

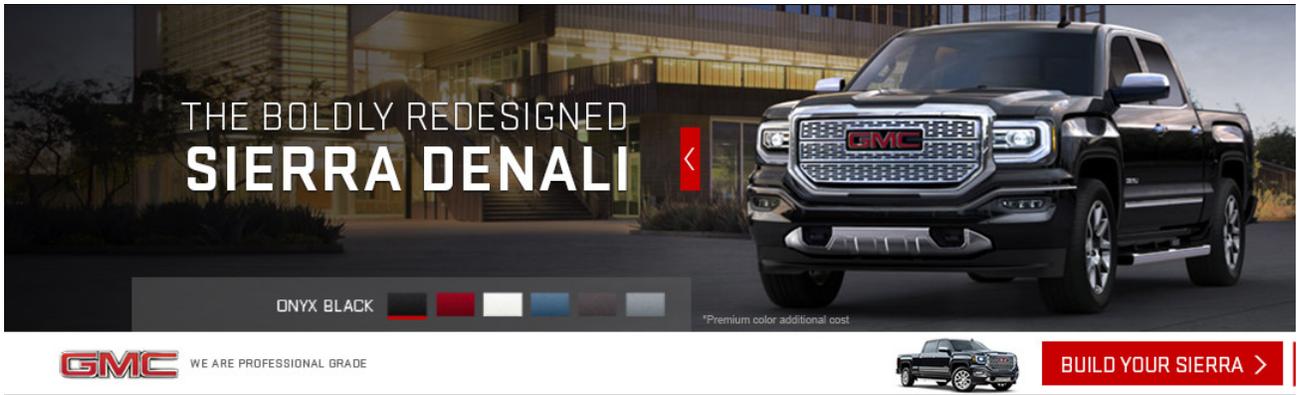
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Trump critics urge RNC to replace Trump in special meeting

Associated Press

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By STEVE PEOPLES, Associated Press

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© AP Photo/Paul Sancya A woman carries the American flag in the street at a protest as Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump delivered an economic policy speech to the Detroit Economic Club in

WASHINGTON — Desperate conservatives have circulated a petition calling for the Republican National Committee to host a special meeting where Donald Trump could be replaced as the party's presidential nominee.

Organizers — some of the same Republicans who tried to prevent Trump from winning the GOP nomination — acknowledge the effort is a long shot at best. But fearing an Election Day disaster, they have appealed to RNC members across the nation in recent days to intervene.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures," Regina Thomson, executive director of a political action committee known as the GOP Accountability Project, wrote in an e-mail distributed to RNC members over the weekend and obtained by The Associated Press.

"Donald J. Trump is a disaster," Thomson wrote, attaching a copy of the petition in the message. "His post-convention behavior has been deplorable."

Trump has worried many leading Republicans in recent weeks with a string of controversies and fights, notably with the Muslim American parents of an Army captain killed in Iraq and prominent Republicans up for re-election. Trump reversed course and ended up endorsing House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and Sens. John McCain of Arizona and Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire.

Still, Thomson and other anti-Trump Republicans are concerned.

Party rules allow RNC members to replace a presidential nominee in the event of "death, declination, or otherwise" — language Trump critics say allows for his replacement soon after he formally captured his party's presidential nomination at the national convention. To force a meeting to discuss Trump's ouster, however, organizers must submit signatures by at least 16 RNC members from 16 states.

Should they do so, GOP chairman Reince Priebus has 10 to 20 days to convene the full, 168-member Republican National Committee.

"This is the same story over and over again," said RNC spokesman Sean Spicer, dismissing the latest effort. He suggested that the Trump rebels have "a credibility problem" after repeated failed attempts to block Trump's nomination at the convention.

Even after Trump ended his feud by endorsing Ryan last Friday night, a fresh wave of Republican operatives — and even a handful of elected officials — vowed to vote for someone else or even leave the GOP altogether.

"We're concerned he's on a path to destruction and we're trying to avert that," Thomson said in a Monday interview.

The Colorado Republican, the former state chairwoman for Texas Sen. Ted Cruz's presidential campaign, said she has received verbal commitments from party officials willing to sign the petition, but declined to say how many or who they are.

Several RNC members, reached by the AP on Monday, acknowledged deep frustration with Trump's candidacy, but said they would not sign the petition. None were willing to give their names for fear they would be associated with the move.

"It is a difficult path but we are supportive of their efforts," said Republican operative Dane Waters, who led an anti-Trump effort at the convention. "It is important that all options be considered and tried. Priebus should never have allowed this to happen."



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