

## Electors for Trump urged to have second thoughts

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When Joyce Haas noticed late last month that her mailbox was stuffed fuller than usual, she chalked it up to the arrival of the holiday season.

"I thought, okay, it's Christmas card time!" said Haas, 70, one of 538 electors from across the country who will officially pick the next president later this month.

This was no flood of season's greetings. It was the start of what she said has been a steady stream of 150 to 200 letters, postcards and handwritten notes urging her to disregard Donald Trump's victory in her home state of Pennsylvania and vote for someone else. She said she has received thousands more messages via email.

"To me, it has been a form of harassment," said Haas, a Republican fully committed to voting for Trump.

Many other electors in states won by the president-elect have experienced similar pressure, with a constellation of anti-Trump activists, organized groups and rogue electors waging an urgent, long-shot attempt to prevent Trump from taking office. A Republican elector from Texas said this week that he will not vote for Trump.

On Tuesday, two Democratic electors in Colorado filed a lawsuit in federal court challenging a state law that requires them to vote for the winner of the state's popular vote, the Denver Post reported. They had pledged to support Democrat Hillary Clinton, who won the state's nine electoral college votes. The suit is part of efforts in several states to use the electoral college vote to block Trump from winning the presidency.

Although such efforts do not appear to have put Trump's expected victory in doubt, they have infused a normally dull quadrennial exercise with political tensions still raw nearly a month after Trump's defeat of Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, who easily beat Trump in the popular vote but fell short in the electoral college. They have also given rise to a new round of questions about how the electoral college should operate and whether it should continue at all.

The 538 electors are to vote on Dec. 19. Before Election Day, political parties in each state chose competing rosters of electors. In states where Trump won, the Republican slate will vote this month. The number of electors in each state corresponds to the size of its congressional delegation.

There is no federal law binding electors to the results in their states, and state-level guidelines governing electors vary. "More than 99 percent of electors have voted as pledged" throughout history, according to the National Archives. Trump would defeat Clinton 306 to 232 if all of them do so this month.

However, Texas elector Christopher Suprun wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed published online Monday that he does not plan to vote for Trump because the president-elect is "someone who shows daily he is not qualified for the office." He urged others to rally behind a Republican alternative, such as Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Haas, who is the vice chair of the Pennsylvania Republican Party, shared with *The Washington Post* examples of letters and emails she has received, including a few that came in an envelope with the same Stockton, Calif., return address but that were signed by different people.

"Here are the reasons why you MUST vote for Secretary Clinton," the letters read. They argue that Trump has engaged in "unethical" business practices and has appointed people with records of "BIGOTRY" to senior White House posts.

Kimba Livesay, 52, who confirmed that she spearheaded the effort to draft and send the letters, said she started organizing a local group of about 240 women the day after the election. She called Trump "dangerous," and she said she uses her return address in Stockton because "people were afraid to put their own return address on there."

"We just want our voices to be heard. Do I think it will really change the outcome? I don't know. Do I think that they might think about it a little differently this time around? Maybe so. And that's our hope," Livesay said.

Charles Potts, 72, a Republican elector from Oklahoma, said he has heard from just two people: a woman from Texas and a person who claimed to be from Boston. But the text exchange with the latter individual shortly after Election Day, which he shared with *The Post*, was impassioned.

"Vote for Hillary. Do it, Charles," it read.

Potts replied, "Why would I do that?"

"Because Trump is a fascist bigot who will reduce the rights and outcomes of so many Americans," the texter wrote.

Potts, who provided the texts and phone number to *The Post*, said he never got a reply when he asked for the texter's name. A person who answered a call placed to the phone number quickly hung up.

Ebby Amir, 28, a software engineer from New York, has collected elector contact information through Google searches and with a friend started a website called Ask the Electors, which provides people with a way to email electors with their concerns directly. Through the group, more than 90,000 emails have been sent, he said.

"After the election, there was this sort of frustration to get involved and have more of a voice," said Amir, who acknowledged that reversing the outcome, as he would like, is a "long shot."

Bret Chiafalo, 38, a Democratic elector from Washington state who started the group Hamilton Electors, is taking a different approach. He is discouraging people from reaching out to electors. Instead, he is talking to them privately in hopes of persuading enough to unite behind a Republican alternative to Trump.

The name of Chiafalo's group nods to Alexander Hamilton's writings in the Federalist Papers, which he and other Trump critics hold up as an argument that the electoral college should serve as a safeguard against allowing someone unfit for the presidency to serve.

Many see what Chiafalo and others are doing as nothing more than sour grapes. Robert Asher, 79, a Republican elector from Pennsylvania, said he understands that some might be upset about how Trump won the presidency, but he said that anyone disputing the validity of the institution is a sore loser.

"That's just the way elections are. I don't understand why they can't understand that," he said.

Mark Weston, an electoral college expert who has written a book, said the likelihood of electors defying Trump is "improbable" because it would require bipartisan coordination unheard of in these rancorous political times.

"One-eighth of Trump's 306 electors, 38 of them, would need to desert him for another Republican, and then if the Democrats were to join those 38 - maybe vote for John Kasich, then Kasich could have 270 electoral votes," he said. "Unless the Democrats join in, no one is getting the majority, in which case the election goes to the House of Representatives, and it's Republican."

Clinton's win in the overall popular vote - she leads by more than 2.6 million votes, with more ballots being tallied - has renewed consideration of whether the country should do away with the electoral college.

"It will take a little time, but I'd be surprised if we didn't eventually shift to a popular vote for president over the next decade or so," former vice president Al Gore told MSNBC on Monday. In 2000, Gore won the popular vote but lost in the electoral college.

Representatives for Clinton and Trump's transition team did not respond to requests for comment on the efforts to pressure electors to vote against Trump.

While many of the people who don't want to see Trump win in the **electoral college** have voiced an array of worries about him, some have singled out business interests as an area worthy of more scrutiny before Dec. 19. Any questions about Trump's financial holdings "need to be resolved before the **electoral college** votes," said Richard Painter, a corporate law professor at the University of Minnesota Law School, who served as George W. Bush's chief ethics lawyer. Laurence Tribe, a Harvard Law School professor who once taught President Obama, agrees and has been speaking out in television interviews and social media.

But neither Painter nor Tribe has made direct contact with any electors, and Tribe said he has heard from "less than a dozen" concerned electors from Michigan, Texas and elsewhere, a number he concedes is not enough to make a difference.

Some of those involved in lobbying electors say they want to continue applying pressure on Trump in the years to come.

"We'll still fire up a few letters," Livesay said.