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< Stacey Abrams Says She Was Almost Blocked From Voting In Georgia Election

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STEVE INSKEEP, HOST:

We question Georgia's Stacey Abrams next. The Democratic candidate for governor of Georgia acknowledged defeat over the weekend without calling it a concession. She said that Republican Brian Kemp won under the law - he received just over 50 percent of the vote for governor - but that he won only after purging voter rolls and taking other steps, overseeing his own election while serving as the Georgia secretary of state.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

STACEY ABRAMS: You see, I'm supposed to say nice things and accept my fate. You see, as a leader, I should be stoic in my outrage and silent in my rebuke. But stoicism is a luxury. And silence is a weapon for those who would quiet the voices of the people. And I will not concede because the erosion of our democracy is not right.

INSKEEP: That's Stacey Abrams, the Democratic candidate in Georgia, who is now on the line from there. Welcome to the program.

ABRAMS: Thank you for having me.

INSKEEP: So you raised a range of voting problems in Georgia in that speech and at other times, and then you said the mistakes clearly altered the outcome. What evidence showed that the outcome was altered here?

ABRAMS: The totality of the errors made - 1 1/2 million people purged, 53,000 put on hold, 3,000 denied the right to register as new citizens, long polling lines, misplaced provisional ballots. The totality of the issues demonstrates that there has been gross mismanagement of our elections. And I'm not suggesting that I know I would have won. But I am saying that the results were unalterably made less safe and less secure because of the actions taken by the secretary of state.

INSKEEP: Oh, so you cannot demonstrate, for example, that people were denied registration or their registration was purged and that there were enough of them on your side that you would have won had things been different.

ABRAMS: Well, I would say this - I would speculate that that is true, but we don't know because of how insidious this behavior has been. And that is why I was willing to acknowledge that the election is over because, given the current state of our laws, this is what is true. But my point is that it was not a fair fight. And that is what we are launching with Fair Fight - a demand that from now on there be no question about the legitimacy of our elections.

INSKEEP: Fair Fight, that's the organization that you intend to lead going forward and that will, among other things, you say file a lawsuit over this. Who exactly are you going to sue? And I ask that knowing that the Secretary of State Brian Kemp oversaw this election, but his office doesn't do everything. A lot of this is on the county level, right?

ABRAMS: Well, let's be clear. The secretary of state is responsible for the administration of elections in the state of Georgia. The counties answer to the secretary of state. And so Fair Fight Georgia will be filing a lawsuit - a federal suit that will allege gross mismanagement of our elections process. It will be based on thousands of complaints that we received - not only immediately but things that preceded the election. And it will look at the totality of the challenges facing the state of Georgia.

INSKEEP: Can you demonstrate that things like broken machines or polling places that were closed for this election happened disproportionately in Democratic-leaning areas or minority areas or however you want to put it?

ABRAMS: So - and I think that's a critical point. This is not a partisan argument. Republican Dan Gasaway, a state representative, lost his primary because they left his name off of thousands of ballots, because they misdrew the district lines. That was under the secretary of state. And we know that this has happened in other districts.

INSKEEP: And when we talk about your governor-elect, I'd like to know what you think was in his mind. We look back on the fact that Brian Kemp, as you say, purged the voter rolls of 1.5 million people. Voter rolls are always purged in Georgia, but they accelerated under Brian Kemp. Do you believe that you will be able to show that Kemp's office accelerated the voter purge thinking that there would be a smaller electorate that would be slanted just a little bit in his favor?

ABRAMS: That's not the question. The question is did he unlawfully purge voters. Did he mismanage his job and thereby weaken the integrity of our electoral system? I do believe we can prove that.

INSKEEP: And it doesn't matter what his motivation was if he did those things?

ABRAMS: It does not matter. As I said on Friday, the election is over. But what remains is a fight for our democracy because, while Georgia is the flashpoint that I'm focused on, we know that this is a national conversation and a national crisis.

INSKEEP: Now, what do you make of the statement by Brian Kemp after you acknowledged defeat? He praised you and then said, quote, "the election is over, and hardworking Georgians are ready to move forward. We can no longer dwell on the divisive politics of the past." Is he right?

ABRAMS: There is nothing divisive about calling for justice and democracy. That is the core of who we are as Americans. It's the core of who we are as Georgians. And I would say that my hope is he will stand with me to improve the integrity of our

elections, to demonstrate that he is a man of goodwill who wants people to be able to cast their votes no matter where they live, no matter who they vote for.

INSKEEP: What did you think when President Trump praised you over the weekend on Twitter for fighting, quote, "brilliantly and hard"?

ABRAMS: I do not follow Donald Trump on Twitter.

INSKEEP: Well, that was a statement that the president made, and he didn't attack you the way that he has attacked an awful lot of other Democrats. What do you think of that?

ABRAMS: He is welcome to his opinion.

INSKEEP: You're not going there at all, are you?

ABRAMS: I am not.

INSKEEP: Well, let me ask something though about the president because the president himself - as I'm sure you know - has routinely made claims without evidence of election fraud. Inevitably, someone is going to ask about your challenge to the integrity of the system and the way that he has questioned the integrity of the system. How will you make a distinction between your criticisms and the ones that the president makes?

ABRAMS: We have four federal judges who've already identified the flaws that we've laid out. We have a raft of evidence, and we do not need to scheme or otherwise manufacture information. We're going to use the evidence of this election and the last eight years to demonstrate not only our cause but the remedy.

INSKEEP: I think you're telling me that it's okay to question the integrity of the election if you have evidence. Is that what you're saying?

ABRAMS: I'm saying it is necessary to push for integrity in our elections based on the evidence.

INSKEEP: And what do you say to voters - some of whom are surely listening right now - who may hear your concerns but they say, I just don't get it? Of course, voter rolls have to be purged. Of course, you have to identify yourself properly at the polling places. They just don't understand why there would be such a fuss.

ABRAMS: There is a luxury for many of us that we can walk into a polling place and be treated as a legitimate voter. The day I voted, I had to correct the poll worker who said that I had filed for an absentee ballot. It took a few minutes for me to be able to cast my ballot because of the problems with the polling place.

INSKEEP: Did that poll worker have a piece of paper or a computer screen front of them that said you had already voted absentee when you tried to vote?

ABRAMS: Yes, yes. And I had to explain to her this is not correct. I've never applied for an absentee ballot. And she had to get a manager, and they had to fix it. And I did it quietly. I didn't turn it into a major conversation. But it was also emblematic to me of the privilege that I have. I know the law. Others do not. And for us to have a fair fight in Georgia, we have to ensure that no one runs the risk of being denied the right to vote.

INSKEEP: Stacey Abrams, thanks so much.

ABRAMS: Thank you for having me.

INSKEEP: She was the Democratic candidate for governor of Georgia. And we have also invited on Brian Kemp, the governor-elect.

(SOUNDBITE OF GOGO PENGUIN'S "WINDOW")

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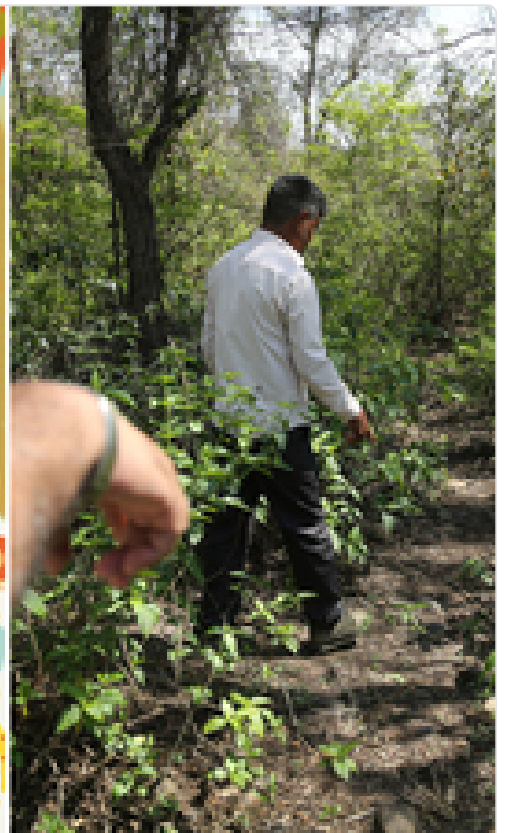
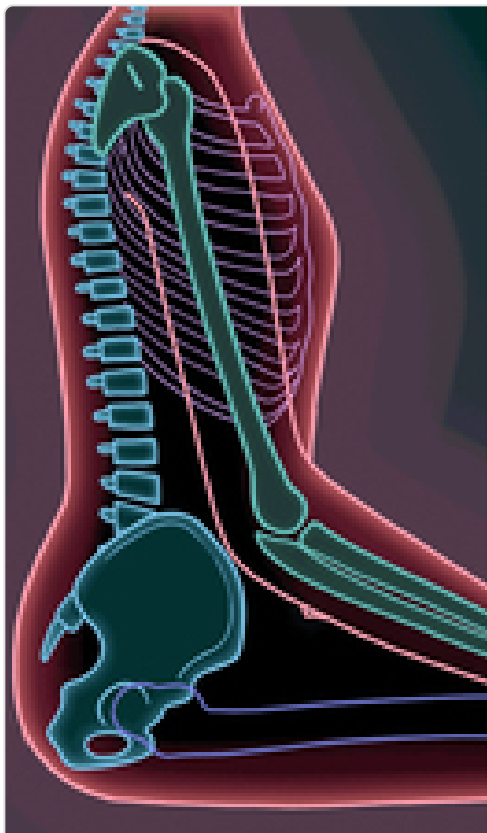
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