

EXCLUSIVE: Grassroot Election Integrity Movement Sweeps Battleground States

By Gary Bai

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At ten past five in the morning on Election Day in 2021, retired construction company owner Warren Jenkins slid into his business-casual attire in a panic, knowing he had to get to the polling station in 20 minutes. He was the only Republican poll watcher at an important precinct.

Jenkin's wife, prescient, pre-made lunch for her husband, who then arrived at the polls to begin his 15-hour shift—from 5:30 a.m. to about 9 p.m.—just in time.

As a volunteer poll watcher in Virginia, Jenkins would run back and forth between the outdoor ballot box and the in-door voting place, observe the conduct of the election, and report irregularities and violations of the Election Code, if any, to election officials.

For his entire life, Jenkins has been somewhat of a model American man: he served in the army, built houses, and loves spending his weekends at church and with family and friends—and wasn't into politics, at all.

But as the battleground blaze simmered at the conclusion of the 2020 election lawsuits, Jenkins still had in his mind the lingering silhouette of Zuckerbucks (private funding in election administration that was allowed in 2020 and now banned in some states), whispers of faulty mail-in ballots, and alleged—later court-confirmed—election law-flaunting. He then thought he could do more for the country as an American.

“With the Trump-Biden election, there was so much press on the dishonesty in the election. I thought I would see for myself,” Jenkins told The Epoch Times. “I'm retired now—and I thought, it was time to roll up my sleeves and to go out and to help out.”

“I felt like being a poll watcher—even though we didn't get paid—was an important role,” Jenkins said. “I didn't really care about the money.”

Jenkins is one of many who saw themselves as a part of a movement to defend the integrity of America's elections, concerned that the 2020 election was not conducted well.

Some offered explanations for what went wrong in 2020—some had substantial proof—but none seemed to be able to convince the courts to rule in favor of what they were proposing, which often consisted of flipping the election results for a district, or the Biden presidency altogether.

Many realized this, so they pivoted forward.

They formed a movement, driven by the belief that citizens should participate in the election process to give rise to transparency, and that accompanying the right to vote is the right to have every legal vote counted—and faulty vote trashed.

Ground-up Movement

Jenkin's resolve to act proved fortuitous, because just as Republicans like him across the country decided to become more involved in elections, roads were built to help them do exactly that.

Cleta Mitchell, who fought alongside former President Donald Trump in one of the 2020 election lawsuits disputing the election results in Georgia, was getting a lot of calls—and a lot of ideas—following the 2020 election.

“What has happened in 2020 was that many people across the country realized that things were not right, and that the election was not conducted according to law in many cases,” Mitchell told The Epoch Times. “And so a lot of people have said, ‘What can I do to help? What can we do to make sure this doesn't ever happen again?’”

“As somebody who spent a lot of time in a lot of different aspects of the election, I've tried to say, here are things you can do: You can go to rallies and have somebody get yelled at,” Mitchell said. “Or, we can train you. We can tell you what you need to do to make sure it never happens again. And there's plenty to do.”

Mitchell, a seasoned lawyer with a swath of experience in all corners of election issues (and a Democrat-turned-Republican), leads the [Election Integrity Network](#), a project of the Conservative Partnership Institute, a Washington-based non-profit.

Since its launch, the network developed into a nationwide mobilization base and knowledge-sharing platform that operates at national, state, and local levels to work on [election integrity](#) initiatives, such as pushing legislation for voting security, hiring more poll watchers and election officials, and examining potential loopholes in election administration processes.

Through training and discussion “summits,” the network has kicked off state-level “coalitions” across the country, and these state coalitions would then become the headquarters of mobilizing precinct-level task forces in that state to work on election integrity projects.

“Ultimately, all elections take place at the local level,” Mitchell said when asked about her vision for launching the network. “We are asking people to become involved in apparatus at their local level, because that's where the elections take place. And that's where many of the problems occur, because that's where the voting takes place.”

Getting to Work

The Election Integrity Network started humbly with weekly telephone calls, during which state coalition leaders in various battleground states would bounce ideas off of each other on how to improve election security and share the issues they spot.

But things quickly picked up speed when Lynn Taylor, a regular on these calls who leads [Virginia Fair Elections](#), a state-level coalition in Virginia, saw that time is cutting short for her state.

“Virginia is one of two states that have statewide elections every year, Virginia and New Jersey,” Taylor said in an interview with The Epoch Times, sharing how she was concerned about the way the 2020 election was run and wanted to help improve the security of the 2021 election—the question now is how.

“The idea came from Clea when she and I were on the phone together, and she said, ‘you really need a summit,’” Taylor said, recounting her conversation with Mitchell. “I said, ‘I don’t have the budget for that,’ and she said, ‘I do.’ Two and a half weeks later, we had a summit.”

“This was very different from the way that things had been done,” Taylor said. “You know, people have been having summits for ages, but this is the first one in my years that we actually use it for training purposes.”

With the help of Mitchell and the Election Integrity Network, Taylor organized the network’s first “[Election Integrity Summit](#)” in August 2021 in Virginia. The two-day event featured election integrity training and information for grassroots who wanted to help improve election security. These included poll observers’ recruitment, scheduling, training, and administration; a project to document potential illegal voter registrations; and a discussion on the alleged influence of private funding in the 2020 election.

A panel discussion on Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg’s alleged influence during the 2020 election at the “Election Integrity Summit” in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, which took place on Aug. 20–21, 2021.

During the summit, people who had already been working on related initiatives—improving security around the ballot box, analyzing election data for potential anomalies, or pushing for election integrity legislation, for example—found others scattered across Virginia working on similar things, and quickly fused into local work groups called “Election Integrity Task Forces” and began collaborating on projects on a county basis.

“The coalition was how you get involved. You work on a county basis. Then you come up to the state coalition to bring your questions ... to see if other counties are running into the same things,” Taylor said, recounting how there were a little more than a dozen task forces in the state during the time of the summit, a number that quadrupled to more than 50 in a few months.

“I’ve been doing this for 26 years, and I’ve never seen people come together where they all left their logos at the door,” Taylor said. “They are more interested in the election integrity issue—and making sure that there are free and fair elections—than they are in promoting their own agenda. It is the first time I have ever seen this—in the 26 years that I’ve been working in the nonprofit arena.”

Shelley Oberlander, a Republican Precinct Captain for ten years, was leading a local election integrity task force in the Virginia coalition. After learning from the summit about the election integrity projects that she could start in her county, Oberlander started to expand her team.

After the summit, Oberlander connected with other county-level task forces and had weekly conference calls to share their experiences. Within a year, Oberlander’s team grew from a few members to six work groups, each specializing in areas of election integrity including legislation, education, data analysis, election technology, and voter administration.

“We brought it home, we put it in practice, and we got it going,” Oberlander said in an interview with The Epoch Times.

A Helpful Hand

The backstory to Oberlander’s involvement in this grassroots election integrity movement is illustrative of the other driving force behind the movement: the Republican National Committee (RNC).

As a member of a county-level GOP, Oberlander started the local election integrity team in the Loudoun County GOP at the calling of the state-level GOP, the Virginia GOP, which operates joint forces with the RNC earlier this year and started an election integrity program. Earlier this year, the Virginia GOP sent out a marching order to county-level Republican units in the state asking them to start election integrity teams.

“The RNC and Virginia GOP are encouraging unit chairs to hone in on local election integrity efforts,” Emma Vaughn, an RNC spokesperson, told The Epoch Times in a statement.

In other words, Oberlander, as a part of the Republican Party, was able to utilize resources within the GOP establishment, as well as the Election Integrity Network to expand her task force and knowledge base.

But the RNC wasn’t always able to do this, as its hands were only recently freed.

The RNC, the powerhouse and teller machine of Republican initiatives, was legally barred from organizing and sponsoring ballot security operations like poll watching from 1982 to 2018, due to a 1982 consent decree ([pdf](#)) issued by Dickinson R. Debevoise, a judge appointed by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

This has been consequential. The consent decree meant that for nearly 40 years, the Democratic National Committee had a structural advantage over the RNC in strategizing and developing election administration infrastructure in accordance with its vision of how voting should be done.

“Because of the DNC v. RNC Consent Decree, the RNC had been shut out of most election integrity efforts for nearly four decades, which led to a lack of institutional knowledge to conduct election integrity operations,” the RNC’s 2021 election integrity report reads ([pdf](#)).

After the consent decree expired in 2018, the RNC began building infrastructure around election integrity projects. This includes spending more than 30 million on election protection efforts in battleground states across the country during the 2021 cycle, and continued building election security infrastructure for the 2022 cycle, Vaughn told The Epoch Times.

“The RNC has made a multi-million-dollar investment for the 2022 cycle, including 17 state Election Integrity directors, 35 in-state election integrity counsels, and in recruiting over 43,000 poll workers and poll watchers in battleground states across the country,” Vaughn wrote in a statement.

“The RNC works with other groups who have an interest in promoting election integrity but the party’s efforts are independent from any outside organization,” Vaughn wrote.

The Movement Ripples

The Election Integrity Network’s success in Virginia, which Mitchell calls the “Virginia model,” was promptly replicated in other states. By mid-2022, the Election Integrity Network held summits in eight battleground states—Virginia, Georgia, Arizona, Florida, Pennsylvania,

Michigan, Wisconsin, and North Carolina—and mobilized thousands to start election integrity projects at the local level, according to Mitchell.

“What we are focused on is building out the infrastructure—creating state coalitions and local election integrity task forces,” Mitchell said. “We really are measuring our success by the number of states who are up and running with statewide election integrity coalitions.

“We measure that by helping them bring together the various groups to have weekly calls, then getting their local task forces going and then getting a framework for recruiting and training poll workers, election officials and starting the working groups within each state,” Mitchell said.

According to Marshall Yates, Executive Director of the network, the network’s state-level conference calls in North Carolina, Michigan, and Georgia had over 75 in attendance, and Arizona and Pennsylvania had about 40 in attendance. The attendees are like Oberlander: they mostly consist of task force leaders who would put what they learned in the calls into practice at their local counties.

Even Congress hopped on.

“She’s a lawyer and has a lot of experience and knowledge, and she’s dogged on this,” Rep. Claudia Tenney (R-N.Y.), who heads the Election Integrity Caucus with more than 70 Republican members, said of Mitchell in an interview with The Epoch Times. Tenney participates in the Election Integrity Network’s conference calls when she has time and has passed around some of the network’s materials around Congress.

“We go through with a very methodical legal analysis, and that’s what she does, which I really appreciate,” Tenney said. “We’re trying to set the record straight, and come up with solutions. We just want to make sure that people feel confident and trust their vote.”

The Bigger Picture: Uneven Playing Field

An important pretext for the project, according to Mitchell, is that the left has been building infrastructure around election administration and attempting to influence election outcomes with more effort and conviction than those of the right.

“We need conservatives to become involved and engage in the process—because the left has been systematically building their own infrastructure,” Mitchell told The Epoch Times.

Underlying this infrastructure-building Mitchell was referring to are two competing ideologies, one held by the right and another by the left, on how voting rights should be protected in a democratic society.

As articulated by J. Kenneth Blackwell and Kenneth A. Klukowski in a paper ([pdf](#)) in the Yale Law & Policy Review, improving access to voting (making voting more convenient) and improving ballot security (placing more burden on the individual voter but prioritizing the integrity of the voting process) often come into tension. The left leans toward the access approach, and the right leans toward the security approach.

“The voting system, by necessity, requires a balancing of these somewhat countervailing interests,” the paper reads.

As evidence that this balance is tilted disproportionately towards the left's agenda, Mitchell pointed to [reports](#) by Capital Research Center (CRC), which allege a "coordinated effort" by the left to influence elections via private donations and dark money networks, such as the [Arabella Advisors](#), the [Rockefeller Foundation](#), and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's left-leaning non-profit, the [Center for Tech and Civic Life](#) (CTCL).

The Epoch Times has reached out to the Arabella Advisors, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Center for Tech and Civic Life for comments.

Notably, Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, [funneled](#) via the CTCL \$400 million to a network of nonprofits that sent advisers to local election offices across the country to become directly involved in election administration in 2020.

Critics of the CTCL like Mitchell say its maneuvers are outright election manipulation. The CRC wrote in an analysis that CTCL "consistently gave bigger grants and more money per capita to counties that voted for Biden." The CTCL's advisory services to local election offices were often provided in conjunction with left-leaning organizations, such as the Brennan Center for Justice. The CRC reported in August that this kind of private funding in election administration had been banned in 24 states.

But the tilted balance goes beyond Zuckerbucks. Open Secrets, a non-profit research group tracking political financing, estimated in a March 2021 report that \$447 million of "dark money"—political donations with undisclosed sources—supported liberal groups at the federal level during the 2020 election cycle, while only \$190 million supported conservative groups.

'Something They Will Never Have'

According to Mitchell, however, notwithstanding the uneven playing field in favor of the left, conservatives have "something they will never have."

"Conservatives and patriots who believe in election integrity and the rule of law—the many volunteers who form the Election Integrity Network—will never have the money the left-wing billionaires have dedicated to building their sprawling election disruption enterprise," Mitchell said. "We will never have the sheer number of entities as the left has built over the past decade."

"But we have something they will never have: an army of citizen patriots who love America, and are tirelessly dedicated to becoming an integral part of the election process at every local election office in the nation—who are intent upon saving and preserving our Constitutional Republic—that is the mission of the Election Integrity Network and the thousands of volunteers across the country who are part of this mission," Mitchell added.

"That's why Conservative Partnership Institute is proud to have launched the Election Integrity Network and why we continue to support and grow it."

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