

Secret GOP Plan to Disrupt Voting in Florida

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A secret document obtained from inside Bush campaign headquarters in Florida suggests a plan – possibly in violation of US law – to disrupt voting in the state’s African-American voting districts, a BBC Newsnight investigation reveals.

Two e-mails, prepared for the executive director of the Bush campaign in Florida and the campaign’s national research director in Washington DC, contain a 15-page so-called “caging list”.

It lists 1,886 names and addresses of voters in predominantly black and traditionally Democrat areas of Jacksonville, Florida.

An elections supervisor in Tallahassee, when shown the list, told Newsnight: “The only possible reason why they would keep such a thing is to challenge voters on election day.”

Ion Sancho, a Democrat, noted that Florida law allows political party operatives inside polling stations to stop voters from obtaining a ballot.

Mass challenges

They may then only vote “provisionally” after signing an affidavit attesting to their legal voting status.

Mass challenges have never occurred in Florida. Indeed, says Mr Sancho, not one challenge has been made to a voter “in the 16 years I’ve been supervisor of elections.”

“Quite frankly, this process can be used to slow down the voting process and cause chaos on election day; and discourage voters from voting.”

Sancho calls it “intimidation.” And it may be illegal.

In Washington, well-known civil rights attorney, Ralph Neas, noted that US federal law prohibits targeting challenges to voters, even if there is a basis for the challenge, if race is a factor in targeting the voters.

The list of Jacksonville voters covers an area with a majority of black residents.

When asked by Newsnight for an explanation of the list, Republican spokespersons claim the list merely records returned mail from either fundraising solicitations or returned letters sent to newly registered voters to verify their addresses for purposes of mailing campaign literature.

Republican state campaign spokeswoman Mindy Tucker Fletcher stated the list was not put together “in order to create” a challenge list, but refused to say it would not be used in that manner.

Rather, she did acknowledge that the party’s poll workers will be instructed to challenge voters, “Where it’s stated in the law.”

There was no explanation as to why such clerical matters would be sent to top officials of the Bush campaign in Florida and Washington.

Private detective

In Jacksonville, to determine if Republicans were using the lists or other means of intimidating voters we filmed a private detective filming every “early voter” – the majority of whom are black – from behind a vehicle with blacked-out windows.

The private detective claimed not to know who was paying for his all-day services.

On the scene, Democratic Congresswoman Corinne Brown said the surveillance operation was part of a campaign of intimidation tactics used by the Republican Party to intimate and scare off African American voters, almost all of whom are registered Democrats.

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