



Why DeSantis' new election police unit in Florida matters

Steve Benen

April 26, 2022

Florida Republicans had every reason to be pleased with how Election Day 2020 unfolded. The state's system of elections worked exactly as intended — the Sunshine State has traditionally billed itself as the gold standard in election administration — and GOP candidates in the state excelled in races up and down the ballot.

As regular readers know, however, that was not good enough. As Republicans nationwide embraced Donald Trump's Big Lie, and GOP officials sought ways to place new hurdles between voters and their democracy, Florida Republicans approved a series of new voter-suppression measures about a year ago.

Among the new — and entirely unnecessary — policy measures were restrictions on ballot drop boxes, new powers for partisan poll watchers, and new burdens on those who vote by mail. (About a month ago, a federal judge rejected the anti-voting measures. The ruling has been appealed.)

Evidently, that wasn't good enough, either. The Associated Press reported on Gov. Ron DeSantis signing a bill yesterday that will, among other things, create a police force dedicated to pursuing election crimes that largely don't exist.

The law creates an Office of Election Crimes and Security under the Florida Department of State to review fraud allegations and conduct preliminary investigations. DeSantis is required to appoint a group of special officers from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement who would be tasked with pursuing the election law violations.

I suppose the obvious joke here is that the Office of Election Crimes and Security could simply dispatch officers to hang out at The Villages and catch Trump voters committing fraud, but the fact remains that the creation of such an office is far from funny.

A far-right Republican governor will hand pick officers to pursue a problem that doesn't exist in any meaningful way. GOP legislators nevertheless agreed to create this new "office" and set aside more than \$2.6 million in taxpayer money to address the imagined scourge.

That, incidentally, was a pared-down total: DeSantis originally wanted \$5.7 million for a 52-person voter fraud police force — which, again, would be responsible for dealing with a problem that *the governor knows isn't real*.

The Cato Institute's Julian Sanchez summarized the problem nicely: "There are few things more dangerous than a government agency handed cash and resources with a mandate to solve a problem that does not exist. As a rule, they'll invent it if they have to."