



CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

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Committee on Oversight and Reform  
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Hearing on “Confronting White Supremacy (Part VII): The Evolution of Anti-Democratic  
Extremist Groups and the Ongoing Threat to Democracy”

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**Introduction**

Chairman Raskin and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the ongoing crisis anti-democracy extremism and white nationalism present to this country. I commend you for using this forum to address the urgent threats posed to American democracy from paramilitary groups, white nationalism, and political violence. I live and work in Portland, Oregon, a place deeply shaped and impacted by anti-democracy extremism. At Western States Center, we believe that what happens in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain States matters to the rest of the country. This region has been the proving ground for extremist and anti-democracy formations. Over these past five years, as the fight for inclusive democracy has become both a national and international struggle, it’s become imperative that we soberly assess the drivers of these threats and invest in local governments to combat them.

When the FBI released its *Hate Crimes Statistics 2020 Report*, it revealed the highest level of hate crime incidents in 12 years, with a 13 percent increase in hate crime reports submitted by law enforcement agencies.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the sobering data from 2020, we are increasingly seeing an erroneous and dangerous belief voiced by many of the shooters in our most horrific modern-day American massacres. In a Buffalo grocery store, a Charleston church, an El Paso Walmart, the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, among others – the shooters justified their actions with the “great replacement” theory. This conspiracy theory is at the core of the white nationalist movement and poses a grave threat to our democracy.

My experiences have shown that common values can bring us together. In the 1990s, when the predominantly white, rural Pacific Northwest and intermountain region was designated an “Aryan homeland” by white nationalists, I worked with Republican governors, local elected officials, law enforcement, business and civic leaders to establish over 120 multi-disciplinary anti-hate task forces across six states. Later, working with a faith-based coalition,

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Justice. *2020 Hate Crimes Statistics*, 5 May 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/crs/highlights/2020-hate-crimes-statistics>

I founded and directed a community project to expose and counter hate groups. Through this work I had the opportunity to be in direct dialogue with a number of white nationalist and white supremacist organizers and persuaded several neo-Nazi leaders to renounce racism and violence.

I grew up in poverty in Long Beach, California, facing racist harassment and violence as a young Black man. I expected better when I moved to the reputedly liberal haven of Eugene, Oregon. Instead, I found that despite my extensive work experience, no one would hire me – I was subject to even starker racial discrimination. The person who decided to break the status quo and hire me, happened to be a conservative white Republican. I was the first Black person he'd ever met. During our time working together I learned that our lives and our values were not as different as they seemed. We both believed in hard work, fair work, and taking care of one's neighbors. Because of these experiences, I have dedicated my life to uniting Americans across party, race, class, occupation, and geography. It's also why I believe that, despite an acceleration in anti-democracy formations, it is possible to build a shared commitment to a country where all can live, love, worship and work free from bigotry and violence.

For the majority of Americans who care about democratic practice and our republican form of government, we are not powerless. Just the opposite. When elected officials, businesses, nonprofit institutions, faith leaders and ordinary citizens join together across lines of political ideology and reject the violence and antisemitic conspiracies of white nationalism, we begin the important work of closing the door to political violence and stopping anti-democracy extremists from mainstreaming their tactics and agenda.

### **January 6 Insurrection, an Ongoing Assault**

First, it is important to understand that the insurrection did not end on January 6, 2021. Across the country, in small communities and towns, the insurrection is still a daily reality for many Americans. Health workers, educators, local government officials, civil right activists, election workers, and community leaders are the targets. They are bearing the brunt of intimidation, physical violence, and acts of domestic terrorism from those who were supportive of the insurrection and those who took part in it.

A report from the National League of Cities finds that harassment, threats, and violence directed at local elected officials is rising at an alarming rate: 87% of local officials surveyed observed an increase in attacks on public officials in recent years, while 81% reported having experienced harassment, threats and violence themselves.<sup>2</sup>

A new survey found that almost a fifth of election administrators say they've been threatened

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nlc.org/post/2021/11/10/new-report-harassment-threats-and-violence-directed-at-local-elected-officials-rising-at-an-alarming-rate/>

because of their jobs, and one in five local election officials say they are likely to quit before 2024.<sup>3</sup> The reporting consortiums Spotlight PA and Votebeat found, “In 14 southwestern Ohio counties, one in four directors or deputy auditors of elections has left. One in four election officials in Kansas either quit or lost re-election in November. Twenty-one directors or deputies have left or will leave election posts in Pennsylvania’s 67 counties.”<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps no incident illustrating the continuity of the January 6 insurrection was better covered than the violent assault on House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s husband, Paul Pelosi, in October.<sup>5</sup> The attacker stands accused of promoting antisemitic, misogynistic and racist language and conspiracy theories. This incident brings home the crisis for those communities that are being targeted in much the same way but without the benefit of federal intervention and mainstream media attention.

It also demonstrated the cultural shift that has occurred in the almost two years since the insurrection, a shift to an environment where individuals feel empowered to carry out political violence on their own or in an increasingly unpredictable way.

The reports of threats to the power grid in multiple states and the people who rely on it – under investigation after attacks on electric substations in North Carolina,<sup>6</sup> Oregon, and Washington – are raising the stakes.<sup>7</sup> Law enforcement is reportedly investigating posts by extremists on online forums that encourage attacks on critical infrastructure and whether the North Carolina attack was intended to disrupt a local LGBTQ event – this after a series of attacks on LGBTQ communities in recent weeks and months.

On June 11 in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, an anonymous tip to local law enforcement led to the arrest of 31 Patriot Front members on charges of conspiracy to riot. They were armed and allegedly planning to violently disrupt a Pride event. As a result, Western States Center and other civil rights groups have led calls for the Department of Justice to launch an investigation of Patriot Front based on these arrests, the group’s other activity, and the threat of violence

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<sup>3</sup> Parks, Miles. “1 in 5 local election officials say they're likely to quit before 2024.” *NPR*, 10 Mar. 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/10/1085425464/1-in-5-local-election-officials-say-theyre-likely-to-quit-before-2024?t=1654519570236>

<sup>4</sup> Albiges, Marie. “Pa. election officials are burnt out and leaving their jobs after 2020 ‘nightmare’.” *Spotlight PA*, 21 Dec. 2020, <https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2020/12/pennsylvania-election-2020-officials-retiring-nightmare/>

<sup>5</sup> Snodgrass, Erin and Charles R. Davis. “Assault on Nancy Pelosi’s husband is dangerous escalation of political violence because individuals now feel ‘empowered’ to carry out these acts alone, extremism expert says.” *Business Insider*, 28 Oct, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/nancy-pelosi-someone-broke-into-california-home-assaulted-husband-office-2022-10>

<sup>6</sup> FBI.gov. “Shooting of Electrical Substations,” <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/seeking-info/shooting-of-electrical-substations>

<sup>7</sup> Salahieh, Nouran, et al. “As North Carolinians regain power, investigators probe terrorism and threats against power substations across the US.” *CNN*, 9 Dec. 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/08/us/power-outage-moore-county-investigation-thursday/index.html>

they pose.<sup>8</sup> Crucially, the arrests averted the chilling effect on civil rights that a canceled or violent event would have had on the local LGBTQ community.

Unfortunately, this outcome is rare. White nationalist and other bigoted groups are driving harassment campaigns against elected officials, leaders of color, LGBTQ groups, school officials, and many more at alarming rates. This harassment has a chilling effect on the ability of many people, particularly people of color, women, and LGBTQ people, to engage in civil society. It can also lead to violence.

A tragic recent example was the mass shooter who targeted a LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado, injuring 17, killing five, before being subdued by bystanders. The suspect, Anderson Lee Aldrich, was charged with 305 criminal counts including hate crimes and murder.<sup>9</sup> Just two weeks later on December 2, over 50 members of the Proud Boys and other groups had gathered to protest a “Holi-Drag Storytime” in Columbus, Ohio, prompting the LGBTQ event to be canceled.<sup>10</sup>

The same weekend, an anti-LGBTQ rally was held in Fort Lauderdale, attended by a Broward County school board member and uniformed members of the Proud Boys. And in Lakeland, Florida, a group carried Nazi flags and performed Hitler salutes outside an event featuring drag performances. They also carried a banner that read, “Drag queens are pedophiles with AIDS” and other antisemitic and Christian nationalism symbology commonly used by white nationalist groups like the Proud Boys.<sup>11</sup>

The work of the January 6th Committee to investigate the siege on the Capitol has sent a strong message that leaders in Washington, D.C. are committed to a shared respect for our most essential democratic norms. The investigations have shown that responsible, bipartisan commitment to our most cherished values — democracy, civility, respect for the rule of law — is possible in this country and an effective countermeasure.

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<sup>8</sup> *Letter Requesting the DOJ to Investigate Patriot Front*, Western States Center, 18 July 2022

<https://www.westernstatescenter.org/request-to-investigate-patriot-front>

<sup>9</sup> Philipps, Dave. “Suspect in Colorado Springs Attack Charged With Murder and Hate Crimes,” *The New York Times*, 6 Dec. 2022,

[https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/06/us/colorado-springs-aldrich-charges.html?name=styl%3Acolorado-nightclub-shooting&region=TOP\\_BANNER&block=storyline\\_menu\\_reirc&action=click&pgtype=Article&variant=show&is\\_new=false](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/06/us/colorado-springs-aldrich-charges.html?name=styl%3Acolorado-nightclub-shooting&region=TOP_BANNER&block=storyline_menu_reirc&action=click&pgtype=Article&variant=show&is_new=false)

<sup>10</sup> Associated Press, 10TV Web Staff. “Columbus school cancels drag story time, citing security dispute,” *10 WBNS*, 3 Dec. 2022,

HYPERLINK "https://www.10tv.com/article/news/local/columbus-ohio-school-cancels-drag-story-time-citing-security-dispute/530-9c1d2db7-dc54-4576-84f9-6fcd4664a715"

<https://www.10tv.com/article/news/local/columbus-ohio-school-cancels-drag-story-time-citing-security-dispute/530-9c1d2db7-dc54-4576-84f9-6fcd4664a715>

<sup>11</sup> White, Gary. “Protesters display Nazi flags outside Lakeland charity event featuring drag shows,” *The Ledger*, 4 Dec. 2022,

<https://www.theledger.com/story/news/local/2022/12/04/group-displays-nazi-symbols-outside-drag-event-in-lakeland/69699763007/>

The prosecution and conviction of organizers like Oath Keepers leader Stewart Rhodes on seditious conspiracy charges send a strong signal that individuals who help coordinate violent attacks on our government can and will be held accountable for their actions. This is a win for all who believe in inclusive democracy.

However, the January 6 investigations and prosecutions alone cannot interrupt that power building; we must recognize antisemitism and “great replacement” narratives as a core tenant of white nationalism.

### **“Great Replacement” Theory, Core to White Nationalism**

Much of the violence and intimidation I have been describing is perpetrated by those who have been influenced by the “great replacement” and white genocide conspiracy theories, beliefs that falsely purport a global conspiracy is orchestrating a master plan to undermine white political power by increasing the number of Black and brown people. Depending on the version of the theory one comes across, that conspiracy might be run by “global elites” or “an international cabal” or “monied interests.” All thinly-veiled references to Jewish people.

When a Tops grocery store in Buffalo, NY, was targeted by a perpetrator who killed 10 Black people, reporting by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *National Public Radio*, among other media outlets, indicated that the shooter was radicalized to this violence online; that the far-right and white supremacist ideology he internalized centered around the great replacement and white genocide theories; that he targeted the Tops supermarket in Masten Park because of its high demographic of black shoppers; that he drove over three hours to get there from Conklin, NY; that he wrote a 180-page rant, plagiarizing a majority of it from the racist screed written by the Christchurch, New Zealand mass shooter; and that he referred to previous hate-fueled mass killings in Pittsburgh, PA (2018), Charleston, SC (2015), El Paso, TX (2019), Christchurch, New Zealand (2019), Halle, Germany (2019), Oslo and Utøya Island, Norway (2011) as models for his own terrorism.<sup>12</sup>

The “great replacement” theory is a disturbing thread connecting all of these events. In response to the question of why he was going to attack, the Buffalo shooter wrote, “To show to the replacers that as long as the White man lives, our land will never be theirs and they will never be safe from us.”<sup>13</sup> The mass shooting in Buffalo is only one of the recent

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<sup>12</sup> Cassandra Miller, Devlin Barrett, Aaron Gregg, and Mark Berman, “Accused Buffalo Gunman Followed a Long Trail to Terror, Officials Say,” *Washington Post*, May 15, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/05/15/payton-gendron-buffalo-shooting/>; Nicholas Confessore and Karen Yourish, “A Fringe Conspiracy Theory, Fostered Online, Is Refashioned by the G.O.P.,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2022;

<sup>13</sup> Bayoumi, Moustafa. “The alleged Buffalo shooter was also inspired by Islamophobia. That’s telling.” *The Guardian*, 22 May 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/may/22/buffalo-shooter-islamophobia-replacement-theory>

violent incidents to expose the power of the “great replacement” and white genocide narratives. Five years earlier, the great replacement narrative surfaced in August of 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia, when participants in the Unite the Right rally chanted “You will not replace us. Jews will not replace us.”

Antisemitism has survived for thousands of years in Europe, adapting itself to the fears and challenges of the day, always assuring believers that whatever the current threat might look like, the face behind the mask was always a Jewish one. More recently, “The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion”—a forgery that purports to represent the minutes of a meeting of the international Jewish conspiracy—was first circulated by Czarist secret police in Russia in 1903 and introduced to the United States by Henry Ford in 1920, establishing antisemitic ideology in its modern form.

Antisemitism’s modern form has the added challenge of occurring within the context of the rise of new technology and diminishing traditional media. At the very moment that democracy is under assault, people are increasingly relying on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, to get their news – not to mention platforms like Parler and Truth Social geared to those banned from mainstream social media spaces. In October, pop culture icon Kanye West (who now goes by Ye) began a weeks-long antisemitic tirade with a Twitter post about “going death con 3 on Jewish people,” and quickly saw his millions of followers increase by over 180,000.<sup>14</sup> Could this uptick in support for West's rhetoric be an indicator of the latent antisemitic and racist anxiety many white Americans purport to feel?

A month before the Buffalo massacre, a poll found that 7 out of 10 Republicans said they believe in the ideas that constitute the “great replacement” theory.<sup>15</sup> A poll in April found that 42% of young male Democrat and 45% of young Republican men said they approve of violence to achieve political change.<sup>16</sup>

Sixty-seven percent of Republicans told the same pollster they “believe the country’s demographic changes are being orchestrated by ‘liberal leaders actively trying to leverage political power by replacing more conservative white voters.’”

In May 2022, 55% of GOP Primary voters in Idaho agreed either strongly (26%) or somewhat (28%), with the statement “There is a conscious effort being made to replace white Americans

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<sup>14</sup> Cartwright, Megan. “Kanye's Social-Media Follower Count Increases Despite Antisemitic Posts,” *Newsweek*, 11 Oct. 2022,

<https://www.newsweek.com/kanye-west-twitter-instagram-following-increases-antisemitic-posts-1750722>

<sup>15</sup> Carless, Will. “Month before Buffalo shooting, poll finds, 7 in 10 Republicans believed in 'great replacement' ideas.” *USA Today*, 1 June, 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/06/01/great-replacement-theory-poll-republicans democrats/7461913001>

<sup>16</sup> “SPLC Poll Finds Substantial Support for ‘Great Replacement’ Theory and Other Hard-Right Ideas.” Southern Poverty Law Center, 1 June 2022, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/06/01/poll-finds-support-great-replacement-hard-right-ideas>

with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.”<sup>17</sup>

If we seek to counter domestic extremism, we must recognize that antisemitism and “great replacement” remain the energizing principle behind white nationalism.

The modern-day antisemitic conspiracist belief in the “great replacement” theory must be unequivocally denounced by all levels of government and civil society. Instead, it is finding increased acceptance in mainstream media and culture.

### **Local Governments Have Solutions, but Need Support**

Supporting local governments to act against white nationalism is an effective long-term strategy to stem the tide of hate-fueled violence. But the burden of responding to hate and political violence cannot be limited to local government leaders. Local government requires federal relief and support in addressing our country’s existential threat that is white nationalism and hate violence.

In 2021, domestic extremists killed at least 29 people in the United States, in 19 separate incidents; 26 of these 29 were killed by right-wing extremists.<sup>18</sup> Over the past 10 years, white supremacists have committed 244 murders in the United States.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the number of reports of assaults, vandalism and harassment targeting Jewish communities and individuals in the United States was the highest on record in 2021, a 34% increase from the prior year.<sup>20</sup>

In another measure of the rise of extremism, in 2021, 72 active Proud Boys chapters were documented across the country, a near doubling from 43 the year before.<sup>21</sup>

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project found that of all named groups identified at armed demonstrations since 2020, the vast majority (81.9%) are right-wing actors. Armed demonstrations are nearly six times as likely to turn violent or destructive compared to unarmed demonstrations.<sup>22</sup>

The point I want to underscore is this: with the exception of any events in the nation’s capital, these incidents occur in local communities, including state capitals, that are often ill-equipped

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<sup>17</sup> FM3 Polling Research of Idaho Republican voters, May 17-19, 2022

<sup>18</sup> Murder and Extremism in the United States 2021. ADL Center on Extremism, February 2022, [https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-05/Murder\\_Extremism\\_US\\_2021\\_report-2022.pdf](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-05/Murder_Extremism_US_2021_report-2022.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Murder and Extremism in the United States 2021. ADL Center on Extremism, February 2022, [https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-05/Murder\\_Extremism\\_US\\_2021\\_report-2022.pdf](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-05/Murder_Extremism_US_2021_report-2022.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2021. Anti-Defamation League, April 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2021>

<sup>21</sup> The Year in Hate & Extremism Report 2021. Southern Poverty Law Center, March 2022, <https://www.splcenter.org/20220309/year-hate-extremism-report-2021#proud-boys> 5 <https://acleddata.com/2022/01/05/updated-armed-demonstration-data-released-a-year-after-the-6-january-insurrection-show-new-trends/>

<sup>22</sup> Armed Assembly: Guns, Demonstrations, and Political Violence in America. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project and Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, August 2021, <https://acleddata.com/2021/08/23/armed-assembly-guns-demonstrations-and-political-violence-in-america/>



to handle extremist violence without additional training, tools, and resources.

At Western States Center, we understand the mainstreaming of social movements like white nationalism as a driver of hate violence, and that these movements prioritize building political power. That's why an important aspect of our intervention strategy is focused on shifting political and institutional power to counter white nationalism, which closes opportunities for them to organize.

We also focus on supporting the local government efforts, like in Portland, Oregon, to act against white nationalism and stem the tide of political violence. In 2017 there was an uptick in incursions into Portland by anti-democracy groups that were largely framed as a free speech issue. After we began engaging in media interventions in 2018, the public conversations around these dangerous rallies began to shift toward focusing on their violence, the harm to local communities, and the ways in which they undermine local government. In 2019, we worked with Portland officials to unanimously pass a resolution condemning white supremacy. That summer, the Portland mayor held a large rally days before bigoted groups planned to descend on the city. At the rally, elected officials, representatives from law enforcement and many community groups denounced white supremacy.

The City of Portland's resolution denouncing white supremacy helped to set a baseline of political agreement. It resulted in a two-part training on white nationalism for the Portland city council and similar resolutions in other cities such as Eugene, Oregon. That fall, the Proud Boys issued a national call, in hopes of setting up a violent clash with the Portland community. We organized a response from a broad set of community groups, asking elected officials to demonstrate unity against bigotry. The Portland Mayor and City Council responded to our request for solidarity, issuing a strong statement<sup>23</sup> and directing transit readerboards to display messages<sup>24</sup> reading "Portland United Against Hate."

In 2021, WSC organized business leaders to speak out against hate and political violence. Before the election, we organized over 100 elected and civil society leaders to make a statement against hate and election violence.<sup>25</sup> And once again, prior to an anti-democracy mobilization, we supported the city of Portland in responding in a united and values-based way.

These successes set the scene for stronger action as anti-democracy organizing targeting

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<sup>23</sup> City of Portland Oregon. (2020 September 25). *Letter to the Community: Local, State Leaders Stand in Solidarity with Community and Business Leaders Against Hate and Violence* [Press release].

<https://www.portland.gov/eudaly/news/2020/9/25/letter-community-local-state-leaders-stand-solidarity-community-and-business>

<sup>24</sup> KATU Staff. "PBOT signs along I-5 to show 'Hate Has No Place Here,' 'Black Lives Matter' on Saturday," *KATU 2 ABC*, 26 Sep. 2020. <https://katu.com/news/local/pbot-signs-along-i-5-to-show-hate-has-no-place-here-black-lives-matter-on-saturday>

<sup>25</sup> Western States Center. (2020 October 28). *Oregon State and Community Leaders Unite Against Hate and Election-Related Violence* [Press Release]. <https://www.westernstatescenter.org/oregon-state-and-community-leaders-unite-against-hate-and-election-related-violence>

Portland escalated. It was no surprise that the 2019 rally was smaller than expected and wrapped up in under an hour before asking the police for a route out of town. In 2020, in part due to clear statements from political leaders and law enforcement in Oregon, incidents of election violence and voter intimidation were minimal. Similar coordinated political action in 2021 also led to a reaction and diminished size rally, though unfortunately violence was not absent during that rally. In stark contrast to the prior years, 2022 has been a quiet year in Portland, with bigoted and anti-democracy groups shifting their strategies in response to their lack of success in intimidating the Portland community.

Western States Center took this intensive support for local communities to Coeur d'Alene when it noticed well-connected white nationalist influencers beginning to foment anti-LGBTQ rhetoric against the group organizing a Pride event, North Idaho Pride Alliance (NIPA), as well as some of NIPA's local business and nonprofit sponsors. NIPA led a robust communications strategy to encourage local community members to report threats and other dangerous bigoted activity and strengthen community faith in the safety of the Pride event. NIPA's communications strategy also focused on the importance of high turnout and community involvement as a way that the Coeur d'Alene community could ensure a safe and successful event. In the May primary election in Idaho, Republican groups successfully pushed back against bigoted anti-democracy candidates. Democrats and Republicans, along with law enforcement and religious and business leaders, condemned extremist behavior as unacceptable.

In Washington state, former Representative Matt Shea's extremist actions were investigated by the FBI, and a wide range of civil society groups condemned his actions. An independent investigation commissioned by the state legislature resulted in him being stripped of committee memberships on a bipartisan basis.

And in the December 2020 attack on the Oregon Capitol, law enforcement agencies and a legislative committee investigated to establish the facts. A wide coalition of business, civic and religious leaders spoke out, and when the facts were established that revealed former Representative Mike Nearman helped plan the attack and opened the door for armed rioters who attacked law enforcement, both parties jointly expelled him from the body in a bipartisan vote that was unanimous except for Nearman.

The lessons we drew from these experiences were that when robust, coordinated and broad political action is taken against anti-democracy movements like white nationalism, it frequently leads to diminished violence and a lull in overall activity. The bar is high to reach the level of response needed though, and in difficult political contexts it is frequently not reached. Portland has been nationally targeted by bigoted and anti-democracy groups set on fomenting racist violence, and even the most well-prepared city would be hard pressed to effectively counter that level of targeting without state and federal political support and resources.

From large cities like Portland, to some of the smallest towns in our region, local leaders are increasingly isolated and overwhelmed by responding to anti-democracy and bigoted targeting. From rallies that intimidate local elected officials and undermine the capacity of cities and counties to keep people safe, to a wave of resignations of local officials and violence targeting state capitols, the impact of anti-democracy and white nationalist extremism on local and state governance is significant. Businesses, places of worship, and community groups face similar challenges responding effectively without additional tools, training, and resources. To support this kind of push-back on extremism, Western States Center has created toolkits and resources that include:

- *Community Guide for Opposing Hate*, a publication of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate, Western States Center, and the Montana Human Rights Network
- *Confronting Conspiracy Theories and Organized Bigotry at Home: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers*
- *Confronting White Nationalism in Schools: A Toolkit*
- *Reader's Guide for Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right* by Cynthia Miller-Idriss
- *Strengthening Local Government Against Bigoted and Anti-Democracy Movements: Recommendations for Civic Leaders*

But states need support from the federal government to respond to white nationalism and political violence, including clear condemnation of the antisemitic “great replacement” conspiracy theory and policies that tackle this threat head-on. This support should include stronger laws and enforcement to prevent unlawful paramilitary activity, more training and support for government employees and local elected officials responding to attacks, examination of political bias in law enforcement, improved information sharing across municipalities and agencies, and a dedicated desk at the Department of Justice, focused specifically on anti-democracy and hate groups.

With the federal government’s help, local governments and communities can respond with strategies that strengthen democratic practice while closing space for political and hate violence. As the examples outlined above demonstrate, there are already communities that have utilized effective responses.

Respectfully, I offer several actions that could reduce the threat to local communities from anti-democracy extremism:

A. *Block Grants to Counter the Impacts of Extremism on Local Governments* Support for appropriations creating block grants for local governments is needed to help counter the impacts of extremism on the functioning of local governance. When local governments or community institutions become weak or fail, we have seen in many different locations that extremist groups will step in to occupy the vacuum. The worsening

breakdown in trust between local government and the community creates further space for extremism to build power. As political violence becomes more commonplace, there are insufficient resources to maintain security for the functioning of school boards, city councils, county commissions, and other local bodies. There are a number of tools available to help local governments to counter the impact of anti-democracy groups; federal financial assistance in the form of block grants is needed for state and local governments to choose and implement the tools that are right for them to strengthen resilience and responses to anti-democracy targeting.

B. Require Federal Agencies to Provide Respective Action Plans Those targeting communities often break existing laws, travel across state and county lines to engage in violent mobilizations, and rely on a lack of coordination from agencies and municipalities to continue flouting our laws and norms. A serious attempt at requiring all federal agencies to develop their own actions to respond would be a meaningful step in the right direction.

C. Root out Extremism in Law Enforcement and the Military It is well documented how white nationalist groups seek to recruit and place supporters within law enforcement,<sup>26</sup> especially local sheriff's offices. Along with additional resources for officer safety must come a greater examination of the prevalence of these groups in law enforcement agencies across the country. Both law enforcement and our military face the threat of rising extremism within their ranks, as documented by the Brennan Center report, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism, White Supremacy, and Far-Right Militancy in Law Enforcement."<sup>27</sup> One member of the U.S. Army, a self-proclaimed neo-Nazi currently on trial for plotting to murder other soldiers, wrote on an encrypted app "that he had joined up solely to gain knowledge of military weaponry and tactics," according to reporting on the case.<sup>28</sup>

D. Speak in a Unified Voice Speak out collectively and publicly as a unified House against hate violence or political violence regardless of where it emerges and cite the negative example of hate rhetoric and racial profiling. The burden of responding to political violence cannot be limited to local level government leaders. It requires the visible moral condemnation of federal elected officials and the agencies they oversee. Many of those voices are noticeably absent in the aftermath of the white nationalist-driven

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<sup>26</sup> Levinson, Jonathon. "Dozens of Oregon law enforcement officers have been members of the far-right Oath Keepers militia," *OPB*, <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/10/15/dozens-of-oregon-law-enforcement-officers-joined-far-right-oath-keepers-militia/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/hidden-plain-sight-racism-white-supremacy-and-far-right-militancy-law>

<sup>28</sup> Winston, Ali. "The Satanist Neo-Nazi Plot to Murder U.S. Soldiers." *Rolling Stone*, 5 June 2022, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/the-satanist-neo-nazi-plot-to-murder-u-s-soldiers-1352629/>

murders of African Americans in Buffalo, New York. Congress has an influential platform to shape which political ideas are acceptable in mainstream political discourse and which are not. The House could have an enormous impact by clearly rejecting the “great replacement” conspiracy theory.

As we work together to address this crisis, these are just some of the urgent actions we would encourage you to explore. We remain inspired by the broad coalitions of local elected leaders, civil servants, and community members who raise their voices against violence and bigotry every day. But the burden of responding to hate and political violence cannot be limited to local government leaders. Local government is deserving of federal relief and support in addressing white nationalism and political violence – an existential threat aimed at the heart of our democracy.

Thank you for your consideration

### **About Western States Center**

Based in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain West, Western States Center (WSC) works nationwide to build a future where all people can live, love, worship, and work free from bigotry and fear. For over 35 years, Western States Center has fostered leaders, organizations, collaborations, and initiatives that reduced disparities and advanced equity; lifted up the leaders of marginalized communities; and delivered accessible tools for community organizing and civic engagement to tens of thousands of people throughout the West and beyond.

Four strategic pillars guide Western States Center’s work. *Building Movement* by strengthening the organizing capacity of often-marginalized communities with an emphasis on gender and racial justice and combatting antisemitism. *Developing Leaders* by providing training, leadership development, and organizational capacity support to social justice movement leaders. *Shifting Culture* by convening culture makers to shift the narrative and use culture as a vehicle for social change. *Defending Democracy* by helping communities and civil society effectively respond to white nationalism and anti-democracy social movements.

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