

THE CAMPAIGN TO DISMANTLE ERIC

How far-right misinformation and the election denial movement led nine states to reject the Electronic Registration Information Center

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OVERSIGHT

Executive Summary

For decades, right-wing activists and lawmakers have exaggerated the threat of voter fraud and election security concerns to promote increasingly restrictive voting laws. Former President Donald Trump's refusal to accept his 2020 loss, along with his and his allies' efforts to overturn a free and fair election, drew upon these same ideas, giving rise to a coordinated and well-funded movement dedicated to undermining public trust in elections and laying the groundwork for challenging the results of future elections.

This election denial movement represents a threat to the health of U.S. democracy that has extended beyond the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. Over the past several years, American Oversight has investigated and tracked a growing nationwide network of election deniers and their influence on government officials — from the false electoral certificates submitted following the 2020 election and the partisan and discredited post-election “audits” launched by officials in battleground states, to the forward-facing and dangerous attacks on the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC).

American Oversight's report “The Campaign to Dismantle ERIC” draws upon thousands of pages of public records uncovered through requests and litigation, as well as public reporting and expert input, to tell the story of how the election denial movement targeted ERIC as part of its continued effort to undermine U.S. democracy. In compiling this report, we are grateful for the input and expertise of partner organizations and the continued work of these organizations, reporters, and election experts to expose and counter attacks on one of the leading tools for ensuring accurate voter lists.

As detailed in our report, American Oversight's investigation shows how:

- the same people who tried to overturn the 2020 election worked behind the scenes to influence the ERIC exodus by promoting false claims and conspiracy theories, priming states for post-election chaos that could be used to deny election results in 2024;
- states have scrambled to find viable replacements — none of which provide ERIC's security, reliability, or effectiveness;
- and election denial activists are now pushing their own ERIC alternatives that would make it easier to challenge the voting rights of thousands.

American Oversight's work monitoring the election denial movement and allied public officials is far from over. As we enter another presidential election year, we will continue to track and expose the impact of state withdrawals from ERIC and other actions that threaten voting rights and U.S. elections — pillars of American democracy.

—Heather Sawyer
Executive Director, American Oversight

About American Oversight

American Oversight is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit watchdog that advances truth, accountability, and democracy by enforcing the public's right to government records.

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I. Introduction

With another monumental election year on the horizon, the election denial movement is poised to continue its effort to undermine U.S. democracy thanks to a sustained campaign against one of the leading tools for ensuring accurate voter lists: the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC). Conservative activists and politicians who profess to be gravely concerned about “election integrity” and the state of the country’s voter rolls have, over the past two years, pressured nine Republican-led states to reject ERIC, a bipartisan organization that many of those same state leaders had previously touted.

Through public records requests and litigation, American Oversight has obtained thousands of pages of documents detailing the inner workings of this effort. The documents include evidence revealing how some of the same people active in the attempt to overturn the 2020 election have been working to dismantle ERIC and, in the process, make it easier for voter-roll maintenance systems to be supplanted by individuals and groups dedicated to subverting democracy.

Until last year, ERIC was a non-controversial nonprofit that quietly helped states clean up their voter rolls by securely comparing voter data. Then, a January 2022 article on a fringe right-wing website set off a cascade of misinformation. A political firestorm, fanned by a coordinated effort on the part of anti-democratic activists, eventually led several states to withdraw.

The story of how ERIC became a political lightning rod is one of far-right misinformation; the cynical opportunism of so-called “election integrity” leaders and activists dedicated to reducing access to the ballot; and the staying power of an election-denial movement that grew out of former President Donald Trump’s false claim that he had won the 2020 presidential election.

American Oversight began investigating states' ERIC withdrawals in 2022, soon after Louisiana's secretary of state suspended his state's participation in the system by citing unsubstantiated "concerns."¹ After submitting public records requests to officials who had also abandoned ERIC or raised concerns about the system in more than a dozen other states, including Ohio, American Oversight sued the secretaries of state of Louisiana and Ohio in June 2023 to compel the release of documents.

The documents American Oversight obtained show how election officials defended ERIC behind the scenes while publicly caving to a pressure campaign led by some of the same people who sought to keep Trump in power in 2020. The rapid exodus that followed led to a scramble to find viable replacements, none of which have so far proven to be effective or secure.

The documents also provide telling details about how powerful Trump allies and conservative activists took advantage of the vacuum left by the withdrawals to pitch their own severely flawed alternatives, with alarming implications for voting rights. Finally, the documents show election administrators expressing grave concerns that the ERIC exodus would make it harder for them to do their jobs at a time when they are already under unprecedented attack for their work.

Voting in the presidential primaries is weeks away. This coordinated dismantling of ERIC has weakened several states' ability to maintain accurate voter rolls or push back on false claims of fraud while making it easier for activists to challenge registrations across the country. The result is a heightened risk of significant disenfranchisement — and yet another avenue for the same people who have spent years sowing distrust in American democracy to undermine the 2024 election.

II. Background

ERIC was designed to address a persistent problem for state and local election officials: out-of-date voter rolls. The [nonprofit membership organization](#),² which launched in 2012 with [start-up funding](#) from the Pew Charitable Trusts,³ operates a system that [allows states](#) to confidentially share data with one another so that local election officials know when someone has moved to another state, is otherwise registered in two places, or has died.⁴ The system also identifies eligible but unregistered voters, with a requirement that member states notify eligible citizens about how to register to vote.⁵

Election deniers often falsely conflate imperfect voter rolls with large-scale voter fraud. Voter fraud, including double voting, is [extraordinarily rare](#).⁶ But out-of-date voter rolls do present real problems for elections administrators and voters: Election information sent to the wrong address wastes taxpayer money and election administrators' time, and out-of-date information means that current voters might not get critical election information.

A previous attempt to create a multi-state data-sharing system for voter rolls, the Interstate Crosscheck program, [collapsed under concerns](#) about its accuracy and security.⁷ Crosscheck, developed in 2005, was operated by then-Kansas Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh and later expanded during the tenure of Secretary

Kris Kobach, a prominent “election fraud” alarmist.⁸ One study found that the system would remove about 300 registrations used to cast legitimate votes for every one double-registration,⁹ jeopardizing the voting rights of people who were not, in fact, registered in multiple states.¹⁰ Use of Crosscheck was [paused](#) in 2017 for security reasons,¹¹ and Kansas [suspended operation](#) of the program in 2019 as part of a legal settlement over problems with its data security.¹²

While Crosscheck gained a national [reputation for faulty data](#) and poor security,¹³ ERIC emerged as a bipartisan and reliable way for states to share voter data. The system, [designed by](#) a national election and voter-registration expert and an IBM data scientist,¹⁴ pulled in a wider variety of data in order to reduce false matches, and [used encryption](#) and one-way hashing to protect sensitive data.¹⁵ [By 2019](#), a bipartisan group of 22 states and the District of Columbia had joined ERIC¹⁶; by 2022, the program had [grown](#) to 31 states and the District of Columbia,¹⁷ helping election officials identify millions of outdated records¹⁸ in their systems and requiring states to notify eligible citizens of how to register to vote.

ERIC earned the trust of elections administrators across the political spectrum. When a Trump-organized “voter fraud” commission, co-led by Kobach, asked states for reams of voter data in 2017, several states declined to fully participate, with some officials [arguing that ERIC](#) was already doing that work, and doing it better.¹⁹ As recently as early 2023, many Republican secretaries of state continued to sing ERIC’s praises. For example, John Merrill, Alabama’s secretary of state until 2023, [described ERIC](#) as “one of the most effective tools that we have had in the area of election administration.”²⁰

ERIC operated with a relatively low public profile until January 2022, when the fringe right-wing website Gateway Pundit published a multi-part series of articles maligning it.²¹

Gateway Pundit is known for publishing conspiracy theories and false rumors; previously, for instance, [it had promoted](#) the “birther” conspiracy theory that President Barack Obama was not a U.S. citizen, and it published multiple stories framing innocent people for high-profile crimes.²² Gateway Pundit founder Jim Hoft, who wrote the series about ERIC, has been an enthusiastic purveyor of [false claims](#) about the 2020 presidential election,²³ including [spreading false rumors](#) about two Georgia election workers,²⁴ resulting in racist abuse and death threats leveled against them.

Gateway Pundit’s ERIC articles similarly were filled with false and unsubstantiated claims²⁵ and relied heavily on J. Christian Adams, a conservative elections attorney who [claims to be](#) the first person²⁶ to have publicly criticized ERIC²⁷ and in late 2021 called ERIC “diabolical” on a conservative radio program.²⁸ The Gateway Pundit articles alleged ERIC “is essentially a left wing voter registration drive disguised as voter roll clean up”; raised unsubstantiated concerns about unauthorized and partisan access to ERIC data; accused ERIC of being influenced by philanthropist George Soros; and criticized states for removing an insufficient number of voters from the rolls. (Adams later told NPR that he had never intended for his criticisms to lead to states abandoning ERIC, and that it was “better to be in ERIC than not in ERIC.”)²⁹ ERIC has [debunked Gateway Pundit’s false claims](#),³⁰ as have several media outlets.³¹ For example, while Soros’ Open Society Foundations had previously given money to Pew [for voting rights work](#),³² NPR [reported](#) that “Soros has never had any involvement” in ERIC.³³

Despite the outright falsehoods and misleading allegations, Gateway Pundit’s series unleashed a movement to pressure conservative states to abandon ERIC, in the process undermining the single most effective tool to maintain accurate voter rolls and to rebut claims of widespread voter fraud — and, importantly, relieving those states of their obligation to use ERIC’s data to notify eligible citizens of their right to register to vote.

III. Louisiana's Withdrawal

On January 27, 2022, Louisiana Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin announced that he would be suspending his state's ERIC membership, [referencing](#) "concerns raised by citizens, government watchdog organizations and media reports."³⁴ [NPR](#) later reported that when Ardoin shared this news with a group of far-right activists shortly after his decision, he earned a sustained round of applause.³⁵

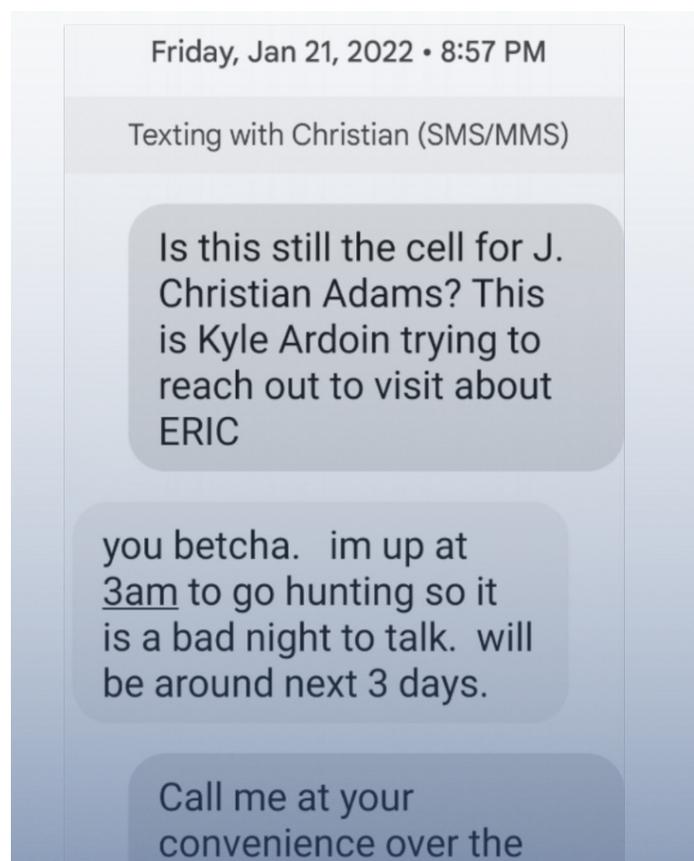
Although Ardoin's office [told Votebeat](#) the decision had "nothing to do with" the Gateway Pundit articles,³⁶ its timing — just one week after the initial article's publication and the [ensuing spike](#) in mentions of ERIC on far-right social media³⁷ — raised questions about the influences behind his announcement. In addition, American Oversight obtained records suggesting a strong connection between the initial Gateway Pundit article and Ardoin's decision.

On January 21 — the day after the website published its first in the series — an official in the secretary's office forwarded Ardoin a statement from ERIC's executive director, Shane Hamlin, that addressed falsehoods in the article. That evening, Ardoin replied to top staff in his office: "I'm likely going to suspend our membership until we can make sure our data isn't being used or supplie[d] to other organizations," he wrote, indicating he was aware of both the article and ERIC's refutation.ⁱ

The next week, Ardoin and several colleagues had another chance to speak with Hamlin about his stated concerns. American Oversight obtained a recording of the February 2 conference call, which featured a detailed presentation by Hamlin that methodically addressed and debunked false claims about ERIC.

Hamlin emphasized the importance of protecting voter data, outlining both the legal protections and information security practices ERIC employs to ensure its data is not — and could not — be accessed by external organizations.ⁱⁱ

Those reassurances appear to have had no impact on Ardoin. And Hamlin was not the only person with whom Ardoin was communicating about ERIC. The same evening Ardoin told staff he would likely be suspending Louisiana's membership, he texted voter-fraud alarmist J. Christian Adams, whom Hoft had quoted several times in sourcing his Gateway Pundit articles. Ardoin asked Adams for a call to discuss ERIC, to which Adams responded that he would be available over the next three days.ⁱⁱⁱ



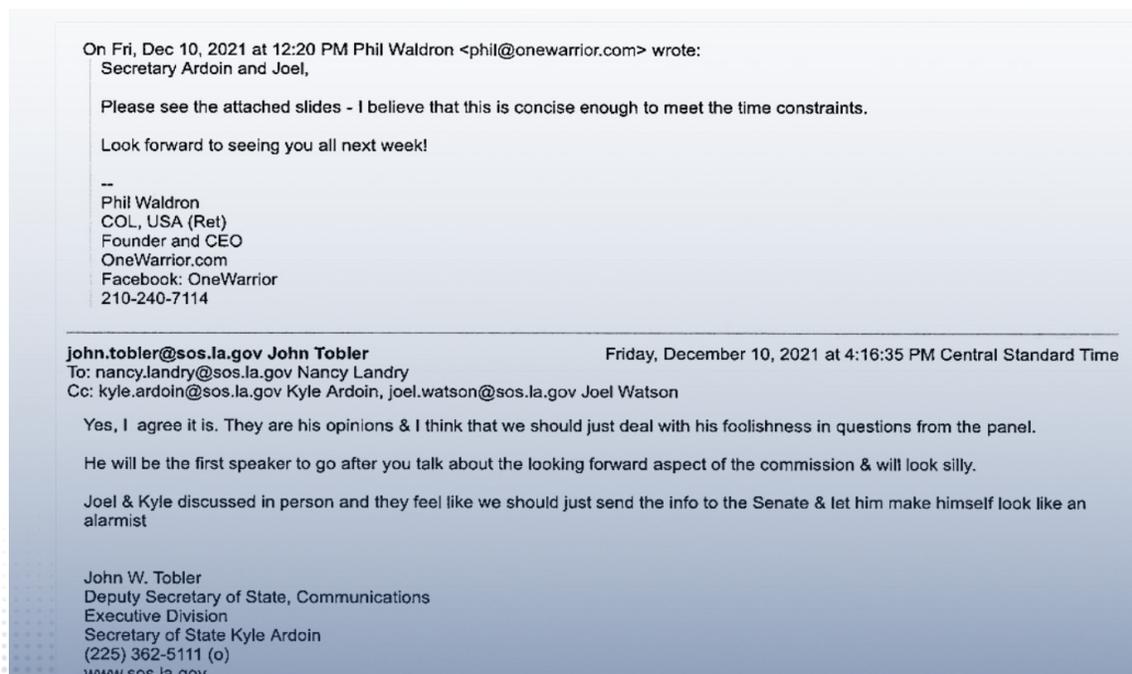
Text messages exchanged by Louisiana Secretary of State Ardoin and J. Christian Adams.

Other news reports and public records unearthed by American Oversight further showed that Ardoin was no stranger to the election denial movement. In May 2021, the secretary's office exchanged emails with Russ Ramsland, a co-founder of Allied Security Operations Group, about a service agreement with the company for election-related work.^{iv} Ramsland had worked with [Phil Waldron](#) — a retired Army colonel active in Trump's attempt to overturn his election loss³⁸ — in elevating conspiracy theories about the 2020 election.³⁹ Allied Security (referred to in the documents as Allied Special Operations Group) also [had initially](#) been selected to conduct the Arizona Senate's discredited "audit" of Maricopa County's 2020 results before being dropped because of negative media coverage.⁴⁰ The service agreement with the Louisiana secretary of state's office is unsigned, but specifies that the company would be "examining the processes and setup involved in the Louisiana Voting Equipment and advis[ing] on security vulnerabilities," and "may be engaged in further support of other election processes and practices."^v

Weeks earlier, Ardoin had invited Waldron and Draza Smith, another prominent election denier and frequent guest on right-wing [podcasts](#),⁴¹ to speak at a December 2021 meeting of the Louisiana Voting Commission,^{vi} which had been tasked with recommending^{vii} a [new](#)

[voting apparatus](#) to replace the state's aging voting machines.⁴² Accompanying slide decks produced to American Oversight reveal Smith's presentation included recommendations to ban voting by mail except for military members and in a few other special circumstances, and to prohibit use of electronic ballots.^{viii} In his 90-minute speech, Waldron advocated counting paper ballots by hand,^{ix} a popular conspiracy-theory-inspired proposal that experts say is costlier, more time-consuming, and less accurate.⁴³

The documents obtained by American Oversight demonstrate Louisiana officials knew Waldron's presentation was full of falsehoods, but still gave him a platform. In an email exchange among state officials, including Ardoin, the week before Waldron presented to the commission, First Assistant Secretary of State Nancy Landry — recently elected as secretary of state — wrote that Waldron's presentation was "full of erroneous information" and asked the group, "Who is going to present the rebuttal?" John Tobler, the deputy secretary of state for communications, agreed that the presentation revealed Waldron's "foolishness." Tobler added, "Joel & Kyle discussed in person," likely referring to Deputy Secretary Joel Watson and Ardoin, and said "they feel like we should just send the info to the Senate & let him make himself look like an alarmist."^x



The records also indicate the secretary of state's office offered to reimburse both for their travel to Louisiana.^{xi}

Ardoin and Smith also communicated regularly — including over text on the day the first Gateway Pundit article was published, and on January 27, the day Ardoin formally announced Louisiana's withdrawal from ERIC. That day, Smith told Ardoin she was working on a review of Louisiana's voting system and sent him data related to state voter turnout.^{xii}

Other public records indicate that, months later, Ardoin was also in contact with Cleta Mitchell, a [longtime proponent](#) of voting restrictions⁴⁴ who [aided President Trump](#) in his attempt to remain in power in 2020.⁴⁵ In June, Ardoin emailed Mitchell and another prominent voter-fraud alarmist, Hans von Spakovsky, to ask for input on programming for the upcoming National Association of Secretaries of State conference.^{xiii}

That same month, Ardoin participated in a recording of Mitchell's podcast, "Who's Counting,"^{xiv} which she used to regularly criticize ERIC and which NPR has [described](#) as "a central hub for stolen election narratives."⁴⁶

Since Louisiana's withdrawal from ERIC, Ardoin has continued to insist he made the decision based on privacy concerns, but has failed to clarify what those concerns are or to provide any other justification. In March 2023, for example, [Ardoin said](#) he had "a responsibility to protect my constituents' personal data, and being a part of ERIC was no longer in the best interest of our citizens."⁴⁷ Ardoin's office declined interviews on the topic with [NPR](#) and⁴⁸ [Politico](#),⁴⁹ and offered incomplete answers to questions from [Votebeat](#).⁵⁰ [When asked](#) publicly by American Oversight in May 2023 to explain what concerns prompted his state to leave ERIC, Ardoin replied, "No comment."⁵¹

IV. The Campaign to Destroy ERIC

Prior to 2022, questions about ERIC had cropped up in certain corners of the right-wing election denial space. The month after the 2020 election, the election integrity group the Amistad Project — a project of the Thomas More Society, an anti-abortion legal group involved in efforts to cast doubt on the 2020 results⁵² — had published a report urging participating states to audit ERIC.⁵³ In August 2021, vocal election skeptic Janel Brandtjen, at the time the chair of the Wisconsin Assembly’s elections committee, asked the administrator of the Wisconsin Elections Commission for information about “what benefits ERIC provides to us.”⁵⁴ ERIC was also on the radar of J. Christian Adams’ Public Interest Legal Foundation (PILF), which sued the District of Columbia Board of Elections for ERIC records in 2021.⁵⁵

But it was not until the Gateway Pundit series that the anti-ERIC campaign gained traction. Indeed, several right-wing groups sympathetic to election conspiracy theories had, in 2021, still publicly supported ERIC.⁵⁶ After Hoff’s ERIC articles and Secretary Ardoin’s suspension of Louisiana’s membership, however, the manufactured ERIC controversy took off in far-right circles, providing [activists](#) who had previously worked to discredit the 2020 election results with a new opportunity to elevate their specious concerns about election systems — and to attack ERIC’s voter outreach requirement.⁵⁷

The most prominent of these activists was Cleta Mitchell, who runs a coalition of election denial groups called the Election Integrity Network. Under Mitchell’s leadership, local “election integrity” groups across the country started raising the alarm about ERIC and organizing coordinated

pressure campaigns on legislators and election officials.⁵⁸ One particularly enthusiastic activist who joined forces with Mitchell was Pennsylvania-based Heather Honey, who had [worked on](#) the Arizona Senate’s so-called “audit” of Maricopa County’s election results.⁵⁹ Honey [founded](#) Haystack Investigations, a firm with which lead “audit” contractor Cyber Ninjas subcontracted,⁶⁰ as well as Verity Vote, a group that claims to conduct “election integrity research and investigations.”⁶¹ Verity Vote [falsely](#) claimed Pennsylvania’s 2020 election involved more than 100,000 unaccounted-for votes,⁶² and before the 2022 midterms [alleged](#) the state had sent ballots to nearly 250,000 unverified voters.⁶³

Under Mitchell’s leadership, local “election integrity” groups across the country started raising the alarm about ERIC and organizing coordinated pressure campaigns on legislators and elections officials.

In June 2022, Honey [presented](#) a Verity Vote report on ERIC at a secret summit for secretaries of state convened by Mitchell, stating that ERIC posed a “threat to election integrity” and that its requirements result in “significant swelling of the voter rolls.”⁶⁴ The report also made connections between ERIC and the nonprofit Center for Election Innovation and Research, which received grants from Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan and became the subject of 2020 election conspiracy theories.⁶⁵ Similar allegations about “Zuckerbucks” and ERIC being a “covert method of registering targeted voters” had been raised, including on Mitchell’s podcast, by Michigan activist Patrice Johnson, the head of Pure Integrity Michigan Elections.⁶⁶

Jim Womack, the head of North Carolina Election Integrity Team, was also present at Mitchell’s summit, as were secretaries of state for Louisiana, West Virginia, Alabama, Florida, and Missouri, according to a letter from Womack to state legislators obtained by the investigative watchdog organization Documented.⁶⁷ The anti-ERIC activists in attendance soon took their concerns to election officials and state legislators. On the same day as the summit, Honey spoke with the general counsel in the West Virginia secretary of state’s office, Donald Kersey, regarding concerns about ERIC data sharing.^{xv} In July, Womack sent his letter, with Mitchell copied,⁶⁸ urging North Carolina lawmakers — who had recently authorized the state board of elections join ERIC for one year⁶⁹— to prevent the sharing of certain data with the organization.

Election denial activists’ reasons for opposing ERIC were in line with the same specious claims about data security and partisan funding raised by the Gateway Pundit articles. For example, American Oversight obtained documents showing that in February 2022, Florida’s then-Secretary of State Laurel Lee met with a group of activists and election conspiracists — including Jeff O’Donnell, Wesley Huff, and Draza Smith⁷⁰ — regarding ERIC; in advance of the meeting, voter fraud activists sent Lee’s office a report with false claims about Soros’ involvement.^{xiv}

Many of the Gateway Pundit’s allegations were also eventually reflected in the stated rationales of state leaders upon leaving the consortium. Florida Secretary of State Cord Byrd [referred](#) to “ERIC’s partisan tendencies,”⁷¹ while West Virginia Secretary of State Mac Warner similarly [referred](#) to “the opportunity for partisanship.”⁷² Officials in Alabama and Florida [cited vague](#) concerns about information security⁷³ that resembled claims from the Gateway Pundit series, which had alleged, with no evidence, security lapses connected to the network. In fact, according to ERIC Executive Director Shane Hamlin, ERIC has [never had](#) a security breach.⁷⁴

The most powerful throughline in activists’ opposition to ERIC, however, is an objection to the group’s proactive voter registration efforts. For decades, the myth of widespread voter fraud has been used to promote new voting restrictions, like ID or proof-of-citizenship requirements, and to push back against measures designed to make voting more accessible, such as increased use of mail-in voting or the expansion of early voting.⁷⁵ At the heart of those efforts is the clear aversion to greater voter participation, and anti-ERIC activists have not hidden their antipathy for ERIC’s outreach requirement for contacting eligible but unregistered citizens, an obligation states took on when they voluntarily joined ERIC.

From: heather@verityvote.us <heather@verityvote.us>
Sent: Tuesday, June 21, 2022 9:40 PM
To: Donald Kersey <DKersey@wvsos.com>
Subject: RE: WV Contact - Public Records Request

Hi Deak,
Attached is the CEIR email that describes the transfer of data from ERIC to CEIR. Please let me know if there is anything else that would be helpful to you. In the video of the EBU webinar, Becler discussed the data security and locking up the laptop on which he has the ERIC EBU data. He says that he deletes it when he is done using it because that is his “agreement with ERIC”. He also says that he would have a similar agreement with states.

I noticed that you were also on the list of attendees for the Revere demo back in September 2020. If you have a few minutes, I would be very interested in anything that you recall about that demo/webinar. My cell phone is 610-220-4822.

Thank you,
Heather

During a September 2022 appearance on Mitchell’s podcast, Honey said ERIC was “inflating the rolls with people who don’t want to be registered.”⁷⁶ Documented obtained an audio recording from a March 2023 conservative conference in Pennsylvania in which Honey made similar claims that the “impact of ERIC is that instead of cleaning up our voter rolls ... they add more people to it.”⁷⁷

Conservative state officials embraced those arguments as they considered leaving ERIC. According to notes obtained by Documented from a February 2023 meeting of the Florida Fair Elections Coalition, which is part of Mitchell’s network, Secretary Byrd emphasized his state was not using ERIC for “bloating the voter rolls,” adding that the “[n]otion that it is up to election officials to drive turnout is not something I philosophically agree with.”⁷⁸ In withdrawing his state from ERIC, Missouri Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft [objected](#) in particular to ERIC’s requirement of “a solicitation to individuals who already had an opportunity to register to vote and made the conscious decision to not be registered.” LaRose, the Ohio secretary of state, [said](#) states should not be “forced to meet specific requirements,” such as voter outreach.

A significant impact of the exodus from ERIC may be the suggestion that our elections are not secure — especially to those who, primed by former President Trump and his allies, already doubt the integrity of the electoral process. As Merrill, the former Alabama secretary of state, [said](#) about attacks on ERIC and other efforts to cast doubt on election systems: “I am concerned because it breeds potential problems in people’s minds. When that happens it can actually put people in a defensive posture and think if their candidate loses, ‘Well then the reason my candidate lost is my candidate got cheated.’”⁷⁹

Who is Cleta Mitchell?



Cleta Mitchell has been a prominent Republican voice in voting-rights battles since the 2000 presidential election recounts.⁸⁰ The election lawyer serves on the board of the conservative funding juggernaut the Bradley Foundation, where she has helped steer millions of dollars toward groups

that inflate fears of voter fraud to advocate for restrictive voting laws.⁸¹ She also sat on the advisory board of the federal U.S. Election Assistance Commission, an appointment that drew considerable criticism.⁸² In early 2023, American Oversight uncovered correspondence between Mitchell and right-wing groups in which she used unfounded claims of fraud to oppose expanded access to absentee voting.⁸³

In 2020, Mitchell became a central figure in former President Trump’s attempts to overturn his reelection defeat.⁸⁴ Mitchell, who helped the campaign launch legal challenges in Georgia, participated in the now-infamous call in which Trump asked Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to “find” him the votes he needed to win the state.⁸⁵

Mitchell subsequently took on an influential behind-the-scenes role in the effort to overturn the election, including helping to steer \$1 million from Trump to a discredited Arizona election “audit.”⁸⁶ Since then, Mitchell has become a leader in a network of activists energized by false claims about the 2020 election.⁸⁷ Mitchell’s Election Integrity Network grew out of her work with the Conservative Partnership Institute,⁸⁸ a group that is chaired by former U.S. senator and election denier Jim DeMint and that includes Trump’s former chief of staff Mark Meadows as a senior partner.⁸⁹

V. Other States' Withdrawals

Louisiana's withdrawal in 2022 set the stage for a fast-growing anti-ERIC campaign, resulting in a wave of states exiting in early 2023. Alabama's new secretary of state, Wes Allen, [campaigned on](#) a pledge to withdraw the state from ERIC⁹⁰ and followed through by [pulling Alabama](#) out of the group immediately upon assuming office in January 2023.⁹¹

In March of 2023, after Trump called for Republican governors to leave ERIC,⁹² Republican-led states began to withdraw in a more coordinated fashion. On March 6, [Florida](#),⁹³ [West Virginia](#),⁹⁴ and [Missouri](#)⁹⁵ all announced decisions to leave, citing one another's same-day withdrawals. Less than two weeks later, [Ohio](#)⁹⁶ and [Iowa](#)⁹⁷ joined the exodus, despite — just the month before — both states' secretaries of state having praised ERIC. Iowa's Paul Pate lauded ERIC as “[a godsend](#)”⁹⁸ and Ohio's Frank LaRose [raved](#) that ERIC was “one of the best fraud-fighting tools that we have” and that it had “provided great benefit for us.”⁹⁹

Once a critical mass of states had backed out of ERIC, some Republican voting officials began relying on the retreat itself as a reason to leave the group. In May, [Virginia](#) — which in 2012 under a Republican governor had been one of the founding members of the organization — became the eighth state to leave ERIC,¹⁰⁰ with the state's commissioner of elections, Susan Beals, [citing](#) the “increasing and uncertain costs resulting from the exit of ~20% of ERIC members.”¹⁰¹ In July, Texas' secretary of state submitted notice that [Texas](#) would be withdrawing from ERIC by mid-October to comply with new state legislation.

A spokesperson told the Texas Tribune, “As fewer states are participating, the costs are increasing

and the amount of data we're going to receive will be reduced.”¹⁰²

The documents American Oversight uncovered from these states reveal the artifice of their public explanations for leaving ERIC. Technocrats and political appointees recognized the benefits of ERIC and the risks of the misinformation surrounding it, but receptive offices continued to meet with far-right election deniers as the anti-ERIC campaign gained momentum in 2022 and early 2023, with some offices even communicating with activists within days or weeks of announced withdrawals.

Ohio and Iowa joined the exodus, despite — just the month before — both states' secretaries of state having praised ERIC. Iowa's Paul Pate lauded ERIC as “a godsend” and Ohio's Frank LaRose raved that ERIC was “one of the best fraud-fighting tools that we have” and that it had “provided great benefit for us.”

Florida, which had baselessly criticized ERIC for data security concerns and supposed partisan leanings, had long been targeted by those seeking to insert themselves into election administration. In March 2023, just four days after Florida withdrew from ERIC, records show the right-wing legal group PILF, headed by J. Christian Adams, emailed the Florida Secretary of State to offer “voter list maintenance leads like what may have been provided by [ERIC].”^{xvii} PILF has a long [history](#) of publishing misleading reports on voter fraud that disintegrate under scrutiny.¹⁰³

Public records show that at the same time, the West Virginia secretary of state's office had been in touch with the Virginia Election Integrity Working Group, which was working “to put pressure on our State Board of Elections to end Virginia's membership agreement with ERIC,”

Legislative pushes to withdraw states from ERIC

The right-wing campaign to undermine ERIC quickly established footholds in Republican legislatures. Texas' exit in 2023 had begun with the passage of Senate Bill 1070, which was signed into law by Gov. Greg Abbott that summer. The legislation allowing Texas to withdraw from ERIC had been introduced by state Sen. Bryan Hughes following discussions with right-wing activists, despite his admission months earlier that "there is no evidence that ERIC is doing anything to Texas voter rolls, I want to be clear about that."¹⁰⁴

The Republican task force involved in creating the legislation also included in the bill a requirement for a "private sector data system" limited to a cost of no more than \$100,000.

But records produced to American Oversight reveal the secretary of state's office had in March and May 2023 estimated the state would need \$750,000 annually for a new interstate crosscheck program, and said that the office was "unaware of specific programs that would comply with the requirements of this bill" — indicating lawmakers had instituted restrictions for the program they knew in advance would be unworkable.^{xxiv}

Legislative campaigns against ERIC also cropped up in other states. In Arizona, Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed Senate Bill 1135, which would have forced the state to withdraw from ERIC.¹⁰⁵ Oklahoma enacted legislation preventing it from joining multistate organizations that require outreach

to eligible but unregistered voters.¹⁰⁶ North Carolina's 2023 budget included a provision barring the state from joining ERIC,¹⁰⁷ and in the fall of 2023 in Wisconsin, Republican lawmakers introduced legislation to withdraw the state from ERIC.¹⁰⁸

In Pennsylvania, reporting in June 2023 indicated state Sen. Cris Dush, who has been an ally of the election denial movement since 2020,¹⁰⁹ repeatedly raised questions about ERIC during committee hearings.¹¹⁰ According to documents obtained by American Oversight, a staffer from Dush's state Senate committee held a call with the Missouri secretary of state in July 2023 to discuss withdrawing from ERIC and cross-state alternatives to the voter list maintenance program.

citing concerns about the sharing of personal information with outside groups.^{xviii}

In Missouri, where the secretary of state cited a handful of reasons for exiting ERIC, including the "opportunity for partisanship in voter registration and list maintenance," public documents reveal state officials' high-level contact with election deniers the month before the state's withdrawal. In February 2023, activist Heather Honey emailed the secretary's office to advocate for "Return[ing] Control and Management of State Data Back to the States."^{xix} Honey offered to research a transition plan and shared with officials National Change of Address data as well as reports containing baseless accusations; records obtained by American Oversight reveal that she and her group Verity Vote met with the office that same month.^{xx}

Records from behind the scenes in Missouri, Ohio, and Texas highlight competing dynamics: concern among top election administrators exiting ERIC even as the states' elected officials moved to do so. Emails American Oversight obtained from January 2022 show Trish Vincent,

Secretary Ashcroft's chief of staff, characterized the first of the Gateway Pundit's articles about ERIC as "horrible and misleading."^{xxi} In Texas, an assistant secretary of state emailed state Rep. Matt Shaheen's chief of staff in January 2023 to respond to a question about ERIC, debunking the Gateway Pundit's misinformation and explaining the benefits ERIC membership provided Texas. "ERIC helps Texas keep its voter rolls clean, and is currently the only way that we can get information on voters who are registered in Texas and in another state," he wrote. "This is an important election integrity tool."^{xxii} Two months later, the day Ohio withdrew, then-state Director of Elections Amanda Grandjean wrote to ERIC Executive Director Shane Hamlin, "As you know, I really worked as hard as I possibly could to avoid this."^{xxiii}

From: Grandjean, Amanda
Sent: Friday, March 17, 2023 3:51 PM
To: Hamlin, Shane
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] RE: Letter from Secretary LaRose

As you know, I really worked as hard as I possibly could to avoid this. Absolutely.

Thanks,
Mandi

VI. States Scramble to Replace ERIC

As more states left ERIC in 2023 in a bid to appease the far right, they faced an obvious consequence of their hasty retreat: The lack of any solid plan to replace ERIC. [Public reporting](#) and records obtained by American Oversight paint a picture of officials scrambling to replicate the benefits of ERIC membership, failing to adequately prepare election officials, and in several cases seeking key information or working on new programs well after they had made the decision to withdraw.

More than two months after Alabama Secretary of State Allen took office and announced the state's exit, the state's director of elections emailed Amy Cohen, the executive director of the National Association of State Election Directors, asking how to obtain National Change of Address (NCOA) data — a critical component of voter roll list maintenance.^{xxvi} In August 2023, three months after announcing its withdrawal, Virginia purchased the Limited Access Death Master File (LADMF).^{xxvii} The LADMF contains data with the Social Security numbers of individuals whose deaths were reported — data used to clean voter rolls that is accessible through ERIC. The next month, the state paid \$28,960 to SysAudits for the sole purpose of auditing LADMF data compliance, underscoring the high cost of withdrawing from ERIC.^{xxviii}

Election authorities and experts in Missouri were also [concerned](#) about the lack of a clear plan for voter roll maintenance following the state's exit in March.¹¹¹

That month, the state's Association of County Clerks and Election Authorities issued a statement calling on Missouri to “pursue an alternative resource” that would give local officials the necessary tools “to ensure secure, accurate, and efficient elections.”^{xxix} Missouri Director of Elections Chrissy Peters forwarded the email to Secretary Ashcroft and other high-level officials, writing that the secretary's office had informed local election authorities it would partner with the Social Security Administration and NCOA, but that “details on these reports would come at a later date.” The records obtained by American Oversight reveal that guidance about Missouri's plan for post-ERIC list maintenance was not provided to local authorities until June — three months after its withdrawal.^{xxx}

The creation of new cross-state data-sharing agreements — an effort led in part by the Ohio secretary of state's office — seems to have begun only after Ohio and Iowa had announced the [suspension](#) of their ERIC memberships, less than two weeks after Florida, Missouri, and West Virginia had done the same. On March 22, 2023, Ohio Elections Director Amanda Grandjean sent an email to officials in several states, requesting the convening of a “working group of states that would like to discuss ideas for securely sharing voter history and other relevant data for the purposes of identifying and investigating potential cross-state voter fraud.”^{xxxi} The working group, which comprised multiple sub-groups such as the Data Sharing Specifications Subcommittee and the Legal MOU Development Subcommittee, met regularly between March and June — after states had already left ERIC — to review potential data sources and discuss legal options for data-sharing agreements.^{xxxii}

The working group’s emails from the spring of 2023 provide a glimpse into how complicated it is to create a viable alternative to ERIC. Comments in the margins of a draft memorandum of understanding for working group participants, circulated by the Ohio secretary of state’s office in May, addressed a number of open questions with which states were grappling as they considered data-sharing options, such as the legality of sharing confidential active and inactive voter files, state rules about entering into data-sharing compacts, and how to manage information about potentially deceased voters.^{xxxiii} A central concern among the officials preparing those data-sharing agreements appears to have been the secure transfer, retention, and destruction of sensitive voter data: A meeting summary from June included an action item urging participating states to designate a cybersecurity point of contact.^{xxxiv}

Unlike ERIC, which was conceived in 2009 but not operable until 2012, the cross-state voter-roll maintenance plans appear to have been designed in a matter of months — with a host of issues still to be worked out.

In June, Georgia and South Carolina signed the first of several interstate data-sharing agreements.^{xxxv} Two months later, Georgia signed a similar agreement with Alabama to establish “a process for each State to improve the accuracy of each State’s voter registration list by identifying duplicate voter registration.”^{xxxvi} Public reporting shows [several other states](#) have finalized such agreements, including Ohio agreements with West Virginia, Virginia, and Florida,^{xxxvii, 112} Virginia agreements

with Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.;^{xxxviii, 113} Alabama agreements with Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Florida, and Tennessee;^{xxxix, 114} and Florida agreements with Georgia and West Virginia.^{xl} American Oversight also obtained a draft memorandum of understanding between Missouri and Florida,^{xli} yet another link in the increasingly complicated web of interstate agreements aimed at replicating ERIC’s partnership — but with each agreement subject to its own terms and security arrangements without any common quality control.

Unlike ERIC, which was [conceived](#) in 2009 but not operable until 2012,¹¹⁵ the cross-state voter-roll maintenance plans appear to have been designed in a matter of months — with a host of issues still to be worked out. The security and [effectiveness](#) of the quickly assembled patchwork of data-sharing agreements remains unclear.¹¹⁶ Reporting by NPR in October 2023 noted the data-sharing agreements appeared to lack the critical DMV data that makes ERIC reliable and effective, including Social Security numbers and other driver’s license information.¹¹⁷ As one former county clerk in Utah told NPR, “These states have decided that instead of using a wheel, they’re going to invent a spherical device that will allow them to easily transport and roll items from A to B.”

VII. Election Denier Ties to ERIC Alternatives

The dangers of states' hasty abandonment of ERIC is not limited to administrative functions or data security. The resulting void has provided fertile ground for activists and private interests — including many of the same people involved in efforts to overturn the 2020 election — who see an opportunity to continue to undermine trust in U.S. democracy by inserting themselves into voter roll maintenance and election administration. At the same time, outside groups and private companies supported by election deniers have developed new products that experts warn will make it easier for voter-fraud vigilantes to challenge and threaten the voting rights of thousands.

In meetings with top election officials, Cleta Mitchell and associates in her Election Integrity Network have pushed to be more involved in voter roll maintenance. American Oversight obtained a May 2023 email from Mitchell to Donald Kersey, the West Virginia secretary of state's general counsel, and Chief of Staff Chuck Flannery: "You made reference last week to some databases that your office and clerks used in your efforts to clean voter rolls and to maintain their accuracy," Mitchell wrote. "Do you mind sending me those databases and any information about them, so I can forward them to the National Working Group on Voter Rolls? I've had some questions from participants who'd like to know more and follow up about obtaining those databases."^{xiii} The records do not contain a reply from the secretary of state's office, but it is notable that such data-sharing with outside groups is what ERIC had falsely been accused of doing.

A week earlier, Secretary Warner had spoken at a convening of the Voter Rolls National Working Group, hosted by the Virginia Institute for Public Policy, about steps West Virginia was taking to maintain list accuracy.^{xiii} [Reporting](#) in May 2023 indicated Mitchell's Election Integrity Network was being partially folded into the Virginia Institute for Public Policy (VIPP),¹¹⁸ which is a member of the State Policy Network, an alliance of more than 100 think tanks that regularly [advocate](#) for extreme right-wing policies.¹¹⁹ Several VIPP board members are affiliated with the Council for National Policy,¹²⁰ an [ultra-secretive](#) group of conservative activists,¹²¹ or have ties to the Charles Koch Foundation and the Federalist Society.¹²²

That same week, Secretary Warner and his general counsel, Donald Kersey, had presented at a webinar about post-ERIC plans to clean voter rolls, moderated by Hayden Ludwig of Restoration of America, who authored several anti-ERIC reports published by Capital Research Center in late 2022.¹²³ The discussion was hosted by the Election Integrity Network and Virginia Fair Elections, a coalition that includes "election integrity" groups such as VIPP, the Amistad Project, and Conservative Partnership Institute.¹²⁴ A June 2023 email also illustrates the extent to which, with ERIC out of the picture, Warner's office was working with VIPP and Mitchell's network: In the email, the Election Integrity Network's Julia Hecht mentioned that Kersey had requested a handout that had been shared with VIPP's voter rolls working group by Rick Richards, the founder of a company known as EagleAI NETWORK. Hecht sent Kersey a copy of the handout as well as a recording of a meeting that VIPP and Election Integrity Network representatives had held with EagleAI.^{xiv}

EagleAI, which was created in the summer of 2022 by Richards, a retired Georgia medical doctor,¹²⁵ is a database used by right-wing activists on the hunt for voter fraud.¹²⁶

[Reporting](#) by Documented found that Valid Vote, EagleAI’s associated nonprofit, was formed around the same time by Compass Legal Group, a firm associated with Mitchell.¹²⁷ EagleAI materials [assert](#) that the software will become “the tool of reckoning across the nation,”¹²⁸ and an EagleAI planning document [refers](#) to the software as “[E]xcel on steroids.”^{xlv}

Election experts have uniformly been unimpressed by EagleAI. Georgia Elections Director Blake Evans [told NBC News](#), “EagleAI draws inaccurate conclusions and then presents them as if they are evidence of wrongdoing,” adding that the program “offers zero additional value to Georgia’s existing list maintenance procedures.”¹²⁹ Despite these vulnerabilities, EagleAI and its proponents, including Mitchell, have argued for state and local election officials to use the company’s voter roll management software as an “alternative” to ERIC, with Valid Vote reportedly setting a [goal](#) of raising \$2.1 million in advance of the 2024 elections.¹³⁰

In early December 2023, Georgia’s Columbia County agreed to use EagleAI¹³¹ despite warnings by voting-rights experts and the state elections board that the system could not be trusted to provide reliable information.¹³² Records obtained by American Oversight include an email from the Columbia County elections director to Richards just two months earlier asking about an alleged “hack” that had been mentioned at a county election board meeting. Richards acknowledged that EagleAI servers became inoperative “possibly due to an attack on the Windows server software. Activity did not breach [sic] the EagleAI NETwork software.” Richards said in his email that the company took security “very seriously” and noted that EagleAI “contains only public available data” — a shortcoming shared by the inter-state agreements seeking to replicate ERIC, whose secure use of information from non-public DMV databases makes it reliable and effective.^{xlvi}

From: Data at Voter Reference Foundation <data@voterreferencefoundation.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 8, 2023 5:34 PM
To: elections.boe.elections@elections.ri.gov
Cc: Data at Voter Reference Foundation
Subject: [EXTERNAL]: Absentee Ballot Reports

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the RI Department of State. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good afternoon,

We request that you provide us with the FINAL absentee ballot and early voting reports for the 2020, 2018, General Elections. We are looking for absentee ballot request/return tracking data for all voters, statewide. Here is an example of what we are looking for. The information below is available for download on [Georgia](#).

County	Voter Registration #	Last Name	First Name	Middle Name	Suffix	Street #	Street Name	Apt/Uni
APPLING								
APPLING								
APPLING								
APPLING								
APPLING								
APPLING								

Application Status	Ballot Status	Status Reason	Application Date	Ballot Issued Date	Ballot Return Date	Ballot Style	Ballo
∩ A	A		9/1/2022	10/11/2022	10/17/2022	MAILED	NO
∩ A	A		9/19/2022	10/11/2022	10/17/2022	MAILED	NO
∩ A	A		9/19/2022	10/11/2022	11/1/2022	MAILED	NO
∩ A	A		10/17/2022	10/17/2022	10/17/2022	IN PERSON	NO
∩ A	A		10/4/2022	10/11/2022	10/26/2022	MAILED	NO
∩ A	A		9/1/2022	10/11/2022	10/17/2022	MAILED	NO

Please let us know if there is a fee associated with this request or if we can provide further clarification.

Thank you,

Voter Reference Foundation
 844-302-2109 (Office)
data@voterreferencefoundation.com



Kristina Kidd
 FOIA Coordinator
 Voter Reference Foundation
uata@voterreferencefoundation.com



From: Data at Voter Reference Foundation <data@voterreferencefoundation.com>
Sent: Monday, June 12, 2023 2:29 PM
To: elections
Cc: Data at Voter Reference Foundation
Subject: [EXTERNAL]: ACP program

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the RI Department of State. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Good afternoon,

Can you please tell me how many voters were registered Address Confidentiality Program or any other protected/confidential program participants as of the 11/8/2022 general election? I am not looking for personal information, just the number of voters in the program.

Thank you,

Voter Reference Foundation
 844-302-2109 (Office)
data@voterreferencefoundation.com



Kristina Kidd
 FOIA Coordinator
 Voter Reference Foundation
uata@voterreferencefoundation.com



From: Ian Camacho <ian.c.camacho@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 1, 2023 4:12 PM
To: vote@johnsoncountytexas.org; nodclerk@gmail.com; Nodaway County; Nodaway County
Cc: SOSMain; Elections-1
Subject: Potential Double voter in 2020 GE in Nodaway County, MO and Johnson County, TX

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please use Phish Alert to report it.

Dear Nodaway County, MO and Johnson County, TX Elections Divisions,

I am bringing to your attention what appears to be a person who double voted in the states of Texas

From: Ian Camacho <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday, February 14, 2023 5:32 PM
To: Robyn Morrison <Robyn.Morrison@senate.texas.gov>
Subject: Re: Great to Meet You!

Hi Robyn,

Instead of waiting I have already started submitting these myself and gotten investigations going in other states and TX.

But to the questions:

I know for a fact that none were submitted on the SoS elections complaint form.

These were sent in anonymously via a pseudonym (Totes Legit Votes) and I was blind copied on the email of 66 names and he also just sent me another list of about 9 more (75 total). I told him that I will fill in the forms as a citizen so that they have a formal complaint record for statistics and to have the claim going, and I am also submitting to the counties

EagleAI is not the only tool that voter-fraud activists may use to crowdsource data for the purposes of issuing voter challenges. [Reporting](#) suggests EagleAI interacts with VoteRef.com,¹³³ an online project run by Gina Swoboda, the executive director of the Voter Reference Foundation and a former [organizer](#) of Donald Trump's 2020 campaign in Arizona.¹³⁴ Swoboda's website, designed to be a resource for people who want to inspect voter rolls for fraud, includes voter information from 32 states and the District of Columbia.¹³⁵ Voting-rights and privacy advocates have voiced [concerns](#) that, like EagleAI, VoteRef could be used not just to compromise individual privacy, but also to intimidate voters, cause mass cancellations of voting registrations, and inundate local election offices with burdensome, time-consuming, and inaccurate challenges.¹³⁶

Mitchell also appears to be involved in facilitating connections between VoteRef and election officials: Records obtained by American Oversight show that Mitchell introduced Swoboda to Wyoming Secretary of State Chuck Gray in January 2023 and corresponded over text about voter identification records and Gray's statements¹³⁷ in support of auditing ballot counts by hand.^{xlvii} Emails indicate Swoboda had contacted Gray and his office multiple times throughout the year.^{xlviii}

Information gleaned from VoteRef has fueled numerous voter challenges and fraud allegations. In February 2023, Ian Camacho — the research director at Look Ahead America, a group that [supported](#) defendants facing charges for participating in the January 6 insurrection¹³⁸ — contacted a Texas Senate staffer asking about the

“anonymous tipster” known as Totes Legit Votes^{xlix} According to an email from the staffer to the Texas secretary of state’s office, the tipster had flagged “approximately 75” alleged double voters.^l The secretary’s office responded that its Elections Division had received multiple emails from Totes Legit Votes, but that because of the high volume, the office was not sending acknowledgments in response to each message.^{li}

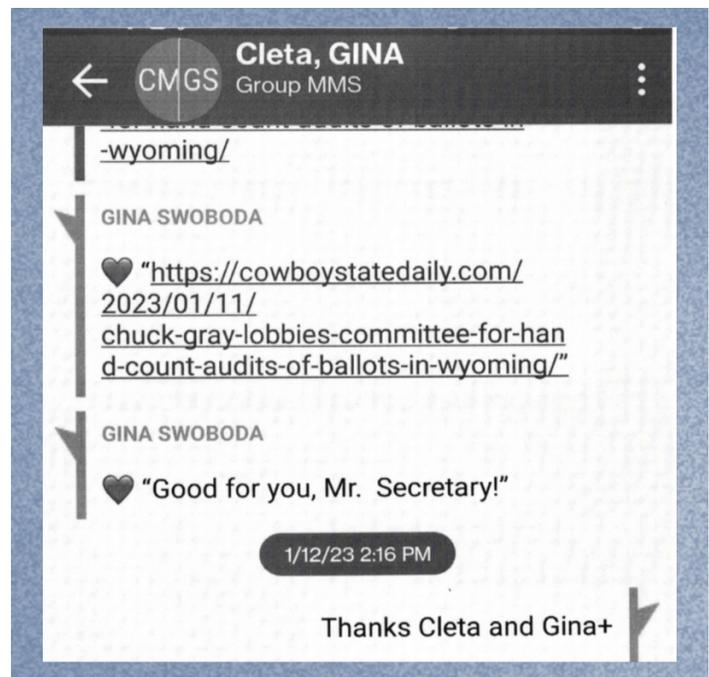
Records of similar complaints lodged by Camacho and Totes Legit Votes with the Missouri secretary of state’s office in March suggest that they had used the VoteRef database.^{lii} Camacho also cited VoteRef data in an email to election officials in Wake County, North Carolina, alleging instances of double voting.^{liii} The records from Missouri indicate that officials quickly debunked several of the allegations,^{liv} even cautioning staff not to click on links shared by Totes Legit Votes.^{lv} Other documents reveal several requests from the Voter Reference Foundation for data from the Wyoming, West Virginia, and Rhode Island secretaries of state.^{lvi}

In Arizona, state Sens. Wendy Rogers, a vocal election denier, and John Kavanagh both separately emailed Swoboda to ask for her thoughts about another voter data monitoring software called Omega4America that was being pushed by fraud activists.^{lvii} According to the [Texas Tribune](#), the software was initially funded by MyPillow CEO and prominent election denier [Mike Lindell](#).^{l39} The program’s creator, Jay Valentine, is a frequent contributor to Gateway Pundit and was active in post-2020 election denial efforts, including by pushing his “Fractal programming technology” as a way to identify supposed voter-roll issues and authoring a report used by government officials and activists seeking to cast doubt on Wisconsin’s 2020 election results.^{l40}

According to documents obtained by American Oversight, Valentine also appears to be trying to step into the empty space ERIC once filled. In March 2023, Valentine sent a letter to Texas Sen. Bryan Hughes, who sponsored the

legislation pulling Texas out of ERIC, offering to demonstrate how Omega4America’s Fractal technology could be used “to study Texas voter rolls and clean them of phantom voters and fake addresses.”^{lviii} Valentine also pitched the system to Texas Secretary of State Jane Nelson in May as “the most comprehensive, scalable voter roll management, reporting and monitoring system in production today.”^{lix} Other documents obtained by American Oversight and reported on by [NPR](#)^{l41} reveal that in August, Nelson shared with top staff an “[i]nteresting article” written by Valentine about his Fractal technology.^{lx}

Notably, none of the replacement programs or interstate agreements contain provisions aimed at increasing voter participation. Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of ERIC — and the unproven claims, uncertain costs, and alarming opportunities for voter intimidation inherent in programs like EagleAI and VoteRef — election deniers are fiercely advocating for ERIC replacements that would advance their own anti-democratic agenda, and perhaps line their pockets.



Text message exchange with Gina Swoboda, Clleta Mitchell, and Wyoming Secretary of State Chuck Gray.

VIII. Conclusion

As states continue to struggle to find or devise adequate alternatives to ERIC, the full repercussions of their hasty abandonment of the partnership have yet to be realized. But with the 2024 primary elections just around the corner, election experts and voting rights advocates are concerned about the impact, particularly as activists and groups with a demonstrated antipathy toward widening access to the ballot attempt to fill the void.

“We are concerned that conspiracy theorists have targeted ERIC, and that since they started doing so, nine states have left ERIC — often without the prior knowledge or approval of local officials who have depended on the program for years,” stated the Brennan Center for Justice. “We are equally concerned that state officials and election denial activists are developing and considering other list maintenance tools that appear to be far less reliable and that may risk: 1) intimidating and disenfranchising voters; 2) generating misinformation about the accuracy of our elections; and 3) compromising data privacy.”

Voter fraud in the United States is extremely rare. In 2007, the Brennan Center found fraud incident rates to be between 0.0003 percent and 0.0025 percent¹⁴²; a 2014 [study by the Washington Post](#) found that out of more than 1 billion ballots cast between 2000 and 2014, there were only 31 credible instances of impersonation fraud.¹⁴³ Other reputable studies have consistently concluded that incidents of fraud are negligible.¹⁴⁴ But for decades, overblown claims have been used by conservative activists and strategists to justify new voting restrictions and to push back at attempts to make it easier for people to cast ballots.¹⁴⁵

Former President Trump’s lies about a stolen election took the long-simmering myth of widespread voter fraud and turned it into an existential threat not only to the efficient and safe administration of elections, but also to American democracy itself.

“Building and maintaining confidence in our elections has never been more important, and trusted, bipartisan resources such as ERIC help do exactly that,” said nonpartisan Secure Democracy. By bowing to conspiracy theories and baseless claims about ERIC, leaders of the nine states that have withdrawn from ERIC have made it harder for their officials to ensure that elections are administered efficiently and safely — and have increased the potential for post-election chaos that can fuel more false claims of fraud based on faulty analyses of voter lists. “Abandoning ERIC will not only needlessly create extra work for election officials, making it more challenging for them to ensure that their voter rolls are up to date, but also harms voters by subjecting them to potential removal from the registration rolls based on unreliable information,” said Jonathan Diaz, the director of Campaign Legal Center. He continued, “The exodus from ERIC threatens to make our democracy less secure, eroding voters’ confidence in the system as we head into a crucial election year.”

While instances of actual fraud remain few and far between, the potential for disenfranchisement thanks to overzealous activists — who either believe the lies about a stolen election or see the partisan advantage in stoking those fears — is of grave concern. That threat is particularly acute for people of color and members of marginalized communities whose voting rights have long been targeted or who are more vulnerable to challenges.

“We commend those election officials who have resisted these calls to withdraw despite efforts from election deniers to push conspiracy theories and faulty systems to replace ERIC, many of which will put voters at risk of being improperly removed from registration lists and having their personal information leaked or misused,” said Sylvia Albert, the director of Common Cause’s Voting and Elections Program.

As [Voting Rights Lab has noted](#), at the same time ERIC has become a punching bag for right-wing election deniers, “many state legislatures are manufacturing new reasons for removing eligible voters from the rolls and/or creating new systems that lack safeguards protecting against the wrongful removal of eligible voters — instead of focusing on ways to ensure that every eligible voter registers to vote.”¹⁴⁶ The objections to ERIC’s proactive outreach to unregistered voters is a glaring reminder of the choice not to prioritize increasing access to the ballot.

This is a critical juncture for American democracy. The election denial movement did not disband after the failed coup of January 6, 2021, and it

is rooted in the same forces that for decades have fought against efforts to widen access to the ballot and have used baseless claims of fraud to render illegitimate the will of voters. “We have many systems that keep our elections safe, secure, and fair,” added Albert of Common Cause. “It is crucial to combat disinformation that is rooted in false narratives and designed to harm voters.”

A central task in countering that disinformation is exposing the communications of government officials, including with whom they have met and what they have said behind closed doors. The government records detailed in this report reveal the hollowness of state leaders’ public explanations for leaving ERIC, their failures in fulfilling their obligations to find replacements for such a vital tool, and the outside individuals and groups pushing ERIC’s demise for political or financial reasons. Our system of government depends upon an engaged and informed electorate. As another monumental election year approaches, the American people deserve to know how lies about the last election continue to threaten the health and strength of our democracy.

Government Records Obtained by American Oversight

- i. LA-SOS-22-0418-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records and Communications Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 231–233, received by American Oversight June 23, 2023.
- ii. LA-SOS-23-0660-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Recording of Call Between Staff and ERIC Executive Director](#)," received by American Oversight July 26, 2023.
- iii. LA-SOS-22-0482-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 16, received by American Oversight November 14, 2023.
- iv. LA-SOS-22-0230-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Communications with Specific External Entities](#)," 1–12, received by American Oversight June 27, 2023.
- v. LA-SOS-22-0230-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Communications with Specific External Entities](#)," 12.
- vi. LA-SOS-22-0230-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Communications with Specific External Entities](#)," 28–30; LA-SOS-22-0482-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 1, 687.
- vii. LA-SOS-22-0482-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 4.
- viii. LA-SOS-22-0482-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 671–686.
- ix. LA-SOS-22-0230-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Communications with Specific External Entities](#)," 36.
- x. LA-SOS-22-0230-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Communications with Specific External Entities](#)," 27–28.
- xi. LA-SOS-22-0482-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 1, 4–5, 442, 665.
- xii. LA-SOS-22-0482-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 4–14.
- xiii. LA-SOS-22-0418-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records and Communications Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 143.
- xiv. LA-SOS-22-0418-A: "[Louisiana Secretary of State Records and Communications Regarding Voting Systems Commission Meeting](#)," 217.
- xv. WV-SOS-23-0760-A: "[West Virginia Secretary of State Communications with Anti-ERIC Activists](#)," 35, received by American Oversight October 11, 2023.
- xvi. FL-DOS-23-0046-A: "[Florida Department of State Communications with Specific Entities](#)," 19, 128–129; received by American Oversight August 22, 2023.
- xvii. FL-DOS-23-0298-A: "[Florida Department of State Communications with Representatives of Public Interest Legal Foundation and Meeting Records](#)," 5–7, received by American Oversight April 20, 2023.
- xviii. WV-SOS-23-0427-A: "[West Virginia Secretary of State Communications and Assessments About the State's Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 67–68, received by American Oversight August 21, 2023.
- xix. MO-SOS-23-0422-A: "[Missouri Secretary of State Email Communications About Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 2153, received by American Oversight July 7, 2023.
- xx. MO-SOS-23-0422-A: "[Missouri Secretary of State Email Communications About Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 2153–2154.
- xxi. MO-SOS-23-1071-A: "[Missouri Secretary of State Communications with Anti-ERIC Activists](#)," 322, received by American Oversight August 24, 2023.
- xxii. TX-SOS-23-0425-A: "[Texas Secretary of State Communications and Assessments About State's Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 408, received by American Oversight September 8, 2023.
- xxiii. OH-SOS-23-0424-A: "[Ohio Secretary of State Communications and Assessments about Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 4, received by American Oversight August 25, 2023.
- xxiv. TX-SOS-23-0769-A: "[Texas Secretary of State Records Related to ERIC Replacements](#)," 29, received by American Oversight October 9, 2023.
- xxv. MO-SOS-23-0421-A: "[Missouri Secretary of State Email Communications About Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 36–40, received by American Oversight August 10, 2023.
- xxvi. AL-SOS-23-0675, 23-0676-A: "[Alabama Secretary of State Records Regarding Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 151, received by American Oversight October 11, 2023.
- xxvii. VA-DOE-23-1084-A: "[Virginia Department of Elections Records Regarding ERIC Alternative](#)," 20, 40–42; received by American Oversight November 10, 2023.
- xxviii. VA-DOE-23-1084-A: "[Virginia Department of Elections Records Regarding ERIC Alternative](#)," 21–23, 40–41.
- xxix. MO-SOS-23-0421-A: "[Missouri Secretary of State Email Communications About Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 1391–1392.

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- xxxi. MO-SOS-23-0422-A: "[Missouri Secretary of State Email Communications About Withdrawal from ERIC](#)," 1091.
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