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OPINION

Preserving Power at the Expense of Others

GOP tactics to suppress the black vote

BY REV. SUSAN K. WILLIAMS SMITH



As President Trump's impeachment unspools, news coverage is buzzing about conspiracy theories and geopolitical rivalries. But at the root of Trump's effort to extort Ukraine was a simple motive: Trump hoped to influence our elections to preserve his power and that of his associates.

That has a lot in common with something closer to home: Our long and ugly history of voter suppression, which likewise aimed to preserve the power of some at the expense of others — primarily people of color.

In Give Us the Ballot, Ari Berman notes the U.S. has always had a “split personality when it comes to race and political power.” Ef-

orts to get African Americans the right to vote in “a nation simultaneously founded on liberty and slavery,” he writes, have always been “met by equally intense efforts to roll back that progress.”

Especially after the Civil War, the political and racial schizophrenia of white America could not endure even the thought that formerly enslaved Africans should have the right to vote. Efforts to stymie the ability of black people to vote — from outright prohibitions to artificial barriers — began in earnest then, and continue in various forms to the present day.

Brutal, often violent voter suppression prevailed in the 20th century. But a new wave of more sophisticated tactics surfaced after the 2008 general election, when Republicans realized the power of the resurgent black vote that had helped elect President Obama.

Carefully studying what the Obama campaign had done, they constructed laws to combat the reasons for its success. States began passing laws that curtailed early voting and mandated the shuttering of polling places that

made it easier for blacks to vote. They instituted techniques like voter purging (including purging by postcard) and imposed restrictive voter registration policies.

More recently, Trump campaign workers studied the techniques that made the Obama coalition successful and greatly increased

clear that the Trump team learned much about Obama's operation and sought to emulate it.

Meanwhile Republicans have doubled down on efforts to keep black people from voting in key races. The marquee example is Georgia, where Democrat Stacey Adams ran for governor against

cast provisional ballots, which according to data collected after the election were not counted.

Fortunately, voting rights advocates are fighting back. Voters in states like Georgia are fighting — successfully — to get polling places reopened. And Florida activists supported the passage of Amendment 4, which restores voting rights to people with felony convictions.

Trump, ever dishonest himself, calls the American political system rigged. He is correct, though not in the way he is communicating it. His party's intense effort to negate the African American vote is still keeping black and brown people, students, the elderly, and immigrant citizens away from the polls.

It will take all of us working together, harder than ever, to overcome those obstacles. But we can and must do it.

Rev. Susan K. Williams Smith is director of Crazy Faith Ministries in Columbus, Ohio. She is a member of African American Ministers in Action with the People for the American Way Foundation.

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their efforts to strengthen their own grassroots organizing.

A Time magazine article reported that the Trump Victory Leadership Initiative, said to be modeled on the Obama campaign, had by 2016 trained 700,000 volunteers — and is aiming for 2 million in 2020. While they consistently attack Obama, it is

Republican Brian Kemp in 2018.

There, polling places in poor and rural districts were closed. “Exact match” laws resulted in the exclusion of 53,000 votes cast by Democrats because of slight differences in what their photo ID said and what was on voter rolls. Many Georgians were forced to

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CLACKAMAS

Beavercreek Clinic
Free Food Market
110 Beavercreek Rd, Oregon City
Tuesday, January 7, 2020
10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Clackamas Service Center
8800 SE 80th Ave, Portland
Tuesday, January 14, 2020
10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Orchid Health Center
535 NE 6th Ave, Estacada
Friday, January 17, 2020
10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Mulino Child
Development Coalition
13700 S Freeman Rd, Mulino
Tuesday, January 21, 2020
12-2 p.m.

Make getting health care simpler with Connect to Care, formerly goMobile.

careoregon.org/connecttocare

MULTNOMAH

Department of Human Services:
East County Office
11826 NE Glisan St, Portland
Friday, January 3, 2020
11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Department of Human Services:
Alberta Office
30 N Webster St, Portland
Tuesday, January 7, 2020
10 a.m.-12 p.m.

CareOregon Open Hours
315 SW 5th Ave, Portland
Wednesday, January 8, 2020
9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Portland Rescue Mission:
Burnside Shelter
111 W Burnside, Portland
Thursday, January 9, 2020
8-10 a.m.

PSU Free Food Market
In front of Shattuck Hall
1914 SW Park Ave, Portland
Monday, January 13, 2020
11 a.m.-1 p.m.

MULTNOMAH

Department of Human Services:
SE Malden
8129 SE Malden St, Portland
Tuesday, January 14, 2020
1:30-4 p.m.

CareOregon Open Hours
315 SW 5th Ave, Portland
Wednesday, January 15, 2020
9 a.m.-12 p.m.

CareOregon Open Hours
315 SW 5th Ave, Portland
Wednesday, January 22, 2020
9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Portland Open Bible Church
Food Pantry
3223 SE 92nd Ave, Portland
Thursday, January 23, 2020
10 a.m.-12 p.m.

Union Gospel Mission
3 NW Third Ave, Portland
Tuesday, January 28, 2020
1-4 p.m.

SNAP assistance available at ALL locations



WASHINGTON

Emanuel Lutheran Church
Winter Shelter
1124 S Beech St, Cornelius
Thursday, January 2, 2020
5-7:30 p.m.

Beaverton City Library
12375 SW 5th St, Beaverton
Wednesday, January 8, 2020
12-4 p.m.

Project Homeless Connect
Sonrise Church
6701 NE Campus Way, Hillsboro
Friday, January 24, 2020
9 a.m.-3 p.m.

