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## MR. TRUMP GOES TO PRISON TOWN & OTHER ARIZONA TALES: FLORENCE, LAND OF NO PORT-O-POTTIES



*By Arizona Right Wing Watch*

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*Cover edits by LCRW editor-in-chief Abner Häuge.*



Donald Trump's "Save America" Tour couldn't have kicked off anywhere but Arizona as no other state has embraced the lies about the 2020 election more than that state's GOP. Endless (and outlandish) claims of "election fraud" are rampant in the state of the Maricopa "audit." The day brought out many familiar faces from the "Stop the Steal" era and several major influencers within the QAnon movement, including 8kun's owner Jim Watkins and his site administrator son Ron Watkins, who both hosted the forum Q posed on. The recent offshoot, fringe QAnon cult led by Michael Protzman aka Negative 48 and a bus of his followers also stopped by.

The Saturday event lasted all day – even though Trump wasn't set to take the stage until 7:00 PM. The venue requested guests arrive at "2 PM, no later than 3:30" to get through the long check-in lines. Some camped out for days, many bringing their RV or setting up their car for a massive MAGA tailgate party.

The chosen location of Canyon Moon Ranch (where Arizonans hold an annual 4-day Country Thunder music festival) is not the best setting for a political rally (or anything really). It's a single two-lane road for 28 miles leading up to the main grounds which resulted in bumper-to-bumper traffic the whole way to and from. Trump would later brag how long the traffic lines were.

In a small town over 60 miles from Phoenix, the main attractions of Florence, AZ are the multiple county, state, federal, and private prisons, youth detention centers, death row, and immigration detention facilities. The winds were heavy in the flat, dusty plot of land that's been inexplicably turned into an entertainment venue.

Merchandise stands and "Kari Lake for Governor" signs started to pop up 27 miles out and sporadically lined the road leading to the rally. Countless variations of overpriced flags, shirts, bobble heads and hats were being sold. "Fuck Antifa: Established 1775," one flag read as I drove by a booth that also had an abundant amount of Confederate and "Let's Go Brandon" gear and a Game of Thrones-themed flag with Trump edited to the Iron Throne. Upon arriving, my eyes were assaulted with the abundant amount of Trump vendors who crammed their tables and buses in every spot they could find. Bordering the entire wait line, some sellers even desperately waded through the parking lot knocking on car windows trying to hawk their MAGA cowboy hats.

The real party was in the parking lot. Confusingly, no alcohol was being sold on the premises and none was allowed beyond the security check-in, but

those around me in line were trying to get as drunk as possible before being forced to throw away the prohibited item.

The most loyal Trump supporters had already been camped out and partying for days, including Michael Protzman/Negative 48's congregation. Protzman leads an even more esoteric group of fanatics than vanilla QAnon followers; they're obsessed with the mythical return of JFK Jr. and their leader's bastardized version of Gematria, a form of religious numerology. The Protzman sect, which has been described as a cult, has been holed up in Dallas, Texas awaiting the very dead JFK Jr. (or maybe even senior) to take his rightful place as Trump's Vice President. I spotted one of their buses in the RV parking lot, decorated with the QAnon slogan "WWG1WGA" and the large cut-out head of JFK Jr. in a "Make America Great Again" hat. Some of Protzman's acolytes, decorated in "Trump/JFK Jr. 2024" gear, were dancing around the general admissions area and preaching their gospel to the traditional MAGA folks streaming into the venue. Once the speakers began, Protzman and his clan sat amongst the sectioned-off VIP section.



It was actually a full weekend of QAnon-friendly events in Arizona. Clay Clark's ReAwaken America tour also made a multi-day pit stop in Phoenix. The set list was jam packed with medical, election, and QAnon conspiracy theorists—some who made an appearance at both the mega-rallies, like Mike

crowd, has far out-raised her GOP colleagues, collecting \$2.5 million in contributions the last cycle and has quickly been elevated in Trump-World. As a result, "Decertify 2020" was the loudest call from this radicalized group of Arizona politicians who were all also familiar faces during Stop the Steal.

Even Ali Alexander came out of hiding and joined the VIP section despite openly snitching on fellow Capitol Riot architects Rep. Andy Biggs and Rep. Paul Gosar, who were also both featured speakers at the Trump rally.

In some ways, it felt more like a rally for Kari Lake's 2022 gubernatorial run. Her ads ran continuously throughout the day on the big screens and her free signs were everywhere. I even saw several of her signs stuffed into a shit-filled port-o-potty (there's a metaphor here). Lake models herself after Trump, who has endorsed her campaign, echoing the chants to "build the wall" and the desire to "lock up" her political opponent. She called for the arrests of all those involved in running "that corrupt, shady, shoddy election of 2020," one who is conveniently her contender in the governor's race.

During his own speech, Trump brought Lake back out onto the stage to praise her loyalty to him and she gushed that he was "the greatest endorsement in all of politics." The message was very clear: if you're a Republican that wants the coveted Trump endorsement, you better embrace the lie and declare "Trump won!" Even better if you're still promising to overturn the electors and retroactively give him an undemocratic win.

For half an hour after Lake's set, a random set list of songs played including Kanye West, Elvis, Village People, Dolly Parton, and, fully embracing the politics equals wrestling meme, the Undertaker theme played twice.

Trump finally took the stage to a full crowd, but his 2-hour speech wasn't interesting enough to keep them around and about half the general admissions area filtered out of the venue long before he ended. He tried to excite the crowd with the occasional swear word or enrage them by falsely claiming that white people are being denied treatment for Covid-19, but nothing really hit. Fans waited in line all day, dealing with intense, dusty winds, and they were met with a setup that didn't even allow them to see the man they admire so much. Trump didn't even announce a 2024 presidential run, which was being speculated all day amongst the crowd. The rally really felt like he was knighting the next era of the Republican Party and, unfortunately for democracy, the Arizona GOP is the blueprint.

Once attendees entered through security, there wasn't much to look at. A plane flew around with a banner that read "Visit 2020 is Nullified.com." VIP guests and the long list of local, national, and international media were placed in a separate part of the venue with actual visual access to the stage, whereas us peasants in general admission were placed behind the tall media bleachers and unable to see the speakers. Maybe some sections could have watched the rally off the Jumbotrons but those were reserved for commercials and an ad for Trump's 320-page picture book for the low, low price of \$99. To make matters worse, spectators were sandwiched in between the long lines for the overflowing port-o-potties (with no wash stations) and crappy food that overtook the entire general area.



After the Pledge and prayer, the most dedicated of Trump loyalists from the Arizona Republican Party took the stage to pledge their allegiance to him and promote the lie that he didn't really lose the 2020 election. AZ GOP chairwoman Kelli Ward and Arizona Senate Majority Whip Sonny Borrelli and Oath Keeper/Secretary of State candidate and current Representative Mark Finchem all began their speeches by falsely declaring "Trump won!"

Calls for the non-existent process of "decertification" are usually exclusive to fringe Oath Keeper (and fangirl of white nationalist Nick Fuentes) state senator Wendy Rogers, but the nine Arizona politicians and candidates openly embraced this anti-democratic measure. Sen. Rogers, who led a "decertify" chant with the

Lindell, Charlie Kirk, Sen. Wendy Rogers, Rep. Mark Finchem, and the father-son duo, Jim and Ron Watkins.

The Watkins family were instrumental tools in the QAnon phenomenon, with Jim owning and Ron serving as site administrator for 8kun (previously 8chan), the website that Q posted on. (Some even speculate Ron is Q himself, or at least contributed to creating some of the content.) Besides Q, the online image board also hosted child pornography, neo-nazis, and served as the platform for the Christchurch, Poway, and El Paso mass murderers to post their manifestos. Ron Watkins and his dad were promoting his current attempt to enter real-life politics for his congressional run in Arizona.

They spray-painted and distributed DIY signs that read "CMZ ARMY" (CMZ short for CodeMonkeyZ, Ron's online persona/screen name) and "TRUMP WON." Ron was walking through the lines promoting himself with his team dubbed the "CMZ Army" who were wearing "CodeMonkeyZ" shirts. Those in the crowd who recognized him also referred to him by his username rather than his real name. Jim, on the other hand, was throwing a fit inside the venue, trying (and failing) to incite the crowd to attack QAnon-critical podcaster and writer, Travis View/Logan Strain.

As I neared the security check-in, a man with a sign that read "Your body is the Temple of God. The 666 vaccine is made using CHILD SACRIFICE" preached to the crowd. Another man rolled out an enormous "FEDSURRECTION" sign adorned with images of Ray Epps, Oath Keeper founder Stewart Rhodes, and Joe Biden, and Nancy Pelosi.

Entering the main gates required one to go through a metal detector and a bag search. The "prohibited items" list was long and no outside merchandise was allowed inside and, as a result, the grounds were littered with trash for gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake, whose team handed out free signs. Drama started at the final security gate. The drunken group in front of me believed they spotted their biggest fear: an American flag on the ground! Yelling about "disrespect," and pushing their way forward to rescue the discarded flag, a woman nearby informed them it was simply a bag.

"It doesn't matter," one of the men responded as he picked the red, white, and blue tote and emotionally placed it on a nearby fence pole.