

OPINION

Hate Groups Spread Lies and Kill Cops

Contested election could make matters worse

BY MARK POTOK

Last November, the FBI accused four members of a Georgia militia of conspiring to attack cities with the deadly ricin toxin, blow up federal buildings, and murder federal law enforcement officials and IRS agents.

In July, the leader of the neo-secessionist League of the South told followers that "we are already at war." Earlier, he had urged them to buy AK-47s, hollow-point bullets, and tools to derail trains.

And in August, the leader of the nativist Americans for Legal Immi-



gration PAC said that in order to save "white America" from the "dictator Barack Obama," it may be necessary to engage in "extra-political activities that I can't really talk about because they're all illegal and violent."

These are just three troubling examples of the dangerous anti-government backlash now gripping the nation. Given this toxic environment, it wasn't surprising that in the new annual census of extremist and hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center, we found that groups on the radical right had grown dramatically in 2011 for a third consecutive year. This expansion has swelled the ranks of extremists to record levels.

The number of U.S. hate groups last year rose to 1,018. The number of these organizations has grown every year since 2000, when there were 602 of them. But the most stunning growth came in the anti-government "Patriot" movement, armed militias and other conspiracy-

minded groups that see the federal government as their primary enemy. These groups increased by 55 percent, from 824 in 2010 to 1,274 groups last year. Since 2008, the year Obama was elected, these groups have skyrocketed by 755 percent.

What's going on? What's fueling this astounding growth?

The expansion of the radical right is largely the result of our country's changing racial demographics, the increased pace of globalization and the associated flows of immigrant workers, and our economic woes.

For many extremists, America's first black president is a symbol of all that's wrong with the country. For them, he's a Kenyan, a secret Muslim, a Marxist bent on destroying our democracy, as well as a harbinger of an America where non-Hispanic whites won't comprise a majority any more. This election season's overheated rhetoric is only adding fuel to the fire.

These groups are both driving and benefiting from political extrem-

ism. They poison our mainstream political discourse, injecting wild conspiracy theories and outlandish rhetoric into the debate while luring new members who fall victim to their propaganda.

But they don't just spread hateful ideologies and misinformation. Law enforcement officials around the country have reported increasing numbers of violent encounters with a subset of the larger Patriot movement: anti-government "sovereign citizens." These individuals generally don't believe they're obliged to pay federal taxes or follow most laws. In February, the FBI reported that it's been flooded with calls from local government officials seeking assistance in dealing with the sovereign citizen movement, which the SPLC estimates has as many as 300,000 adherents across the nation.

Earlier, in September, the FBI issued a bulletin to law enforcement authorities describing the sovereign citizens movement as a "domestic

terrorist" group. It noted that "sovereigns" have killed six law enforcement officers since 2000. The most recent incident occurred on May 20, 2010, when a dashboard camera captured horrifying images of a father-son team of sovereigns murdering two West Memphis, Arkansas police officers during a traffic stop.

Coming in the middle of a hotly contested national election, things could get worse before they get better. If the campaign generates more attacks on Obama based on utter falsehoods, like the claim that he's not really American, it's likely that the poison will spread. And if he wins re-election, the reaction of the extreme right, already angry and on the defensive as the white population faces the prospect of losing its majority status, could be truly frightening.

Mark Potok is a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups, anti-government militias, and other extremist organizations.

Standing with the President on Healthcare

Everyone stands to benefit from health reform

BY CHARLES RANGEL

The Supreme Court commenced with three days of oral arguments last week on the constitutionality of the mandate provision of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), or healthcare reform.

These unprecedented legal proceedings, along with a subsequent ruling which is anticipated this June, could shape - perhaps irrevocably - the future of healthcare in our country.

How did we get here? As chairman of the house Ways and Means committee in 2009, I introduced the healthcare reform bill. I then stood proudly with President Obama on March 23, 2010, as he signed the

legislation into law.

Today, I continue to stand with President Obama knowing full well that the preservation of healthcare reform is vital to the health of millions who live in our great country.



I strongly believe that we are on our way to improving our nation's collective health by expanding healthcare coverage to the millions of uninsured who reside here.

The idea of health reform in America is not a novel concept. Presidents, lawmakers, policymakers, and others with vested health policy interests have proposed various ways of overhauling healthcare over the past 100 years. Until now, however, we did not have a comprehensive health coverage plan that works. Now we do.

There is one fact that I know: Democrat, Republican, or Independent; Liberal, Conservative, or Moderate; member of the Tea Party

or Occupy Wall Street; female or male; young or old; black, white, red, yellow, or brown - we will all become ill and be in need of quality healthcare at some time during our lives.

Overall, everyone who lives in America stands to benefit from health reform.

Yet, since the passage of ACA, the last two years have been fraught with incendiary and destructive rhetoric from Republicans who ultimately want to repeal ACA by gradually and methodically using legislative means to dismantle key provisions of the healthcare reform law.

A common refrain of my Republican colleagues is that they want to "Take our Nation Back!" But where would that take us?

Unless ACA is protected from repeal, Republicans will take our nation back to the days in which one could be denied health insurance coverage for pre-existing conditions. Patients with chronic medical conditions - heart disease, diabe-

tes, end stage renal disease, cancer, AIDS, all could be once again denied coverage. They will take our nation back to the days in which college students under the age of 26 must go without health coverage after being dropped from their parents' insurance plans.

Back again will be the days in which women were subjected to "gender rating" by most states and charged higher health insurance rates than men. These same women will be once again denied contraceptive coverage by their employers. Healthcare costs will rise because socioeconomically disadvantaged patients will be unable to afford expensive co-pays for preventive care, this resulting in more costly treatments for health conditions that could have been addressed if detected earlier.

Gone will be the days in which insurance companies will have to be more transparent with consumers about justifying their administrative rates and overhead costs. Even

worse, insurance companies will again drop healthy patients from coverage once they become sick.

Seniors will no longer receive rebate assistance to pay for Medicare "donut hole" coverage expenses. Small businesses and families would lose healthcare tax credits. Lifetime caps on medical insurance coverage would return. Medicare insurance fraud could once again run rampant.

The list of harmful and deleterious effects of the potential rollback of healthcare reform is almost catastrophic to even imagine! Now is not the time for complacency. We must remain vigilant and aware that the possibility of losing all of our hard-fought healthcare reform gains is here and it is real.

Now, we have a tangible healthcare reform system that works. Let's keep it that way. Let's stand together and say, "NO"! We won't go back. America just can't afford it.

Charles B. Rangel is a Democratic congressman from New York.

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