

MICHIGAN

Protesters descend on Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson's home after dark

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A couple of dozen protesters gathered in front of Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson's home Saturday night shouting through megaphones against the certification of the election and demanding a forensic audit.

A portion of the demonstration was broadcast live on Facebook around 9:30 p.m. The protesters are seen walking up to Benson's Detroit home, some wearing President Donald Trump paraphernalia and carrying American flags.

"We are over here in the fricking dead of night, man," Genevieve Peters, who posted the live video, said as she walked to the house. "We are letting her know that we're not taking this bullshit election, we are not standing down, we are not giving up you are not going to take this election from a man that has earned it completely 100% by a freaking landslide. Let me tell you: This ain't over."

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The group then begins chanting, "Stop the steal" and "We want an audit," touting signs displaying a stop sign that read, "Defend our liberty, stop the steal."

Benson said the protesters gathered in front of her home as she and her 4-year-old son were finishing putting up Christmas decorations, just when the two were preparing to watch the Christmas classic, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas."

"I have always been an energetic advocate for the right and importance of peaceful protest as enshrined in the United States Constitution, however there is a line crossed when gatherings are done with the primary purpose of intimidation of public officials who are carrying out the

oath of office they solemnly took as elected officials," Benson said in a statement Sunday night.

The demonstration fueled the misinformation fire that has been roaring since polls closed in early November, Benson continued in the statement, and protesters are an extension of efforts to thwart the election.

"Through blatantly false press releases, purely political legislative hearings, bogus legal claims and so called 'affidavits' that fail to allege any clear or cogent evidence of wrongdoing, those unhappy with the results of this election have perpetuated an unprecedented, dangerous, egregious campaign to erode the public's confidence in the results of one of the most secure, accessible and transparent elections in our state's history.

"The demands made outside my home were unambiguous, loud and threatening. They targeted me in my role as Michigan's Chief Election Officer. But the threats of those gathered weren't actually aimed at me — or any other elected officials in this state. They were aimed at the voters."

Throughout the election, President Donald Trump and his personal attorney Rudy Giuliani have circulated false conspiracies about election fraud in Michigan. The two continue to attempt to discredit the election by citing false allegations about absentee ballots counted in Detroit, allegations that have been disproven in court and by election officials.

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Trump falsely claims that he won the election in Michigan when in fact he lost the state by more than 154,000 votes. Giuliani appeared before the Michigan House Oversight Committee Wednesday during which he spent more than three hours asking questions of witnesses who accompanied him to the hearing as a means to present what the Trump campaign deems to be evidence of fraud, but was largely conspiracy and misinformation.

The video has garnered more than 30,000 views and nearly 500 comments since the livestream was first posted Saturday night.

Peters is seen attempting to speak with a security officer who arrived at the scene, but the officer does not engage. She later calls Benson a "Demorat."

A few patrol units from the Detroit Police Department and the Michigan State Police later appeared, and the situation remained peaceful, MSP Lt. Mike Shaw said. "There wasn't much,

to it," Shaw said.

The protest posed no security issue to Benson, Shaw said. "I wouldn't even call it a demonstration, it was just a small event and nothing came of it."

Despite Shaw's recollection of the peaceful event, Attorney General Dana Nessel and Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy issued a joint statement condemning the demonstration, deeming the protesters' actions as "mob-like behavior" and said the event was not activism. Rather, it was, "disturbing behavior masquerading as protest."

"They shouted baseless conspiracy theories about the election, and in videos uploaded to social media, at least one individual could be heard shouting 'you're murderers' within earshot of her child's bedroom," the statement reads. "In a civil society, there are many ways to peaceably assemble and demonstrate. Anyone can air legitimate grievances to Secretary Benson's office through civil and democratic means, but terrorizing children and families at their own homes is not activism. This disturbing behavior masquerading as protest should be called out for what it is and roundly condemned by citizens and public officials alike."

Peters in the video promises they will be back.

"We want her to know that we will continue to be here because we are sick and tired of them ignoring everything that has to happen, which means we need a forensic audit," Peters said. "This is called exercising my constitutional right."

Another protester then shouts, "Benson, you are a villain."

Peters is a vocal and avid fan of Trump and often goes live at various rallies in support of the president. Her latest Facebook post wishes Giuliani well in light of his coronavirus diagnosis Sunday and includes a photo of her without a mask and a masked Giuliani outside last Thursday's hearing in Lansing.

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About 16 minutes into Saturday night's livestream, the first police cruiser is seen arriving and protesters begin singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America."

A police officer approaches the group and speaks with a protester who explains why the group is demonstrating, the officer then walks away. The group continues chanting, "No audit, no peace" and "Legal votes only."

Among the chants was, "Say his name, Trump," which is a play on a popular chant used to remember the names of victims of police brutality including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

"We will not stand down, we will not stop," Peters continues in the livestream. "We will continue to take this election back for the president that actually won it by a landslide."

Near the end of the stream, Peters faces off with a passerby who lives in the neighborhood who complains about the noise and tells Peters that Benson has a little boy inside.

"We will not accept a fraudulent election, just so you know," Peters tells the neighbor.

A protester also captured in the livestream says, "Don't worry, we don't burn down cities like antifa does," referring to reports of looting and vandalism during summer protests against police brutality.

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