

To Beat Trump, Democrats Seek to Help Anti-Abortion Candidate

The New York Times, August 29, 2024

Some Democratic donors and political operatives have quietly been working to help an anti-abortion activist qualify for the presidential ballot in swing states and assist his campaign, part of an attempt to siphon votes away from the Republican ticket, according to four people with knowledge of the plans.

The Democrats' efforts are on behalf of Randall Terry, who expects to be the nominee of the Constitution Party in about a dozen states. Mr. Terry is the founder of Operation Rescue, which gained prominence for blocking the entrances to abortion clinics.

But to Democrats, Mr. Terry has become an ally of sorts — a far-right candidate who they hope can persuade some Republican voters to reject former President Donald J. Trump, whose support for the anti-abortion cause has been inconsistent. Mr. Trump has boasted about appointing three of the Supreme Court justices who were responsible for overturning *Roe v. Wade* but said recently that his administration would be “great” for women’s reproductive rights.

In a close election, being able to convince a few thousand voters in targeted states to cast a third-party ballot rather than vote for Mr. Trump could help Vice President Kamala Harris.

There are at least two strategies from Democrats to help Mr. Terry. The first idea, which was pitched to Democratic donors, has been to fund ballot-access efforts on Mr. Terry’s behalf, according to two of the people with knowledge of the talks.

Mr. Terry has so far qualified for the ballot in only a few competitive states, including Wisconsin, Michigan and Florida. A particular point of emphasis for these Democratic operatives has been in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Terry’s campaign was not originally planning to prioritize appearing on the Pennsylvania ballot. But Mr. Terry said that his campaign and the state Constitution Party turned in about 4,500 signatures in an effort to qualify, and that at the last minute — the night before the submission deadline, July 31 — an entity delivered about 4,000 more signatures, which Mr. Terry said “were paid for by people that are completely unknown to me.”

A person with knowledge of the operation said the signature-gathering effort was funded by a group of Democratic donors who spent about \$100,000 on a consultant to help Mr. Terry’s campaign.

Despite these outside efforts, Mr. Terry did not qualify to appear on the ballot in Pennsylvania.

In states where Mr. Terry is on the ballot, Democrats are circulating at least one plan to help him cut into Mr. Trump’s vote share.

One progressive operative, Nick Horton, has in recent weeks proposed a plan to use a new pro-Christian anti-abortion group to help Mr. Terry, according to three of the people briefed on the strategy.

Mr. Horton’s background is in criminal-justice reform in Rhode Island, but he has gained some prominence in recent months as the board chair for Pass the Torch, an advocacy organization that encouraged President Biden to forgo the Democratic nomination. He did not return requests for comment this week.

In a presentation prepared for liberal donors and reviewed by *The New York Times*, Mr. Horton’s team outlined a plan to work as a “spoiler” by encouraging anti-abortion Republicans to vote for Mr. Terry rather than Mr. Trump. Using ads, influencers and endorsements, the Democrats intend to attack Mr. Trump from the right and to highlight Mr. Terry’s strict anti-abortion position.

It is unclear how much money the effort has raised, although aides to several major Democratic donors said they had been made aware of the plan in recent weeks. Mr. Terry has virtually no money on his own but said that Tom DeLay, the former Republican House majority leader who was once charged with campaign-finance crimes but was ultimately cleared by a court of appeals, was working to set up a super PAC on Mr. Terry’s behalf. Mr. DeLay could not be reached for comment.

Mr. Terry issued a warning to the Democrats who are involved in supporting him financially — welcoming their help but telling them that their plan would backfire.

“For every one voter who leaves Trump to vote for me, there’s going to be 20 Democrats who say, ‘Oh, my God, he’s right,’” Mr. Terry said. “We will cause Kamala to lose Wisconsin. On election night, when you see the margin that she loses by and you see my name and how many votes I got, we’ll be able to do the math.”