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Hogan No Hero on Voting -- as National Governors Chair, He Could Have Set National Precedent with Mail Ballots

By *Robert Weiner* and *Wesam Farah*

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While the Maryland chief elections officer, Linda Lamone, stopped the Post Office this week from sending guidance postcards to Maryland state voters with inaccurate information for Maryland, Governor Hogan on the other hand has kneecapped himself by forcing people to apply for mail ballots or vote in person. Mail ballots were automatically mailed to voters in the primaries.

People want easy and safe voting-- as Hogan had allowed in the Maryland primaries and which worked safely. As Chair of the National Governors Association, Hogan had a chance to establish a national precedent in Maryland in the general election. Sadly, he's now resigned himself to be Trump's acolyte.

In lieu of actually instituting comprehensive mail voting by November, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan has approved dwindling Maryland's polling centers down to 360, despite the state having 1800 polling precincts.

Despite Maryland allowing for early, and no-excuse absentee voting, they still lack the primaries' system in which a ballot was mailed to each registered voter, which everyone can then mail in without having to risk COVID.

Had Hogan insisted on instilling mail-in ballots, perhaps more governors and even Congress would have followed his lead and taken swift action.

While this decision to kneecap mail voting may not make a significant impact on Maryland's presidential race, it sets a worrying example of state governors who are willing to cave to Trump's demands and not institute comprehensive voting reform. Moreover, it could influence the Congressional Race for Maryland's 1st district, which will feature Republican Incumbent Andrew Harris running against Democratic challenger Mia Mason.

Following the gutting of the USPS carried out by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a major Trump donor, mail has been arriving later and ballot sorting machines have been dismantled or moved. Allowing Maryland to continue without a mail ballot system makes Hogan complicit in collaborating with Trump to sabotage our democracy.

Lack of mail ballots will affect younger and lower income voters the hardest, which is likely what Trump is counting on. Election Day is a work day, and voting in long lines could cost desperately needed income.

Trump, in order to lend credibility to his skepticism towards mail voting, has cited a case in Paterson, New Jersey in which several ballots are purported to have "gone missing" and have never surfaced. What Trump fails to realize is that this is perfectly normal. Most of the "missing ballots" that Trump cites are simply citizens who have chosen not to vote. The actual fraud was some 150 ballots and prosecutions are already underway. Ballots not being returned is not voter fraud, it is apathetic voters. Trump is leaving out the facts in an effort to tamper with Democracy.

It is not just Democrats who are concerned about Trump's open disdain for the post office. Baltimore resident John Bolton, when interviewed at the National Press Club and asked whether or not Trump is attempting to tamper with the USPS,

he expressed concern, stating "it would be troubling" if he was. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said mail-in voting is safe in his home state of Kentucky and around the country.

So why has Governor Hogan chosen to play into Trump's hands? Regardless, it is too late to do anything about it now other than push early voting.

The best solution for Democrats in Maryland would be to target the procrastinators and encourage them to mail their ballot weeks early. We must reach out to neglected, impoverished, and college communities and guide them through the steps to register for early voting. Or, as Michelle Obama stressed in her Democratic National Convention speech, tell voters to "Bring your lunch" to wait out the long voting lines.

Robert Weiner is a former spokesman for the Clinton White House, the House Government Operations Committee, and was senior staff for Congressman John Conyers, Charles Rangel, Claude Pepper, Ed Koch, Sen. Edward Kennedy; and 4-Star Gen. Barry McCaffrey. He was youth voter registration coordinator for the Democratic National Committee/Young Democrats in 1971-1972 when 18 year-olds first obtained the right to vote and testified at congressional hearings on mail-in registration in 1972.

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