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Trump allies breach U.S voting systems in search of 2020 fraud "evidence"

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KIOWA, Colorado

Pressure campaign

In Colorado, the breach of voting data came to light in early January, when Elbert County clerk Schroeder admitted to copying the hard drives in a lawsuit he joined with other Republican officials against Colorado's secretary of state. The lawsuit argued that the company that tests Dominion election system software, Pro V&V Inc, was improperly certified and that state authorities illegally destroyed election records – allegations the state and the company deny. The suit also asserts Colorado's top election official, Secretary of State Jena Griswold exceeded her authority when she adopted emergency rules last year to prevent election audits she considered partisan and illegitimate. The case is ongoing.

So is the state's own lawsuit against Schroeder. In legal filings, the clerk admitted to making a copy of the county election server's two hard drives on Aug. 26. He said he got help from Shawn Smith, a retired Air Force colonel and self-styled election fraud activist, *and Mark Cook, an IT specialist who supplied Schroeder with a digital forensic imager costing about \$4,000 and capable of transferring data at high speeds. Both Smith and Cook then "provided instructions" as Schroeder worked to take the data, Schroeder testified. On Sept. 2, he made a second copy of the hard drives, he said.*

Cook did not respond to requests for comment. Smith declined to comment.

Secretary of State Griswold, a Democrat, opened a formal inquiry after discovering Schroeder's leak in January and sued the clerk on February 17, seeking the return of the data. Schroeder said in written responses to the inquiry that he gave the copied hard drives to two attorneys, one of whom he refused to identify. The other is John Case, a longtime Colorado attorney who says on his website that he's dedicated to representing citizens "petitioning for integrity" in elections. Case now represents Schroeder in the state lawsuit against him.

Schroeder testified that he did not recall anyone asking him to copy the data. His decision to leak it to unauthorized lawyers, however, followed an intense effort to pressure county clerks across Colorado by an organization co-founded by Smith, one of the men who instructed Schroeder on how to copy the data.

Smith's organization, the U.S. Election Integrity Plan (USEIP), emailed all 64 Colorado county clerks and visited at least 10 of them, including Schroeder, demanding they investigate unfounded allegations of 2020 voter fraud, according to Matt Crane, executive director of the Colorado County Clerks Association.

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Matt Crane, executive director of the Colorado County Clerks Association

Smith emailed Schroeder directly in early 2021, messages reviewed by Reuters show. In some communications, Smith shared a statistical analysis that purported to suggest that Biden had a suspiciously high number of votes in one precinct of majority-Republican Elbert County. Colorado state officials said the county’s votes were accurate.

Four of the emails from USEIP members and allies, reviewed by Reuters, referenced the debunked conspiracy theory about rigged voting machines from Dominion Voting Systems and asserted that clerks are legally bound to launch inquiries and preserve alleged evidence. “You have an obligation to investigate this evidence and take the appropriate actions,” read one message sent on March 15.

“The heat is more on Republican clerks,” said Crane, a Republican who served as Arapahoe County clerk until 2018. “They really look at us like traitors.”

In legal filings, Schroeder said he believed he had a “statutory duty” to preserve the 2020 voting records and the information he copied should be legally public information, without detailing what the files contained.

In court filings, Schroeder said that he was careful to “preserve chain of custody” with the data he gave the attorneys, asserting on Feb. 3 that the copied hard drives remained in “sealed containers.” He said the lawyers who took possession of the data – including the attorney representing him, Case – told him no one had accessed it.

Case declined to comment. He referred questions to USEIP co-founder Holly Kasun, who he described as his “media consultant.” Kasun did not answer questions about Case’s involvement in the data leak.

Schroeder said he feared a state-ordered upgrade to the voting system would erase records relating to the 2020 election. State officials, however, said the 2020 election records would be retained after the upgrade.

No charges have been filed against Schroeder or others involved in the breach of the voting system. The county’s district attorney’s office declined to comment. Elbert County Sheriff Tim Norton said his office had not investigated the incident, which he said was being “handled by the state.” A Colorado State Patrol spokesperson, Sergeant Troy Kessler, said state police do not handle “election matters.”