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CAITLIN O'HARA, REUTERS

A man and woman, carrying their mail-in ballots, walk into a voting center at St. Nikolas Serbian Church on Nov. 5, 2024, in Phoenix, Arizona.

Election agency scrutinized before firings

BO ERICKSON AND ERIN BANCO
Reuters

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's administration spent more than a year scrutinizing the federal agency that oversees U.S. voting systems, questioning its handling of the 2020 presidential election and vetting potential new leaders before he fired its commissioners this month, according to documents reviewed by Reuters and two people familiar with the discussions.

The previously unreported effort sheds light on the Republican president's push to exert greater influence over federal elections after years of disputing his 2020 loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

The Election Assistance Commission, a

little-known bipartisan agency that helps test and certify voting systems, could play a central role as the administration presses for voting and election-administration changes ahead of November's midterm elections. Republicans say the measures would bolster election security, but Democrats argue they are aimed at restricting voter access.

In a speech Thursday, the president vowed to work with states to address alleged vulnerabilities in election systems.

"If you look at voting today, it's in such bad shape in so many states, and we are committing to fix it. And we're also committing to be working with those states and local jurisdictions to help them fix and patch known technical vulnerabilities

before the midterm elections," Trump said in his speech. "We want those elections to be honest."

Trump and the White House did not say what role, if any, they envision for the commission in that effort.

Trump in recent weeks fired the agency's two Democratic commissioners and allowed its lone Republican commissioner to resign, leaving the four-member panel vacant after its other Republican commissioner departed in April.

The White House said Trump "reserves the right to remove individuals that may not be totally aligned with the important task of securing America's elections."

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Trucks haul Iraqi oil through Syria

ARCHIE HUNTER, ANTHONY DI PAOLA, KHALID AL-ANSARY AND NICHOLAS LUIA
Bloomberg News

Iraq uses a vast fleet of trucks to carry fuel oil through Syria and reroute flows away from the Strait of Hormuz, rapidly transforming its neighbor into the Middle East's top export hub.

In just months, Syria went from shipping none of the fuel to making up more than a quarter of Middle Eastern volumes. The supplies arrive on thousands of trucks that can take about four days to reach Syria's Mediterranean ports, and highlight how the Iran war reshaped the region's energy flows.

Persian Gulf countries sought ways to reduce their reliance on the Strait of Hormuz for exports, including through

existing or new pipelines and expanding infrastructure at ports that sit outside the waterway. A fresh flare-up in hostilities in the region affected the movement of fuel cargoes, further underlining the importance of alternative routes. Before the war, the strait accounted for about a fifth of the world's oil supply.

The sharp increase also underscores efforts to bring Syria into the global economy, after the U.S. lifted years of sanctions and supported the country's turnaround. The nation is increasingly seen as a gateway for energy flows from Iraq, including plans for crude oil pipelines, so as to weaken Iran's leverage over the crucial waterway.

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Iraqi diesel-laden tanker trucks line up April 15 along the Tartus-Baniyas highway as they wait to unload their cargo at the Baniyas port refinery on the Mediterranean Sea.

BAKR ALKASEM, AFP

AMC posts surprise profit in Q2

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