

# Lee worked hard to overturn election, keep Trump in power, texts show

By [Mariana Alfaro](#)

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Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) worked furiously to overturn the 2020 election and keep President Donald Trump in power before ultimately abandoning the effort when no evidence of widespread fraud surfaced and his outreach to states for alternate electors proved futile, according to texts.

Lee sent the texts to White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, who turned them over to the House committee investigating a pro-Trump mob's attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. CNN [reviewed the texts](#) Lee and Rep. Chip Roy (R-Tex.) sent Meadows and reported on them Friday.

In texts to Meadows sent in November, Lee is highly supportive of Trump's efforts to undo the election through legal challenges, offering on Nov. 7, 2020 — the day news organizations projected Joe Biden as the winner — his “unequivocal support for you to exhaust every legal and constitutional remedy at your disposal to restore Americans faith in our elections.”

“This doesn't have to come down to a binary choice between (1) an immediate concession, and (2) a destruction of the credibility of the election process,” Lee wrote to Meadows that day.

Lee makes clear that he was working hard to assist Trump, saying in one text that he was spending “14 hours a day” on the effort and contacting state lawmakers seeking anything to give Congress a reason not to count the electoral votes for Biden on Jan. 6, 2021 and affirm his win.

“We need something from state legislatures to make this legitimate and to have any hope of winning. Even if they can't convene, it might be enough if a majority of them are willing to sign a statement indicating how they would vote,” Lee wrote in one text.

A spokesman for the Jan. 6 committee had no immediate comment.

The senator's spokesman, Lee Lonsberry, said in a statement Friday that the text messages "tell the same story Sen. Lee told from the floor of the Senate the day he voted to certify the election results" on Jan. 6, 2021.

"[The texts] tell the story of a US Senator fulfilling his duty to Utah and the American people by following the Constitution," Lonsberry said.

Lee's words on the Senate floor that day, however, did not reflect what the texts showed: his frustration with Trump after the president criticized him at a Jan. 4 rally in Georgia for not doing enough to overturn the results, his complaints about fellow Republican Sens. Ted Cruz (Tex.) and Josh Hawley (Mo.) and his recommendations to Meadows to seek the help of lawyers Sidney Powell and John Eastman.

"I've been spending 14 hours a day for the last week trying to unravel this for him. To have him take a shot at me like that in such a public setting without even asking me about it is pretty discouraging," Lee wrote to Meadows.

Meadows apologized and said Trump would call.

In another text to Meadows, Lee expressed frustration with Cruz and Hawley, arguing that the two were supporting Trump's efforts only to their benefit, and Trump's detriment. Lee said that unless the effort produced a competing slate of electors under state law, it would only hurt Trump.

Hawley had announced in December 2020 that he would object to the electoral count; Cruz and 10 other senators announced Jan. 2 that they would object.

"I have grave concerns with the way my friend Ted is going about this effort," Lee told Meadows. "This will not inure to the benefit of the president."

"I only know that this will end badly for the President unless we have the Constitution on our side," Lee added. "And unless these states submit new slates of Trump electors pursuant to state law, we do not."

Lee mentioned none of these concerns or frustrations during his Jan. 6 floor speech.

Lee's willingness to support Trump's campaign to overturn the election is notable given his experience — he clerked for Supreme Court Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. and was mentioned as a possible Supreme Court nominee when Trump ran for office in 2016.

Lee is up for reelection this year and received Trump's endorsement earlier this month. The former president praised Lee while mocking one of his challengers, independent conservative Evan McMullin, calling him "McMuffin." Trump also took an indirect swipe at Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah), a favorite target. Romney twice voted to convict Trump on impeachment charges.

Months ahead of the election, Romney has not endorsed Lee.

One of Lee's challengers for the Republican nomination, former Utah state Rep. Becky Edwards, said in a statement that the senator "enabled those seeking to keep themselves in power, no matter the consequences."

"The moment Lee realized the gravity of Trump's attempts to undermine the 2020 election, he should have stopped researching the legality of such actions and stopped pressuring local legislators," Edwards said.

McMullin, who ran for the White House in 2016, questioned Lee's decisions on [Twitter](#).

"Why did Sen. Mike Lee advise spurious legal efforts to overturn the 2020 election?" McMullin asked. "And why did he hide those plans from both the public and the FBI in the days leading up to Jan. 6?"

Lee's texts show that, soon after the election, it was Lee who encouraged Meadows to give Powell access to Trump, saying she would help him push forward the legal challenges. He provided Meadows with Powell's contact information and initially seemed confident that Powell could help advance Trump's case.

"Apparently she has a strategy to keep things alive and put several states back in play. Can you help get her in?" Lee texted.

Two days later, Lee once again vouched for Powell, calling her a "strong shooter."

As election results were being counted that November, Powell was making all sorts of false accusations of election fraud. She joined other members of Trump's legal team — including Rudolph Giuliani and Jenna Ellis — at a Republican National Committee news conference on Nov. 19, 2020, in which she falsely claimed that Trump "won by a landslide."

"We are going to prove it," Powell said.

In the time since, Powell has not only failed to bring forward substantial proof to back her claims of election fraud, she's also facing multiple legal challenges, financial penalties and a possible disbarment.

Two hours after that news conference, Lee started to voice his doubts on Powell.

The senator, in a message to Meadows, said he was "worried about the Powell press conference."

"The potential defamation liability for the president is significant here," Lee said. "For the campaign and for the president personally. ... Unless Powell can back up everything she said, which I kind of doubt she can."

Meadows agreed, texting back: "Very concerned."

By late November, Lee had backed away from Powell and instead began encouraging Meadows to hire right-wing lawyer John Eastman. But the trust in Eastman didn't last long either given that, by mid-December, Lee began expressing doubts to Meadows about the plan to legally challenge the election's certification Jan. 6.

"If you want senators to object, we need to hear from you on that ideally getting some guidance on what arguments to raise," Lee texted Meadows on Dec. 16, 2020. "I think we're now passed the point where we can expect anyone will do it without some direction and a strong evidentiary argument."

By Jan. 3, Lee was arguing to Meadows that Trump's effort to have states send alternate slates of electors to Congress would probably fail.

"I don't think the president is grasping the distinction between what we can do and what he would like us to do," he told Meadows that day, warning that the efforts "could all backfire badly."

Hours after a mob stormed the Capitol, Lee voted to certify the election results and Biden's win.