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## Del. Cox tweets QAnon hashtag, a theory that's been widely debunked

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State Del. Dan Cox (R-Frederick and Carroll) is no stranger to Twitter, often tweeting more than a half-dozen times a day.

Earlier this month, he used a hashtag — #WWG1WGA — that caught the eye of another Republican and one of his constituents, Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the CATO Institute and former member of the county's charter review commission.

That hashtag has often been associated with the QAnon conspiracy theory, which claims Democrats and Hollywood elites are running a cabal of Satanic-worshipping, child-sex predators, and that President Donald Trump is fighting that cabal. #WWG1WGA stands for "Where We Go One, We Go All," a rallying cry for the movement.

The theory has been widely debunked, but it has gained steam in recent years thanks, in part, to the popularity of social media.

When reached Wednesday to comment on the tweet, Cox said he's been involved this week with President Trump's team of lawyers in Philadelphia.

"Trump is hopeful and will lift us up like our motto, E Pluribus Unum — out of many One," Cox wrote in a text. "We need unity and Biden is for locking us down, canceling school, proms and sports, and calling riots peaceful, while his corruption is now shockingly known. I support President Trump and General Flynn and that's all my point was about."

Cox's tweet with the hashtag was posted Oct. 23. Later that day, Olson called attention to the post, noting on Twitter it was "associated ... with the QAnon madness."

Cox responded in a tweet by calling Olson a "[Gov. Larry] Hogan GOP rhino pretender" who has a "hatred for all things American."

Olson declined to offer great detail on why he flagged Cox's tweet, but did say it was "remarkable" coming from one of the state's delegates.

"Some of my differences with some elected officials are on the record ... I think [the tweet] speaks for itself, and other people may take it further," Olson said.

State Del. Jesse Pippy (R-Frederick and Carroll), chairman of the Frederick County delegation in Annapolis, wasn't one of them. Pippy said he hadn't researched the QAnon conspiracy theory and that he's more focused on state and local issues.

"As far as tweeting and focusing on issues that may be pretty outside of what a state representative should be focusing on, I try to stay in my lane because there are enough issues at

home in this district and in this state that I really need to be focusing on to make sure that Marylanders are moving forward,” Pippy said.

State Del. Ken Kerr (D-Frederick) also said he hadn’t seen the tweet, but he offered his concerns in the growing perpetuation of theories like this one.

“It bothers me in general that people are so desperate to make sense of difficult times that they will cling to bizarre notions of things that are secretly in someone else’s control,” Kerr said of theories like QAnon. “And if those things would stop, things would go back to normal.”

Steven Clark, chairman of the Republican Central Committee, declined to comment. Deborah Carter, chairwoman of the county’s Democratic Central Committee, only offered: “I don’t think anything Del. Cox tweets is worth responding to.”

Meanwhile, political scientist Todd Eberly had strong thoughts. He said the QAnon theory has gained popularity due to social media and political figures giving it “credence.”

Eberly, a professor at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, added it’s “dangerous” when those theories make their way to local and state politics because it brings those ideas closer to people and their communities.

“This is ... sort of a dangerous and unhinged conspiracy theory, and it keeps growing. Basically, any sort of outlandish theory gets drawn into it,” Eberly said. “There’s a part of me that can’t even fathom that there’s a group of people who believe that prominent Democrats and Hollywood figures are involved in a Satanic cult that involves pedophilia. I mean, this is crazytown.”

He was also clear to note that any elected official who spreads the theory is making a mistake, and he called on the public to not automatically believe the theory.

“This is one of the side effects of the internet and social media,” Eberly said. “And in general, as human beings, we are really, really bad consumers of information.”