

'I just want to find 11,780 votes': In extraordinary hour-long call, Trump pressures Georgia secretary of state to recalculate the vote in his favor

By Amy Gardner at *The Washington Post*

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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President Trump urged fellow Republican Brad Raffensperger, the Georgia secretary of state, to “find” enough votes to overturn his defeat in an extraordinary one-hour phone call Saturday that legal scholars described as a **flagrant** abuse of power and a potential criminal act.

The Washington Post obtained a recording of the conversation in which Trump alternately **berated** Raffensperger, tried to flatter him, begged him to act and threatened him with vague criminal consequences if the secretary of state refused to pursue his false claims, at one point warning that Raffensperger was taking “a big risk.”

Throughout the call, Raffensperger and his office’s general counsel rejected Trump’s assertions, explaining that the president is relying on debunked conspiracy theories and that President-elect Joe Biden’s 11,779-vote victory in Georgia was fair and accurate.

Trump dismissed their arguments.

“The people of Georgia are angry, the people of the country are angry,” he said. “And there’s nothing wrong with saying, you know, that you’ve recalculated.”

Raffensperger responded: “Well, Mr. President, the challenge that you have is, the data you have is wrong.”

At another point, Trump said: “So look. All I want to do is this. I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have. Because we won the state.”

He later added: “So what are we going to do here, folks? I only need 11,000 votes. Fellas, I need 11,000 votes. Give me a break.”

The rambling and at times **incoherent** conversation offered a remarkable glimpse of how consumed and desperate the president remains about his loss, unwilling or unable to let the matter go and still asserting he can reverse the results in enough battleground states to remain in office.

“There’s no way I lost Georgia,” Trump said, a phrase he repeated again and again on the call. “There’s no way. We won by hundreds of thousands of votes.”

Several of his allies were on the line as he spoke, including White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and conservative lawyer Cleta Mitchell, a prominent GOP attorney whose involvement with Trump’s efforts had not been previously known. [...]

On Sunday, Trump tweeted that he had spoken to Raffensperger, saying the secretary of state was “unwilling, or unable, to answer questions such as the ‘ballots under table’ scam, ballot destruction, out of state ‘voters’, dead voters, and more. He has no clue!”

Raffensperger responded with his own tweet: “Respectfully, President Trump: What you’re saying is not true.”

The details of the call drew demands from top Democrats for criminal investigations. Campaigning in Georgia, Vice President-elect Kamala D. Harris called

Trump's conversation a "bald-faced, bold abuse of power by the president of the United States." Biden's top campaign lawyer, Bob Bauer, said the recording "captures the whole, disgraceful story about Donald Trump's assault on American democracy."

Republicans, however, were largely silent. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.), when asked about the call while campaigning in Georgia on Sunday for the two GOP senators who face a runoff Tuesday, dodged the question completely.

Trump's pressure campaign on Raffensperger is the latest example of his attempt to subvert the outcome of the Nov. 3 election through personal outreach to state Republican officials. He previously invited Michigan Republican state leaders to the White House, pressured Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp (R) in a call to try to replace that state's electors and asked the speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to help reverse his loss in that state. [...]

During their conversation, Trump issued a vague threat to both Raffensperger and Ryan Germany, the secretary of state's general counsel, suggesting that if they don't find that thousands of ballots in Fulton County have been illegally destroyed to block investigators — an **allegation** for which there is no evidence — they would be subject to criminal liability.

"That's a criminal offense," he said. "And you can't let that happen. That's a big risk to you and to Ryan, your lawyer."

Trump also told Raffensperger that failure to act by Tuesday would jeopardize the political fortunes of David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, Georgia's two Republican senators whose fate in that day's runoff elections will determine control of the U.S. Senate. [...]

Trump's conversation with Raffensperger echoed his effort to persuade the Ukrainian president to investigate Biden on a call that led to his impeachment, and once again put him in legally questionable territory, legal scholars said. By exhorting the secretary of state to "find" votes and to **deploy** investigators who "want to find answers," the president appeared to be encouraging him to doctor the election outcome in Georgia, which could violate both state and federal law.

Additionally, Trump's apparent threat of criminal consequences if Raffensperger failed to act could be seen as an attempt at extortion and a suggestion that he might deploy the Justice Department to launch an investigation, they said.

Reflection

As you read the text, did you sense a bias in the article?