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11.09.20 – Mo - - -

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11.09.20 – Mo - - - News

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11.09.20 – Mo - - - News Placed in Nov 09 spot – Monday

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A poll worker stamps a voter's ballot at a drop-off location in Austin, Texas, on Oct. 13.

Sergio Flores / Getty Images

By Kipp Jones | Published November 9, 2020 at 11:41am

A Texas woman has been charged with 134 counts of election fraud after she allegedly acted to register nursing home residents, many of whom were mentally incapacitated, to vote in the 2020 election.

Kelly Reagan Brunner, a social worker in the Lone Star State community of Mexia, is accused by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton of acting as an agent for 67 residents at the Mexia State Supported Living Center.

According to a complaint from the state AG's office, Brunner took advantage of the residents by registering them to vote without their consent.

Her ultimate plan, according to Paxton, was to use her position as a proponent for those with disabilities to acquire mail-in ballots so she could vote on their behalf.

"I strongly commend the Limestone County District Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Office, and Elections Office, as well as the Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General for their outstanding work on this case and their commitment to ensuring a free and fair Presidential election in the face of unprecedented voter fraud," Paxton said in a news release.

He added, “Registering citizens to vote or to obtain mail ballots without their consent is illegal.”

The Texas Attorney General’s Office said the alleged fraud was uncovered through a collaborative investigation involving its election fraud unit, the Limestone County Sheriff’s Office, the Limestone County district attorney and other agencies.

The news release from the Texas AG accused Brunner of submitting “voter registration applications for 67 residents without their signature or effective consent, while purporting to act as their agent.”

The release noted that facilities such as the Mexia State Supported Living Center “serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.”

“In Texas law, only a parent, spouse or child who is a qualified voter of the county may act as an agent in registering a person to vote, after being appointed to do so by that person,” it said.

The release added, “None of the SSLC patients gave effective consent to be registered, and a number of them have been declared totally mentally incapacitated by a court, thereby making them ineligible to vote in Texas.”

Paxton referenced the importance of free and fair elections when commenting on Brunner’s case.

11.09.20

Palestinians refugees of 1949 confident Biden will restore UNRWA support

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UNRWA says lacks funds to pay full Palestinian salaries

UN agency says it never recovered from cut to its funding imposed by Trump, taking away \$300 million, a third of its core annual budget; officials say they are in talks with Biden team

AFP| Published: 11.09.20 , 19:45

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, hammered by U.S. cuts, said Monday it lacks the funds to pay full November salaries but is confident President-elect Joe Biden's administration will restore support.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) "never recovered" from the total funding cut imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump in 2018, agency spokeswoman Tamara Arifai told AFP.

Before Trump's cuts the U.S. had been providing UNRWA \$300 million a year, roughly a third of its core annual budget.

Alrifai said 2019 shortfalls were filled by additional support from several Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

Both the European Union and individual European states, notably Germany, also helped close the gap, she said.

This year, "financial support waned," Alrifai added, noting that the coronavirus pandemic "didn't help", as key donors faced increased domestic financial pressures.

"The agency needs to raise US \$70 million by the end of the month if it is to pay full salaries for the months of November and December," an UNRWA statement said.

The funding shortfall affects 28,000 staffers, spread across Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Only those whose work is covered by special emergency budgets could be spared, Alrifai said.

Israel had been critical of UNRWA before Trump's election, arguing its presence was no longer necessary decades after the conflict following Israel's creation in 1948 that created some 750,000 Palestinian refugees.

The Jewish state has also criticized rules under which Palestinians can hand down refugee status to their children.

After taking office in 2017, the staunchly pro-Israel Trump administration began echoing Israeli criticism of the agency before cutting funds the following year.

On the possible impact of Biden's election win, Alrifai said UNRWA was "very optimistic the US will resume its support".

Asked if the agency had received specific commitments from the incoming administration, she said: "We have engaged very close with the Biden campaign team and they do understand the uniqueness of UNRWA for the stability of the region."

Biden's 2020 campaign website said he would restore "humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people" but did not directly mention UNRWA.

The agency's core annual budget for 2020 stood at \$806 million, with an additional \$300 million for emergency programs, including the coronavirus response and Palestinians caught up in Syria's conflict.

Founded in 1949, UNRWA runs schools and provides health services as well as other humanitarian aid to an estimated 5.7 million Palestinians with refugee status.

11.09.20

Trump nominates new Defense Secretary after former Secretary opposition

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Trump fires defense secretary after clash over using military against U.S. protesters

POTUS splits with Esper over range of issues, chief among them is Esper's public opposition to Trump's threats to use active-duty military forces to suppress street protests

Reuters| Published: 11.09.20 , 21:40

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Monday that he had "terminated" Defense Secretary Mark Esper, appearing to use his final months in office after his election defeat to settle scores within his administration.

Trump had split with Esper over a range of issues and was particularly angered by Esper's public opposition to Trump's threats to use active duty military forces this summer to suppress street protests over racial injustice after police killed George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Trump, on Twitter, said Christopher Miller, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, will become acting secretary of defense. The Senate would be highly unlikely to confirm any new nominee before Trump leaves office in January.

"Mark Esper has been terminated," Trump said on Twitter, adding that Miller would be acting secretary "effective immediately."

I am pleased to announce that Christopher C. Miller, the highly respected Director of the National Counterterrorism Center (unanimously confirmed by the Senate), will be Acting Secretary of Defense, effective immediately..

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) November 9, 2020

The Pentagon had no immediate comment.

Sources said Esper had long been preparing for the prospect of his resignation or dismissal following last week's election, particularly if Trump were to win a second term in office.

Trump has steadfastly refused to acknowledge his election loss.

Trump has had an uneasy relationship with the Pentagon, where Esper and top brass have repeatedly sought to avoid being seen as a political instrument of the Trump administration.

Esper's predecessor, Jim Mattis, quit in 2018 over policy differences with Trump, including on Syria. Mattis in June criticized Trump as the "first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people - does not even pretend to try. Instead he tries to divide us."

Like Mattis, Esper also disagreed with Trump's dismissive attitude toward the NATO alliance and was wary of Trump's inclination to see U.S. military alliances through an explicitly transactional lens even as he backed Trump's calls for allies to increase defense spending, sources said.