you can help now, email me at Chuck@LBA80.com. ■

Jamie Raskin, Gary Peters to speak at star-studded virtual fundraiser for suicide prevention nonprofit

Special to WJN

Garrett's Space, a nonprofit focused on preventing suicides among young adults, will be hosting a 24-hour livestream fundraiser on September 11. In its third year, the fundraiser, called Go24forGarrett'sSpace, is intended to educate, inspire, and entertain. The livestream lineup is filled with musical performances from all genres, including Broadway performers, presentations from inspirational speakers touched by suicide, and yoga, fitness, and meditation classes.

Garrett's Space was founded by Julie and Scott Halpert in 2017 when they lost their son, Garrett, to suicide at age 23. The livestream event will raise funds to support the Garrett's Space wellness program and the establishment of a holistically focused residential center for young adults ages 18–28 struggling with significant mental health issues. Last year, the event raised \$118,000.

"Today, more than ever, there is a tremendous need for Garrett's Space and the services we provide," Julie Halpert said. "We're thrilled to welcome well-known personas and celebrities to our 24-hour livestream event for an exciting day of performances and entertainment."

Mental health issues are widespread among young people in our country and suicide is the second leading cause of death for people between the ages of 18 and 34 in the state of Michigan.

Garrett's Space currently offers struggling young adults help free of charge through its wellness groups, which include a support group with peers and movement activities. The sessions are led by an exceptional team of caring and compassionate facilitators. The program provides a welcoming space for young adults to openly discuss their challenges. "While seeking treatment for Garrett, we witnessed first-hand the critical gaps in support in our healthcare system for struggling young adults who need something

more than regular visits to their therapist but aren't actively suicidal," Scott Halpert said. "We believe the services we're striving to provide may have helped restore hope for our son, and we want to provide that hope for youth struggling today."

Within the next three years, Garrett's Space is planning to open a holistically focused residential space in Washtenaw County that will be a haven immersed in nature, intended to lift up young people through times of despair. The space will feature an array of healing activities including yoga, music, meditation, healthy cooking and poetry, as well as peer support, help for coping with broken relationships, and resources for families. Garrett's Space plans to make its programming and residential center models that can be replicated nationwide.

The fundraiser is being produced and hosted by Mario Sulaksana, a musician who was one of Garrett's closest friends. It promises to be an exciting event with an incredible lineup including: Reneé Rapp, a star of *Mean Girls* and the Netflix show *The Sex Lives of College Girls*; Jo Ellen Pellman, star of the Netflix show *The Prom*; Emilie Kouatchou, the first Black woman to play the role of Christine in *Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway; Christopher and Erik Ewers, directors of the new Ken Burns documentary *Hiding in Plain Sight*; leading mental health advocate Patrick Kennedy; U.S. Representative Jamie Raskin, who lost his son to suicide; Michigan Senator Gary Peters; and Michigan Representative Debbie Dingell.

Join Go24forGarrett's Space online any time from 11 a.m. on September 11 through 11 a.m. on September 12 for the virtual fundraiser 24-hour livestream. Please visit the Garrett's Space website garrettspace.org for more information and to donate or join the livestream.

We hope you'll tune in to support this important cause! ■

Fall open house with AA secular humanist Jewish community

The Jewish Cultural Society (JCS) has a lot to offer. As a Secular Humanistic Jewish community, the JCS provides a rich and diverse assortment of programs for individuals and families, including: unique and meaningful High Holiday ceremonies; pre-K through 7th grade Sunday School; an exciting B'nei Mitzvah program; family-focused celebrations (e.g. Sukkot, Chanukah, Purim and Passover); First Friday Shabbat; and Third Friday Chavurah and other gatherings for adults.

Whether you are a JCS member or not, come join us for our Fall Open House

at 2 p.m. on September 11 at the Jewish Community Center, 2939 Birch Hollow Road in Ann Arbor.

All interested families and individuals are also invited to the JCS Rosh Hashanah observance on September 25 at 7 p.m. at the JCC. Registration in advance is required for Rosh Hashanah and for the other High Holiday events. For more information about the Jewish Cultural Society, please contact us at info@jewishculturalsociety.org. To register for the High Holidays, go to www.jewishculturalsociety.org. ■