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PRESS HIGHLIGHTS

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The Washington Post

How GOP-Backed Voting Measures Could Create Hurdles for Tens of Millions of Voters

BY AMY GARDNER, KATE RABINOWITZ AND HARRY STEVENS

MARCH 11, 2021

The GOP's national push to enact hundreds of new election restrictions could strain every available method of voting for tens of millions of Americans, potentially amounting to the most sweeping contraction of ballot access in the United States since the end of Reconstruction, when Southern states curtailed the voting rights of formerly enslaved Black men, a Washington Post analysis has found.

In 43 states across the country, Republican lawmakers have proposed at least 250 laws that would limit mail, early in-person and Election Day voting with such constraints as stricter ID requirements, limited hours or narrower eligibility to vote absentee, according to data compiled as of Feb. 19 by the nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice. Even more proposals have been introduced since then.

Proponents say the provisions are necessary to shore up public confidence in the integrity of elections after the 2020 presidential contest, when then-President Donald Trump's unsubstantiated claims of election fraud convinced millions of his supporters that the results were rigged against him.

But in most cases, Republicans are proposing solutions in states where elections ran smoothly, including in many with results that Trump and his allies did not

contest or allege to be tainted by fraud. The measures are likely to disproportionately affect those in cities and Black voters in particular, who overwhelmingly vote Democratic — laying bare, critics say, the GOP's true intent: gaining electoral advantage.

The rush to crack down on voting methods comes after many states temporarily expanded mail and early voting in 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic, leading to the largest voter turnout in more than a century. The changes reshaped both who turned out and how they voted, with an astounding 116 million people — 73 percent of the electorate — casting their ballots before Election Day, according to The Post's analysis.

In many states, Democrats are trying to make those expansions permanent — and broaden voting access in other ways. Congressional Democrats are also pushing a sweeping proposal to impose national standards that would override much of what Republican state lawmakers are trying to constrict, including measures that would provide universal eligibility to vote by mail, at least 15 days of early voting, mandatory online voter registration and the restoration of voting rights for released felons. The measure has passed the House but faces steep opposition in the evenly divided Senate.

Republican state legislators, meanwhile, echoing Trump's false claims that the election was stolen from him, are pushing hard in the other direction.

The outcome of dueling efforts will vary depending on partisan control of statehouses. The same party controls both legislative chambers and the governorship in 38 states — 23 of them Republican and 15 of them Democratic. Many of the most restrictive proposals have surfaced in states where the GOP

has a total hold on power, including Arizona, Georgia, South Carolina, Missouri and Florida.

Some of the bills in Democratic-controlled states such as Washington, one of the first states to implement all-mail voting, have little chance of passage. But others are steaming ahead: In Georgia, for example, the House has passed a sweeping bill that would limit early-voting hours on weekends and restrict the use of drop boxes for mail ballots, among other provisions. The state Senate, meanwhile, approved a measure that would eliminate no-excuses absentee voting altogether — limiting eligibility to those ages 65 and over, people with disabilities or those who will be away from home on Election Day.

Limits to early or absentee voting are the most common measures among this year's batch of proposed restrictions, with such bills on the table in 33 states. Nearly 85 million voters used one of those methods to cast their ballots in those states last year — more than half of all Americans who voted in the Nov. 3 election.

And the new proposals could do more than rein in early and mail voting. Like squeezing a balloon, the measures could dramatically shift voting to Election Day. That has raised alarm among voting rights advocates that the 2022 midterm elections and 2024 presidential contest could be marred by catastrophically long waits to vote — particularly in big cities, where lines are already a common hurdle for millions of Americans.

"Long lines are going to be the story of 2022 unless something is done," said Democratic elections lawyer Marc Elias, who said he is preparing for a "busy year" of litigation if these laws are enacted. "We have to recognize early on in this next election cycle that this is now the defining feature of the Republican Party, in

competitive states and uncompetitive states. In red states and blue states. They don't run on economic issues, or even social issues. They run on shrinking the vote."

Republicans deny the bills are aimed at suppressing turnout, saying they are essential to improving public confidence in the integrity of elections, even in places where elections ran smoothly, such as Florida.

"There's nothing wrong with securing a great system," said Florida state Sen. Dennis Baxley at a committee hearing Wednesday in Tallahassee, where lawmakers gave initial approval to a proposal to curtail the use of ballot boxes and eliminate automatic registration for absentee voting, which would force voters to reapply each election cycle.

Other Republicans noted that some of their proposals will help speed the process. The Florida bill, for instance, would allow election officials to begin mail-ballot tabulation earlier in the election cycle — a provision state elections supervisors support because it will ensure a quicker result and fewer doubts about the outcome.

In a statement, Mandi Merritt, a spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee, said that the national party "remains laser focused on protecting election integrity, and that includes aggressively engaging at the state level on voting laws and litigating as necessary."

"Democrats have abandoned any pretense that they still care about election issues such as voter roll maintenance and restricting ballot harvesting that were once welcomed as reasonable and routine," she added. "The reality is that we want all eligible voters to be able to vote and vote easily — but voters must also

have confidence that our elections systems have safeguards to prevent fraud and ensure accuracy."

Nevertheless, multiple scholars and historians said the proposed restrictions would amount to the most dramatic curtailment of ballot access since the late-19th century, when Southern states effectively reversed the 15th Amendment's prohibition on denying the vote based on race by enacting poll taxes, literacy tests and other restrictions that disenfranchised virtually all Black men.

It took many more decades for Congress to prohibit such laws and broadly enshrine voting rights with the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and other anti-discrimination laws. Voting rights advocates say the avalanche of proposed restrictions flowing through state legislatures this year could undo much of that progress.

"There's this risk that we're witnessing the rollback of the 'Second Reconstruction,'" said Edward B. Foley, a law professor at Ohio State University, using a common term for the civil rights era. "It's not exactly the same as the end of the first Reconstruction, and one has to hope that it won't be. But there are enough parallels to be nerve-racking."

Targeting mail voting

Of the roughly 250 voting restrictions proposed in 43 states — seven times the number introduced in state legislatures by the same time last year — about half seek to limit mail voting, according to the Brennan Center. Proposals target every step of the process, including limiting who is allowed to cast ballots by mail, eliminating the option of being sent a ballot automatically each election cycle and adding ID, notary or witness requirements.

Far more Democrats than Republicans voted by mail last year, in part because Trump warned his supporters to steer clear of mail ballots, falsely asserting that the process was not secure, and in part because Democrats urged their own to take advantage of the option to avoid long lines on Election Day. As a result, many of the proposed curtailments on mail balloting are expected to make it harder for Democrats to vote than Republicans.

Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania are among the nine states considering limiting mail voting — or further limiting it — to narrow groups of people, such as seniors or those with disabilities.

Trump contested the results in all three states last fall, claiming falsely that lax security and new rules imposed illegally by judges caused his defeat there. With electoral margins of approximately 10,000, 12,000 and 82,000, respectively, these states could easily have swung for Trump if some of the proposed restrictions were in place last year, experts say.

One extraordinary proposal in Arizona would require mail ballots to be postmarked by the Thursday before Election Day, even if they arrive at election offices before polls close.

No evidence has surfaced to support Republican claims of widespread fraud in the state, where President Biden defeated Trump by less than 11,000 votes, and where most Arizonans have been voting by mail for more than a decade. The Republican governor, Doug Ducey, told Trump in the Oval Office last year that it is “difficult, if not impossible, to cheat” under the state’s mail-voting system.

Trump was open about his view that expanding mail voting would benefit Democrats, but he wrapped his grievance in a false narrative of fraud that

conjured unsubstantiated beliefs among his supporters that thousands and even millions of absentee ballots were fraudulently submitted. He also falsely claimed that there was no security in place to prevent ballot theft, and that election workers had abetted a giant crime by not checking signatures on ballot envelopes; sending ballots to the deceased or to empty lots; double- and even triple-counting Democratic votes; or accepting van loads of forged ballots at counting facilities.

No evidence has emerged to substantiate any of those claims.

But Trump's attacks on voting through the mail led many Republicans to shy away from using mail ballots, and they opted instead to vote in person on Election Day.

In Pennsylvania, Biden won 76 percent of the absentee vote, while Trump won 65 percent of the Election Day vote. In Georgia, Biden won 65 percent of the absentee vote, while Trump won 60 percent of the Election Day vote.

Michael McDonald, a political scientist at the University of Florida, noted that the main reason Trump's supporters don't believe U.S. elections are secure is because Trump and his allies have drummed that point into them. Their claim of wanting to improve perceptions of voter integrity, he said, is an excuse to enact suppressive legislation that would disproportionately affect Democrats.

"If Republicans truly wanted to increase confidence in elections, they would stop saying, 'Don't trust the elections,' " McDonald said.

Election Day pressure

Some of the GOP proposals would strain the overall election system — particularly in states with a history of disenfranchising voters of color, who often experience long lines in their precincts, among other hurdles.

In Georgia, for instance, Democrats say the Republican proposal to curtail early voting on weekends is a direct broadside at “Souls to the Polls,” the get-out-the-vote program that encourages Black voters to cast their ballots after church on Sundays during early voting.

Fewer early-voting hours would transfer more pressure onto Election Day resources. The same is true for another proposal that would prohibit election officials from accepting grants from nongovernmental entities. Such philanthropic grants are widely credited with helping election officials prepare for the surge of mail balloting and set up safe in-person voting amid the pandemic.

“There is no justification for that. None,” said Georgia state Sen. Elena Parent, a Democrat from the Atlanta area. “All it will do is lead to longer lines.” As for the Republican rationale that limiting early-voting hours is an equity issue for smaller counties with fewer resources, Parent said: “It’s not an equity issue when one county has a million people and others don’t. The equity issue is preventing the very populous counties from making voting accessible for their people.”

Georgia Republicans have also proposed banning “line-warming” activities such as passing out water and blankets to voters standing in long lines. Supporters of the measure, including Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger (R), say the practice encourages illegal campaign activity if volunteers are advocating for their preferred candidate and handing out free goodies in the process.

Opponents say such activities are necessary to ease the discomfort that many voters face in cities that regularly struggle with long lines.

As one epicenter for the voting wars this year, Georgia's debate over election restrictions has prompted impassioned speeches from Black lawmakers and civil rights leaders about the echoes of racist voter suppression they see in the Republican proposals.

"Today is a dark, dark day in our state," Rep. Nikema Williams, the chairwoman of the state Democratic Party, said on March 1, the day the House approved its elections bill. "Republicans voted as a caucus to enact the most blatantly racist attacks on voting rights in the South since Jim Crow, after losing an election they planned, built and oversaw."

Georgia state Rep. Barry Fleming, the top Republican booster for the sweeping House election bill, said during debate over the measure that day that the proposed law would "begin an effort to restore confidence in our election system by the voters of the state of Georgia." Fleming did not respond to a request for an interview.

In Alabama, a proposal is under consideration to eliminate straight-ticket voting, which critics said is yet another example of a measure that would create longer lines. In Tennessee, Republican state Sen. Janice Bowling proposed eliminating early voting entirely — but withdrew the bill when she found no one to take it up in the House.

Bowling explained her rationale for the measure to the Herald Chronicle of Winchester, Tenn.: "There was a time in the not-too-distant past where we didn't

have early votes," she said. "People went to their precinct on Election Day and they cast their ballot, which is one of the most important things citizens can do."

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Such red-state initiatives also suggest that many Republicans feel compelled to propose restrictions to signal their loyalty to Trump and his supporters — and to avoid a primary challenge in their next elections.

"No one questioned the legitimacy of anything that happened in our state election," said Sharon Steckman, a Democratic state representative in Iowa and a leading critic of the Republican election bill. "They won. They won overwhelmingly. We had no fraud in Iowa."

Steckman thinks the restrictions could hurt Republican voters, too, especially with so many first-time voters coming out to support Trump last year.

"We have a lot of rural Iowa that went solidly for Trump," she said. "We lost a Democratic seat we had for 40 years. I'm not sure how it's going to play out, but

there were a lot of people we had never seen before at the polls — young men, most of them. Young, White men."

Iowa Republicans defended the new measures. David Kochel, a longtime GOP strategist in the state, said a provision that would prevent local election administrators from unilaterally changing their counties' voting rules is reasonable.

"Auditors took advantage of the pandemic to do things outside their statutory authority," Kochel said. "This just makes sure every voter in every county has the exact same access as the person in the neighboring county or neighboring town."

Kochel also said curtailments of early voting and Election Day voting are unlikely to produce long lines in his state, where waits are rare.

A building battle

The Republican-backed bills are causing some angst inside the party, as some worry that support for the measures could hurt lawmakers in competitive districts. One GOP strategist in Georgia, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe internal party strategy, said state Republican leaders gave lawmakers "the green light to drop whatever bill they wanted" to placate Trump loyalists and avoid a primary challenge.

The plan was to prevent most of the measures from actually reaching the House and Senate floor, the strategist said. But now both the Georgia House and Senate have passed substantive bills.

That is forcing Republican lawmakers from more competitive districts to choose their poison: risk a primary challenge by voting against the measures, or risk a general-election challenge if they support them.

If many of the measures proposed across the country pass, legal scholars and voting advocates alike say some will be difficult to defend in court. Foley, the law professor at Ohio State, said taking away a previously granted voting right will prompt scrutiny of the law's rationale — with the burden on the government to justify a new hurdle for voters.

Democrats will also be armed with the fact that until Trump launched his campaign against mail voting, Republicans were champions of the practice, passing legislation in Florida, Pennsylvania and elsewhere, and developing sophisticated ballot "chase" operations to encourage their voters to request, fill out and return mail ballots.

Arguing that some of the proposals could disproportionately affect people of color is a trickier legal prospect because of the federal bench's history of narrowly defining racist intent under the Voting Rights Act.

Laws that return states to pre-coronavirus standards will also be harder to challenge given the extraordinary circumstances that prompted voting changes in 2020.

But there is little question that a new wave of election-related litigation will follow quickly if any of these measures are enacted.

"We are actively monitoring every state's legislature to see whether they are going to enact suppressive voting legislation," said Elias, the Democratic lawyer.

“I can promise those Republican legislatures that if they violate the rights of their voters in an effort to curry favor with a failed one-term president, we will see them in court.”

The New York Times

For Democracy to Stay, the Filibuster Must Go

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 11, 2021

It is hard to imagine a more fitting job for Congress than for members to join together to pass a broadly popular law that makes democracy safer, stronger and more accessible to all Americans.

Last week, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1. The bill, a similar version of which the House passed in 2019, is a comprehensive and desperately needed set of reforms that would strengthen voting rights and election security, ban partisan gerrymandering, reduce big money in politics and establish ethics codes for Supreme Court justices, the president and other executive branch officials.

The legislation has the support of at least 50 senators, plus the tiebreaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris. President Biden is on board and ready to sign it. So what's the problem? Majority support in the Senate isn't enough. In the upper chamber, a supermajority of 60 votes is required to pass even the most middling piece of legislation. That requirement is not found in the Constitution; it's because of the filibuster, a centuries-old parliamentary tool that has been transformed into a weapon for strangling functional government.

This is a singular moment for American democracy, if Democrats are willing to seize it. Whatever grand principles have been used to sustain the filibuster over the years, it is clear as a matter of history, theory and practice that it vindicates

none of them. If America is to be governed competently and fairly — if it is to be governed at all — the filibuster must go.

The most compelling reason to keep the filibuster is its proponents' argument that the rule prevents a tyranny of the majority in the Senate. That's the rationale of the two Democrats currently standing in the way of ending it, Senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. They have been steadfast in defending the modern filibuster as part of what they assert is a longstanding Senate custom.

"It's meant to protect what the Senate was designed to be," Senator Sinema said. "Debate on bills should be a bipartisan process that takes into account the views of all Americans, not just those of one political party."

(It's unlikely that any Republican senator will support getting rid of the filibuster today, even knowing that it would make legislating easier for them in the future, but because the filibuster is a Senate-created rule, that can be accomplished by a simple majority vote.)

Bipartisan cooperation and debate should be at the heart of the legislative process, but there is little evidence that the filibuster facilitates either. The filibuster doesn't require interparty compromise; it requires 60 votes. It says nothing about the diversity of the coalition required to pass legislation. It just substitutes 60 percent of the Senate for 51 percent as the threshold to pass most legislation. If the Senate was designed to be a place where both parties come together to deliberate and pass laws in the interest of the American people, the filibuster has turned it into the place where good legislation goes to die.

That's one reason the framers of the Constitution didn't include a supermajority requirement for the Senate to pass legislation. They had watched how such a requirement under the Articles of Confederation had prevented the government from doing almost anything. As Alexander Hamilton wrote in Federalist 22, "What at first sight may seem a remedy, is, in reality, a poison." Supermajority requirements would serve "to embarrass the administration, to destroy the energy of the government, and to substitute the pleasure, caprice or artifices" of a minority to the "regular deliberations and decisions of a respectable majority."

The filibuster arose only decades later. John C. Calhoun, a senator from South Carolina used it as a means to protect the interests of slavers like himself from a majority. From its beginnings through the middle of the 20th century, when segregationists like Senator Strom Thurmond, also of South Carolina, used the filibuster to try to kill multiple civil-rights bills, the pattern has been clear: It has been used regularly by those who reject inclusive democracy.

The relevance of the history is that the pattern continues today.

Finally, the filibuster is a redundancy in a system that already includes multiple veto points and countermajoritarian tools, including a bicameral legislature, a Supreme Court and a presidential veto. The Senate itself protects minorities in its very design, which gives small states the same representation as large ones.

Another common defense of the filibuster, as Ms. Sinema said, is that the filibuster is crucial for permitting full debate on a bill. Again, reality shows otherwise. The filibuster doesn't only fail to ensure extended debate on a bill; today it curtails the opportunity for any debate at all. A single senator can signal he or she intends to filibuster by typing an email and hitting send. No need to stand on the Senate floor to make your impassioned case.

Reformers have suggested many ways to chip away at the filibuster without destroying it completely. One proposal would bar its use for legislation involving voting rights or other democratic expansions. Another would require the old-fashioned “talking” filibuster. A third would entail holding a series of cloture votes spaced three days apart, lowering the number of senators needed to end the filibuster each time. These are clever solutions, and Mr. Manchin has said he is open to at least one of them.

Even if there were a real debate on a bill, however, it should end at some point. That was clear more than a century ago, when the Senate had not yet established a rule to shut down a filibuster. As Henry Cabot Lodge, a Massachusetts senator, wrote, “If the courtesy of unlimited debate is granted it must carry with it the reciprocal courtesy of permitting a vote after due discussion. If this is not the case the system is impossible.”

If the political reforms in H.R. 1 are not undertaken at the federal level, Republican leaders will continue to entrench minority rule. That’s happening already in states like Wisconsin and North Carolina, where Republican-drawn maps give them large legislative majorities despite winning fewer votes statewide than Democrats. It’s happening in dozens of other states that have passed hundreds of voting restrictions and are pushing hundreds more, under the guise of protecting election security.

The Supreme Court should be blocking these measures and protecting the right to vote, but far too often under Chief Justice John Roberts, it’s done the opposite. In 2019 it refused to stop even the worst partisan gerrymanders, and in 2013 it struck down the heart of the Voting Rights Act, opening the door to a wave of Republican voter-suppression laws that continues to crash. That’s why federal law is the only solution.

There have also already been many revisions to the filibuster. In the 1970s, Congress created a loophole for spending and revenue bills to avoid the filibuster, allowing such legislation to pass with a simple majority — a process known as reconciliation. More recently, in 2013, Democrats eliminated the filibuster for nominations of lower-court federal judges and executive-branch officials. Four years later, Republicans eliminated it for Supreme Court justices, which allowed President Donald Trump to fill one-third of the high court's bench with his picks.

The perverse result of all this is that it is now easier to block a piece of legislation, which could be repealed in the next Congress, than it is to block a federal judge seeking a lifetime appointment. Any intellectual justification for the filibuster has been gutted by the fact that it doesn't apply anymore to many important issues before the Senate.

The point of H.R. 1 is not to help Democrats. It is to rebuild and reinforce the crumbling foundations of American self-government and abolish voter restrictions erected for explicitly partisan gain — a federal law that would protect all voters. If the choice is between saving the filibuster and saving democracy, it should be an easy call.

The Washington Post

Republicans' Attacks on Voting Are Notching Up Victories. It's Degrading Democracy.

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 10, 2021

In a move that was as depressing as it was unsurprising, the Georgia Senate voted Monday to end no-excuse absentee voting, following Democratic victories in the state that former president Donald Trump and others blamed on mail-in ballots. This proposal, which would needlessly make voting more difficult, is perhaps the most nauseating policy so far to gain steam after Mr. Trump's campaign of lies about fraud in the 2020 presidential election. There is still hope that it will not become law. But the bill is only one part of a much larger Republican effort to restrict voting in states across the country, a war on democracy that is already notching victories.

Georgia's Republicans are far from alone in pushing new restrictions on the ballot box. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) signed a big voting bill into law Monday. It cuts the period in which mail-in ballots can be returned, shortens polling-place hours, reduces early voting and bars local election officials from distributing absentee-ballot request forms unless voters ask for them.

New Hampshire Republicans seek to crack down on student voting in their state. They are considering a measure that would punish state colleges and universities if students moving from out of state register to vote in New Hampshire. Another would bar students from using college IDs at polling places. And another would restrict students moving to the state for college from

registering to vote. Yet another proposal would demand onerous levels of documentation from anyone seeking to register.

Arizona Republicans are considering a bill that would trash absentee ballots that are not postmarked by the Thursday before Election Day — even if they arrive by Election Day.

In Georgia, Republicans are contemplating much more than an end to no-excuse absentee voting. Last week, the state House approved a bill that would crimp Sunday voting, which is popular among Black voters, and curtail mail-in ballot drop boxes. Even if the worst ideas do not become law, it seems likely that many needless restrictions will, on the pretext that Republicans must restore confidence in elections — confidence they are responsible for draining with their lies about 2020.

Republicans assail congressional Democrats' big democracy reform bill, H.R. 1, accusing Democrats of seeking political advantage by shifting voting rules. Yet that is precisely what they are doing in state after state. Though one can speculate about Democrats' motivations to mandate ample early-voting opportunities, an easier voter-registration system, mail-in voting options and reasonable provisional balloting, there is a clear difference in the effects of the reforms Democrats favor vs. the ones Republicans want. Democrats are pushing for reforms that would ease voting, and Republicans desire laws that would make it harder, based on lies about fraud.

One side would improve U.S. democracy. The other would degrade it.

Mother Jones

Stacey Abrams Has a Plan to Dismantle the Filibuster and Protect Voting Rights

BY ARI BERMAN | MARCH 10, 2021

As Republicans in the Georgia state legislature passed a series of voting restrictions over the past 10 days, Stacey Abrams, the state's leading voting rights activist, saw an ever more pressing need to reform the filibuster in the U.S. Senate. And she has a plan for how to do it.

The Georgia legislation and the Senate rules might seem unrelated, but to Abrams, the Democratic gubernatorial nominee in 2018 and founder of the voting rights group Fair Fight Action, they're directly connected.

"Republicans are rolling back the clock on voting rights," she says. "And the only way to head that off is to invoke the elections clause of the Constitution, which allows the Congress — and the Congress alone — to set the time, place and manner of elections at a federal level."

The problem is that Republicans will surely use the filibuster to set an impossible 60-vote threshold for any such effort — and that two centrist Democratic senators, West Virginia's Joe Manchin and Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema, have said they oppose abolishing the filibuster. That's why Abrams proposes tweaking it to allow major voting rights legislation to pass, and she thinks her plan can get reluctant Democrats on board.

In the same way that Democrats can pass budget bills and confirm judges and Cabinet members with a simple majority, legislation protecting voting rights should also be exempt from the 60-vote requirement, Abrams says.

“The judicial appointment exception, the Cabinet appointment exception, the budget reconciliation exception, are all grounded in this idea that these are constitutionally prescribed responsibilities that should not be thwarted by minority imposition,” she says. “And we should add to it the right to protect democracy. It is a foundational principle in our country. And it is an explicit role and responsibility accorded only to Congress in the elections clause in the Constitution.”

I spoke to Abrams on Monday, just hours before the Georgia Senate repealed no-excuse absentee voting, part of a series of bills passed in recent days to restrict voting rights that Abrams called “Jim Crow in a suit and tie.”

But neither bill will pass the Senate if Democrats don’t eliminate the filibuster, which Abrams calls “a racist procedural rule that is grounded in this notion that the minority must be protected unless we disagree with what the minority needs.”

Abrams testified before the House in late February in favor of H.R. 1, the most ambitious democracy reform bill since the Voting Rights Act, which would boost voting access through policies like automatic and Election Day registration, early voting, and expanded voting by mail.

“It’s the reform we need that will provide protection, provide a foundational level of access, regardless of your geography,” she says.

She also urged passage of another House proposal, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would require states with a history of discrimination to once again get federal approval for any changes to voting laws and procedures, after the Supreme Court struck down this requirement from the 1965 Voting Rights Act in 2013. The measure is needed, she says, “to make certain we don’t watch [voting rights] be butchered or eviscerated.”

I asked Abrams what she would say to Democrats like Manchin and Sinema to persuade them to go along with a “democracy exception” to the filibuster.

“This isn’t about retribution or revenge,” Abrams says. “This is about protection of the fundamentals of our nation, that if we do not protect the participation of voters in our election system, if we do not permit states to do what they must to protect their voters, then we will find ourselves losing our democratic values, losing our democracy. And so I would say to Democrats who are hesitant that short of completely revising the filibuster, we have to make certain that a minority of people cannot be in power in the Senate, and therefore deny the basic principles of citizenship to millions of Americans.”

Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) has floated a similar idea, and an increasing number of Democratic senators are now expressing openness to eliminating the filibuster, especially for bills like H.R. 1.

“I would get rid of the filibuster,” Amy Klobuchar, the chair of the Senate Rules Committee and a member of the Senate Democratic leadership, told me on

March 3, when the House passed H.R. 1. “I have favored filibuster reform for a long time and now especially for this critical election bill.”

Manchin said on Sunday he’s open to changes to the filibuster, such as forcing Republicans to continuously occupy the Senate floor to block bills. And if Republicans keep passing restrictions on the right to vote, a proposal like Abrams’ could start to find a broader consensus.

THE Nation.

Democracy Is Not Exclusive

BY BEN JEALOUS (OP-ED) | MARCH 9, 2021

House and Senate Democrats have made passage of the democracy-strengthening For the People Act a top priority. Given our intense partisan divisions, it is not surprising that Republicans have not yet gotten on board. But this isn't and shouldn't be a partisan issue. There are good reasons for principled Republicans to embrace the For the People Act just as many congressional Republicans embraced the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act in the 1960s.

Like those historic pieces of legislation, the For the People Act is about moving us toward "a more perfect union." It includes provisions to protect voting rights and make voting easier, reduce the power of big money in politics, and prevent gerrymandering that gives unfair political power to people who did not earn it at the ballot box and denies others the representation they deserve.

The ideas in the For the People Act are supported by two-thirds of the American people, an extraordinary level of consensus in our partisan times. This is the time to strengthen our national commitment to a more fully inclusive and representative democracy.

We are just a few years from the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. War with England was already underway when that manifesto for freedom and individual liberty was signed, printed, distributed, and read in public

squares. It inspired many Americans to take up arms in the cause of independence.

Many of the same people who put their lives on the line in a fight against the world's most powerful military force were disenfranchised in the country they helped bring into being. Nearly all state laws restricted the right to vote to white men who owned property or paid taxes.

Within a few years of the adoption of the Constitution, some people began to understand the wisdom of making our constitutional republic more inclusive and democratic and took small steps in that direction. New states joined without property-owning requirements and all states did away with them by 1856. Over the 100 years following the Civil War, the right to vote was extended to Black men, to women, to Native Americans. In 1943 the racist Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was overturned.

Getting the Constitution's "We the people" to mean all the people has been a long, often brutal, and sometimes bloody struggle against those who saw every expansion of the franchise as a threat.

And sadly, those struggles continue today, more than half a century after the passage of robust civil and voting rights legislation. We still have political leaders seeking to maintain or strengthen their grip on power by denying others the ability to participate.

But that is not a strategy for a healthy democracy. And it is not an effective long-range strategy for any political party, given another milestone that this country will soon reach.

For decades, our country has been becoming more diverse racially, ethnically, culturally, and religiously. Sometime around 2045, if not sooner, non-Hispanic white Americans will no longer be a majority. White Christians are already no longer a majority.

While some people view this diversification as a threat to a real or imagined America of the past, others, including my white father, welcome it.

When the United States is a so-called “majority minority” country—that is, when no single group represents a majority demographically—all groups will be required to work with others to be successful democratically. Our growing diversity can either be a source of increased conflict or it can be an incentive toward respectful pluralism and expanded political engagement.

Every political party and movement that is not grounded in exclusion should be working actively to become more fully inclusive and to welcome the full participation of all people. They should not tie their identities and futures to a restrictive vision of democracy that is doomed to failure.

The 2020 election was, in the opinion of federal officials, the most secure in the country’s history. A record number of Americans participated in spite of the extraordinary challenges imposed by the pandemic. But rather than celebrate that civic participation, too many state legislators are relying on false claims about election fraud to try to pass new restrictions on voting. They are plotting to rig the redistricting process in ways that violate meaningful representation of communities in order to maximize their own power.

That kind of response is a throwback to the era of Jim Crow. It represents our past, not the possibility for our future.

It is time for people of good faith, whatever their political party, to commit to a future in which all Americans are encouraged and enabled to participate in the civic life of their community and country. It is time to pass the For the People Act.

GoErie

Our Democracy Is Broken. H.R. 1 Can Combat Voter Suppression and Fix It

BY REP. MONDAIRE JONES (OP-ED) | MARCH 9, 2021

Our democracy is badly broken. Right now, Republicans in Arizona, Georgia and elsewhere are working hard to break it even further. But last week, my Democratic colleagues and I rose to repair and reconstruct it.

The For the People Act (H.R. 1), which passed the House of Representatives last week, will be the most significant improvement to our democracy since the Voting Rights Act of 1965. My colleagues in the Senate should act swiftly to send this bill to President Biden's desk. It is required to save our democracy from the people who incited the violent insurrection at the Capitol on January 6th.

The For the People Act is a comprehensive bill that establishes automatic voter registration, combats voter suppression, protects our elections from foreign interference, and ends partisan gerrymandering — a process by which representatives choose their voters rather than voters choose their representatives.

But I want to focus on how H.R. 1 changes how campaigns are funded, amplifying the voices of everyday Americans.

Our current campaign finance system gives the wealthy a megaphone and silences the rest of us. In 2016, just 400 mega-donors contributed a total of $1.5

billion – more than every small donor combined. Those donors are predominantly wealthy white men, and they predominantly contribute to white candidates.

Congress isn't just funded by wealthy people — it's full of them. More than 50% of lawmakers in the 116th Congress have a net worth of more than $1 million, compared to just three percent of the population. This is not by accident: our campaign finance system is rigged to favor wealthy candidates. They can fund their own campaigns. They're more likely to have nest eggs they can rely on while campaigning. And when they need extra funds, they can lean on networks of affluent family and friends.

I experienced our broken campaign finance system firsthand in my own run for Congress. When I was considering running for office, the first question insiders asked me was not what I would fight for, not whether my community was behind me, but how much money I could raise.

My leading primary competitor never had to answer that question. As the son of a pharmaceutical billionaire, he didn't have to raise any money at all. Instead, he spent $5.4 million of his inherited wealth to blanket the airwaves with TV commercials three months out from the primary election. In the general election, I faced yet another self-funding candidate who outspent me by pumping $1.5 million into his campaign.

Small-donor matching is simple: for every dollar a regular person donates up to $200, public financing matches that dollar with $6. A $50 donation becomes a $350 donation. As a result, small donors would matter — fixing the toxic power dynamics that threaten our democracy.

Small-donor matching has already transformed New York politics for the better. The donors in New York City elections, which have a matching program, are by far more racially and socioeconomically diverse than the donors in New York State elections, which do not. H.R. 1 would take that transformation nationwide.

The same goes for candidates. Candidates of color disproportionately rely on small donations. But because big money drowns out small donors' voices, we typically raise less money than our opponents. Thus, we are often prevented from even making the ballot. By multiplying the power of the people candidates of color rely on most, small-donor matching empowers more people to take their seats at the table.

When we can elect people who really represent us, we get a government that really serves all of us — not just the wealthy and well-connected. If Congress had more ordinary Americans, it surely would not be so indifferent to the needs of working families. My Democratic colleagues and I in this Congress are already proving that by passing real COVID-19 relief in the American Rescue Plan. And we're just getting started.

For at least a decade, Democrats have promised that when we had the chance, we would fix our broken campaign finance system. It's taken over 10 years, but we're here. It's time. If the Senate fails to follow through — if we compromise with corruption — we risk confirming many Americans' beliefs that billionaires and corporations have captured both parties, that our elections offer no real choices, and that our democracy is a swamp in need of a strongman to drain it.

So let's fight for H.R. 1 and its small-dollar matching program like our democracy depends on it — because it does.

DAILY BEAST

Inside Team Trump's New Plot to Suppress the Vote Under Biden

BY SAM BRODEY AND ASAWIN SUEBSAENG | MARCH 9, 2021

Donald Trump has made it clear that he wants election crackdowns to emerge as one of the defining legacies of his post-presidency, having failed to cling to power during Republicans' anti-democratic blitz during and following the 2020 race. And various GOP lawmakers and some of the ex-president's most prominent allies are lining up to assist him, as Democrats watch in horror and strategize their counter-offensives.

These national and state policy battles have rapidly developed into one of the most critical partisan fights of Joe Biden's young presidency, with both parties viewing the outcomes as increasingly vital to their survival and future dominance at the ballot box.

In recent days, Trump has been calling up Senate allies, quizzing them about H.R. 1 — congressional Democrats' signature elections and voting rights bill — according to two people familiar with the matter. The so-called For the People Act, which passed the House on March 3, includes a national mandate for same-day voter registration, requirements that states establish automatic voter registration, and making Election Day a national holiday. It's also chock-full of other measures, including campaign finance and redistricting reforms and a

requirement that presidents release their income tax returns — all things that would be anathema to the ex-president.

“Do you think it has a chance?” the former president has privately inquired, asking for updates on how united Republicans are in efforts to “kill” the bill. He has been repeatedly assured by GOP senators and other associates that the legislation currently has very low odds of reaching President Biden’s desk. Democrats agree, but momentum is growing within the party to change the Senate’s 60-vote threshold for legislation to a simple majority, explicitly in the name of passing H.R. 1.

That may be a while off still, but that hasn’t stopped some top Trump allies from preemptively mapping out their plans to strike back if the bill ever becomes law.

“The [ACLJ] is reviewing H.R. 1 in light of possible legal challenges, if passed,” Jay Sekulow, a personal attorney to Trump who also heads the conservative American Center for Law and Justice, told The Daily Beast in a recent interview. “We’re also evaluating various states’ election laws to make sure that they’re in compliance with the U.S. Constitution. Over the last several days, we’ve been following H.R. 1 very closely. I have assigned a team of lawyers to look at election issues generally.”

While Republicans and Team Trump attempt to stymie a key Democratic initiative on Capitol Hill, around the country, Democrats and voter advocates are overwhelmed by an onslaught of bills that have emerged on the state level to roll back voting rights in the wake of the 2020 election. Over 250 bills restricting voting access have been filed in 43 states since the beginning of the year, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

“This year certainly stands out in the sheer volume of these bills attacking voting rights and voting access,” Eliza Sweren-Becker, counsel for voting rights at the Brennan Center, told The Daily Beast. “They are driven by longstanding lies about voter fraud and election integrity that have come from organizations like [the] Heritage [Foundation] and others, that have been advanced by the former president and his allies last year... This is a widespread national project to suppress voting.”

Republicans have been particularly active in states that Trump has fixated on since his loss. Arizona, Georgia, and Pennsylvania’s GOP-led legislatures lead the way in proposing bills to limit voting rights. Arizona and Georgia’s Republican governors, Doug Ducey and Brian Kemp, were lambasted by Trump for seemingly not doing enough to overturn Biden’s wins in their states; both are under significant pressure from their parties to sign new restrictions into law.

At his new home base in Florida, former President Trump has told advisers that he wants to help rally support for these types of state GOP voting restrictions through trips and speaking engagements, a person with direct knowledge of the matter said. Trump has hyperbolically argued that if he and his party fail to destroy Democratic ambitions on this issue early on in the Biden era, “we might never win another election ever again,” as he’s phrased it to several people close to him. And last week, Trump’s former vice president, Mike Pence, now a fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, posted an opinion piece for the think tank arguing that “Election reform is a national imperative, but under our Constitution, election reform must be undertaken at the state level.”

Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA), who won a runoff race in Georgia thanks to record turnout just two months ago, is now watching from Washington, D.C., as GOP leaders in his home state push legislation that will almost certainly make it harder

for Black people and other minority groups to vote. “I think that the voter suppression legislation is flagrant, brazen, shameless, unconstitutional,” Ossoff told The Daily Beast last Wednesday. “Georgia's GOP should determine how to appeal to voters, not disenfranchise them because they lose.”

These state-level developments made Democrats’ consideration of voting rights legislation in Congress, like H.R. 1, feel even more urgent. That sense of alarm, however, is growing faster than the space for Democrats to counter it on Capitol Hill. They can pass all the bills they want in the House, but getting the 60 votes needed in the Senate is all but impossible in the evenly-split chamber—unless they jettison the filibuster.

It has not yet been clear that Democrats have nearly enough support within their caucus to get rid of the 60-vote threshold. But the prospect of voting rights bills dying a slow death on their watch may be changing that. In the wake of H.R. 1’s passage, Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)—who did not embrace nuking the filibuster during her 2020 presidential run—said she supported repealing the rule explicitly so voting rights and democracy reform measures could pass. Her home-state colleague, Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN), soon followed, and cited voting rights as a reason why.

House Democrats are clamoring for the Senate to pass expanded voter protections and many believe the state-level bills will simply go unchecked if senators don’t overcome their reservations around getting rid of the filibuster.

Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon (D-PA), a member of the House Judiciary Committee with some jurisdiction over voting laws, represents a state she quipped has been “basically surfing” nationwide trends on voter suppression.

“H.R. 1 is so important,” Scanlon told The Daily Beast. “That may be what sinks the filibuster, because if all this stuff goes through in the individual states and there’s no way to counter it other than a federal law, that may be enough to get people on board.”

When told that Trump remained active in pushing forward laws to restrict voting, Rep. Mondaire Jones (D-NY) let out a laugh. “No surprise,” he said in an interview.

“You cannot engage these people who are bad faith actors and expect a different result from the status quo,” said Jones, also a member of the Judiciary panel. He cited Klobuchar’s support of ending the filibuster as a clear sign of momentum for H.R. 1 and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, a bill named for the late lawmaker and civil rights legend that aims to restore and strengthen voter protection for historically disenfranchised groups. “This is all foundational stuff,” he added. “Nothing else comes close to being this important.”

Many liberals, particularly in the House, have a hard time watching H.R. 1 stall while Team Trump and the GOP go full steam ahead on their measures to curtail voting access—measures explicitly predicated on the conspiracy of widespread election fraud.

“Donald Trump and his Republican enablers, including Greg Abbott and Dan Patrick in Texas, are already employing the big lie that this past election was rigged and stolen in order to disenfranchise millions of citizens, particularly young, Black, and Latino voters,” said Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX) to The Daily Beast.

“And let’s be clear-eyed with stakes,” added Castro. “If President Biden and Congress fail to safeguard our elections now, I fear for the future of our democracy.”

In the face of pressure from the GOP and from within, Biden took his first action as president acknowledging the issue, rolling out an executive order on Sunday directing federal agencies to explore ways to expand voter access.

Jones, for one, believes Democrats should step up their efforts to fight back, both on and off Capitol Hill. He said he is not letting any media appearance or interview slide without mentioning the need to pass bills like H.R. 1 and says House Democrats should “absolutely” keep up the pressure on the Senate by continuing to pass more voting bills, like the VRAA.

“I think we can do more,” said Jones. “This should not be controversial stuff. It’s only controversial because Republicans cannot win on the merits of their policy ideas. They instead must resort to disenfranchising large swaths of American electorate.”

USA TODAY

Worried About the New Jim Crow? There's a Solution

BY BRIAN FROSH, KARL RACINE AND NORMAN EISEN (OP-ED)
MARCH 9, 2021

American democracy is at a crossroads. Legislators in 43 states have introduced voter suppression bills that, if enacted, would amount to the most far-reaching setbacks for voter participation in well over a century, all based upon the Big Lie that the 2020 election was infected by fraud. But the House just showed us another way by passing H.R. 1. This voter protection bill offers expanded freedom to vote building on the historic turnout of the 2020 election. Its fate now rests with the Senate.

As attorneys general who defend voting rights in our jurisdictions and nationally, and a former White House ethics czar who has worked on these issues for decades, we urge him and the Senate to take this path to equitable, inclusive elections.

Nationwide, states are debating more than 250 voting restriction bills that all pursue the same fundamental strategy: giving one party an advantage in elections by making it harder for communities of color to cast their ballots. And they have made no bones about their intent. Take it from Senator Lindsey Graham, who declared that he was going to investigate mail-in voting because “if we don't do something about voting by mail, we're going to lose the ability to elect a Republican in this country.”

Bills trying to end equal opportunity mail-in voting

We can see what that “something” looks like in Georgia, where restrictive anti-voting bills are quickly advancing through the state’s legislatures. The main state senate vehicle, SB 241, would end equal opportunity mail-in voting and add highly restrictive witness requirements. There’s no need for that kind of thing except to limit certain votes. A Michael Carvin admitted as much just this week in a U.S. Supreme Court argument over a similar restriction in Arizona, saying “it puts us at a competitive disadvantage relative to Democrats. Politics is a zero-sum game.”

The main Georgia house bill, HB 531, offers a similar tale. It would restrict drop box access and eliminate early voting on Sundays. That would block Black churches from organizing “Souls to the Polls,” their get-out-the-vote drives — all while imposing new identification requirements. According to recent analysis by the Brennan Center, Black voters accounted for 36.5% of those voting in person on Sunday in Georgia in 2020 compared to 26.8% of those who voted on other days of the week.

H.R. 1 offers a stark alternative to this regression to Jim Crow, building on the best and most effective practices from states around the country — red and blue — to strengthen our multiracial, inclusive democracy. It offers automatic voter registration, equal access to mail-in balloting, and same day voter registration. It requires states to provide voters with access to drop boxes on a per capita basis, starting 45 days before elections. It also would mandate early voting periods, including weekend voting, while prohibiting witness signature requirements and making it harder to purge voters from voter rolls.

For those concerned with fraud and safety, this bill would modernize and strengthen our elections against attacks through the use of mandated threat assessments, security requirements for voting machines, and audit requirements. And for those who recognize big money has too much influence in our elections, the bill creates a small donor matching system—offering civic-minded folks who give a few dollars to a campaign a metaphorical megaphone so their voices aren't drowned out by wealthier interests.

In all of that, H.R. 1 would shatter the hundreds of proposed barriers to racially equitable voter participation that some factions of legislators are introducing in state houses across the country. Without it, ensuring future elections are fully fair and free will continue to be an uphill climb.

We attorney generals just want to see fair policies

That is why 21 state or local attorneys general — including the two writing this — support swift passage of the bill. As chief legal and law enforcement officers in our jurisdictions, we want to see just and fair policies put forth that ensure election results reflect the will of all eligible voters, so that we, the people, have the power to make our communities stronger. Though we acknowledge H.R. 1 won't put an end to all voter repression, it is a critical first step. The next one rests in H.R. 4, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act — a badly needed reinforcement of the Voting Rights Act. We also tip our hats to President Biden for his executive order this weekend instructing federal agencies to take steps to better support voter registration and other election-related advances.

Between those federal actions, good state bills that seek to enhance the freedom to vote, and the bipartisan state and local leaders who worked so tirelessly to run

the most secure election in history this past go around, we can make our democracy stronger than ever.

There's no time to wait while state-level suppression bills gain steam. The Senate's anti-majoritarian filibuster rules should not stand in the way of H.R. 1's consideration. They have a long history of propping up racist policies, and if they clear the way for a new wave of voter suppression disproportionately targeting Black and brown Americans, that shameful history will add a new chapter. Budget reconciliation is effectuated by a simple majority vote — doesn't the very foundation of our democracy as expressed in H.R. 1 deserve the same? Thankfully, when Senator Joe Manchin was just asked about this, he suggested that if all else fails, he might be open to handling the bill via a 51-vote threshold.

The American people have demonstrated in the 2020 election and in the time since that they want and need many of the changes proposed in H.R. 1. The expansion in voting access last fall allowed us to break records for participation. Those new records are a sign of a democracy gaining vitality. The Senate should act to ensure we can keep breaking them in the elections to come.

NBC NEWS

Georgia Republicans Are Pushing Dozens of 'Election Integrity' Bills. Black Voters Are the Target, Rights Groups Say.

BY JANE C. TIMM | MARCH 8, 2021

After 15 years allowing voters to cast absentee ballots without excuses, Georgia Republicans say the practice has got to go.

On Monday, the Republican-controlled state Senate passed a package of legislation that would, among other things, limit mail-in voting primarily to Georgians who are elderly, disabled or out of town on Election Day — one of dozens of restrictive election-related measures under consideration in state legislatures.

Supporters of the measures, who include allies of former President Donald Trump and those who stood up to his bogus allegations of fraud after Joe Biden upset decades of Republican dominance to win the state, say the bills are commonsense election security efforts. Democrats, voting rights advocates and civil rights groups say something else is going on.

“It's pathetically obvious to anyone paying attention that when Trump lost the election and Georgia flipped control of the U.S. Senate to Democrats shortly after, Republicans got the message that they were in a political death spiral,” state Rep. Renitta Shannon, a Democrat from Decatur, said during a floor debate over the Republican proposals in Georgia last week. “And now they are doing

anything they can do to silence the voices of Black and brown voters specifically because they largely powered these wins."

The Senate bill and other restrictive voting laws passed by one chamber of Georgia's General Assembly are expected to end up in conference committee, where lawmakers will seek to reconcile competing legislation into a final piece of legislation.

Grassroots organizers say Georgia, which just elected two Democrats to the Senate, flipping the seats from red to blue, is ground zero for a movement happening across the country. State Republicans have introduced at least 253 restrictive voting bills in 43 states, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law, and because they control the majority of legislatures across the country, at least some of the proposals are likely to pass. In the fall, state Republicans will also control far more of the redistricting process than Democrats, and experts say lawmakers could easily gerrymander Republican House majorities.

"A lot has been written about the fact that the U.S. is going to be majority people of color — 2040, 2050 — well, that's 2024 for us here in Georgia," said Nsé Ufot, a voting rights advocate who leads the New Georgia Project, a group that aims to engage and register new voters.

Ufot argued that the proposals amount to blatant voter suppression in a state that had already erected major barriers to the ballot box.

"So we're talking about three years from now, four years from now, Georgia will be a plurality, white people will be the minority in Georgia," she said. "And there are some people that are deathly afraid about that. And they're doing everything

they can to break the machinery or break the machinery of our democracy to hold on to power for as long as they can."

Voting rights experts and civil rights groups have argued that, taken together, the movement adds up to a national assault that would push voters of color out of the electorate and that federal voting rights protections — like H.R. 1, which passed the U.S. House last week — are badly needed to ensure equal access to the ballot box.

"Those policies, in large part, would protect voters from some of the efforts that we're seeing in states across the country," said Eliza Sweren-Becker, an attorney at the Brennan Center who tracks restrictive and expansive voting proposals in states. "For example, H.R. 1 would implement Election Day registration, a policy that some states are trying to repeal. H.R. 1 would implement automatic voter registration, again, a policy that's a target of states like Georgia and Arizona, so it would really protect voters."

While the White House has indicated voting rights are a priority, issuing an executive order Sunday aimed at expanding voter registration, the sweeping reforms advocates want appear likely to be stalled in the closely divided Senate. Democrats control only a slim majority with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaking vote, and many Democratic senators have reiterated their opposition to eliminating the 60-vote threshold to pass nearly every piece of legislation, a rule known as the filibuster. Meanwhile, an attorney for the Arizona Republican Party offered a blunt reason for defending the state's voting restrictions before the Supreme Court last week: The measures help Republicans win elections.

Debate over election laws in Georgia has been marked by last-minute hearings, hurried rewrites and furious floor debates. The House created a Special Committee on Election Integrity to corral bills.

John Cusick, a lawyer with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund who is tracking the proposals, said last-minute 7 a.m. hearings had been scheduled the nights before, Zoom testimony had been prohibited and hearings had been conducted without fresh copies of bills in hand.

“They've been not open, not transparent and not inclusive,” he said.

A pair of dueling omnibus packages — one in the House and one in the Senate — and a small army of standalone bills tackle everything from early voting hours to automatic voter registration and drop boxes. Some proposals would limit weekend early voting in some counties, which is popular among Black voters who organize “souls to the polls” events at churches.

“All of these by themselves are challenging,” Cusick said. “And then when you start putting them together and you see the ways that they're interacting, it just exacerbates all of the harms, especially for voters of color who are being disproportionately impacted.”

Republicans say it is about bringing back trust. Many GOP voters believe Trump's lies that the election was stolen, according to public opinion polls.

The House's omnibus bill is “designed to begin to bring back confidence of our voters back into our election system,” the Georgia bill's sponsor, state Rep. Barry Fleming, a Republican from Harlem, near Augusta, said in a floor speech on March 1.

Georgia's Republican-controlled Legislature, in particular the Senate, has cast doubt on the integrity of the election system over the last year. The Senate hosted hearings to investigate allegations of fraud in early December, inviting Trump's conspiracy-peddling attorney Rudy Giuliani, who is being sued for defamation for advancing baseless conspiracy theories, to make fantastical claims before a subcommittee.

Once Georgia lawmakers nail down a package of bills they hope to become law, the buck passes to Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, who faces a difficult political decision if some of the more extreme measures are sent to his desk for his signature or a veto.

Kemp, like Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, faced Trump's ire for defending the integrity of the contest and not overturning Biden's win in the state. Both have said they support voter ID for mailed ballots while demurring or obliquely resisting proposals like ending mail-in voting for most eligible residents.

“At the end of the day, many of these bills are reactionary to a three month disinformation campaign that could have been prevented,” Raffensperger said in a statement, saying his office was reviewing the proposed bills.

Vetoes would risk enraging Trump supporters, and they could invite a primary challenge in Kemp's 2022 re-election race, while allowing such a bill to become law would give Democrats ample fuel in their challenges.

Trump has hinted that he could get involved in a primary challenge to Kemp, too.

“Doug, you want to run for governor in two years?” Trump said at a Georgia rally in December, referring to outgoing U.S. Rep. Doug Collins, a Republican. “He'd be a good-looking governor.”

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

The Real Reason Republicans Keep Saying the Election Was Stolen

BY DON ROSE (OPINION) | MARCH 8, 2021

There is a profound reason why those hundreds of Republican officeholders and operatives, from U.S. senators on down — all of whom probably know better — keep echoing the former guy's whine that the 2020 election was stolen right out from under their collective nose.

The off-hand explanation is that they want to stay on the right side of the former guy. But actually, as you have probably figured out, maintaining the myth of a stolen election gives them the rationale for passing all sorts of state laws to curtail voting rights in the name of securing honest elections and preventing vote fraud.

Those politicians understand they are a numerically minority party and the more people who vote the more likely Democrats will win. This applies particularly to communities of color, as shown dramatically in the U.S. Senate runoff election in Georgia s as well as in the other four states that flipped to Joe Biden last November.

Absent any positive ideas to expand Republican numbers, there is a concerted drive to reduce the opportunities of those who vote Democratic.

Thus, largely under the guidance of the American Legislative Exchange Council — the right-wing think tank for developing conservative state legislation — at

least 33 states have generated more than 165 measures to curtail voting, predominantly aimed at Blacks, Latinx and Indigenous people. Various bills would limit the number of days of early voting, make it harder to obtain mail-in ballots, eliminate drop-boxes for absentee ballots, end or restrict “souls to the polls” Sunday vote drives and so forth.

One bill would actually make it a crime to bring food or water to people standing in long lines waiting to vote.

Meanwhile, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is under continued legal assault, now with a 6-3 conservative Supreme Court majority known to be hostile to progressive balloting legislation. An earlier court already gutted key provisions of the act.

Clearly, the protection of voting rights is among the highest priorities for progressives this presidential term, now that the $1.9 trillion COVID-19 recovery act has passed both the U.S. Senate and House. If enough of those restrictive proposals are passed and we do not develop strong local programs to combat them, Democrats easily could lose their slim grip on both houses next year, though the map favors them making gains in the Senate.

The strongest antidote to this GOP drive would be for the Senate to pass H.R. 1, known as the For the People Act. This progressive wish-list would create a mild revolution by expanding voting rights through a series of measures including automatic voter registration, same-day registration, mandating 15 days of early voting and broadening mail-in voting, among other proposals.

The bill would also deal with an equally deadly issue by combating gerrymandering through independent map-making committees, take a lot more

money out of politics, introduce higher ethical standards and grant statehood to the District of Columbia.

Revolutionary indeed.

Sadly however, though the bill passed in the House easily with no Republican votes, it faces a grim future in the Senate, even if all 50 Democrats and Vice President Kamala Harris vote for it, because it would be subject to the damnable filibuster — just like the $15 minimum wage.

Yes, that’s another reason to end the filibuster.

Voting rights are again dangerously under siege. It’s imperative that organizers start now organizing voters of color and developing work-arounds to combat potential new restrictions passed by gerrymandered legislatures.

It can be done. Keep Georgia on your mind.

The Washington Post

Will Democrats Scrap the Filibuster to Pass Big Election Package?

BY DAN BALZ (OPINION) | MARCH 6, 2021

President Biden and Democratic lawmakers will face many challenges this year as they attempt to dramatically redirect policy after four years of Donald Trump's presidency. None will be as consequential for the future of elections and the shape of democracy as the coming battle in the Senate over a comprehensive election revision bill.

In its simplest description, the legislation is designed to make it easier for people to vote, make elections more transparent and shore up some of the infrastructure of election operations. Such a description, however, belies the breadth of what is included in the nearly 800-page bill, which carries the biggest proposed changes for elections in decades.

The contents cover major changes to campaign finance law, including rules to expose dark-money contributions and the creation of a small-donor federal matching system for House elections. The bill would shift control over how congressional districts are drawn, taking power from politicians and giving it to independent commissions, as some states already have done. The bill also would tighten ethics and lobbying rules, deal with foreign interference in elections and set a code of conduct for federal judges.

The proposed changes to how people vote touch on many of the issues that became flash points in the 2020 election. The bill would provide for automatic voter registration, require use of paper ballots, allow no-excuse mail-in voting, set standards for the number of days for early in-person voting and require states to begin processing mail-in ballots well ahead of Election Day to lessen post-election counting controversies.

Two years ago, the Democratic-controlled House approved H.R. 1 on a party-line vote, with every expectation that the legislation would die in the Republican-controlled Senate, as it did. Last week, House Democrats pushed through this year's version of H.R. 1, again along strict party lines. The bill's future is brighter this year due to Democratic control of the Senate, but passing it will be a monumental task, a battle that could be decided by whether Democrats are prepared — or able — to end the filibuster.

The bill, labeled S.1 to show its priority status, now sits in the Rules and Administration Committee, chaired by Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.). The committee members include Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.). The first hearing is set March 24. Klobuchar said she hopes to start marking up the measure sometime in April, with the prospect for floor action later this spring.

Klobuchar noted many of the provisions in the omnibus bill are individual pieces of legislation that were introduced in the past with bipartisan sponsorship — among them bills she co-sponsored with Republicans. Some are similar to measures that have been approved in many states, including states with Republican governors or Republican legislatures. Some provisions would force blue states in the Northeast with antiquated rules to shape up their procedures.

“Not all provisions are bipartisan but a lot are,” Klobuchar said.

That carries little weight with Republicans. They see the legislation as a vast overreach by the federal government into the affairs of the states, although after many GOP lawmakers supported an effort to get the Supreme Court to overturn election results in several states, that argument is less persuasive. Mostly they see it as a partisan exercise by the Democrats to tip the scales in their favor in future elections.

Republicans have attacked the measure with extravagant language, highlighted by what former vice president Mike Pence recently wrote in the Daily Signal. Pence said the bill “would increase opportunities for election fraud, trample the First Amendment, further erode confidence in our elections and forever dilute the votes of legally qualified eligible voters.” He said the measure’s sole goal is “to give leftists a permanent, unfair and unconstitutional advantage in our political system.”

Pence prefaced this attack by claiming that there were “significant voting irregularities” in the 2020 election, when in fact there were not “significant” irregularities and nothing on the scale that would have changed the results of the presidential race. Pence’s language gives credence to the false assertion advanced by Trump and supported by many other Republicans that the election was rigged and stolen, again in the absence of credible evidence to prove it.

Ben Ginsberg, a Republican election-law attorney who called out Trump’s falsehoods about the election being stolen, said that in any bill this big, there are good provisions and questionable ones. “It’s an almost 800-page bill, so while there is some fine stuff in there, significant other parts read like a bill hijacked by the wily political operatives in the Democratic Party. . . . It’s a huge gift to the

Republicans because two weeks ago the story was GOP civil war and now, lo and behold, they're unified."

The debate in Congress over the For the People Act is set against the backdrop of action by Republican legislators in states to make voting more difficult. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, which has pushed for the federal legislation, about 250 bills to restrict voting have been introduced or pre-filed in 43 states, a roughly sevenfold increase over a year ago. Many of these state-level bills would tighten rules for mail-in ballots or require more restrictive voter identification provisions.

"Democrats and Republicans have very different views on how to run elections, on how easy it should be to vote," said Nate Persily, a professor at Stanford Law School, an expert on election laws and procedures, and an advocate for H.R. 1. "They have diametrically opposed views on how elections should be financed and how districts should be drawn. There is very little middle ground here. If Democrats had 60 votes in Senate, it would be a different battle, but it is their last chance to make some of these changes in time for the 2024 election."

Michael Waldman, president of the Brennan Center, said the combination of new facts and new momentum have helped to push the federal legislation forward, though he acknowledged significant obstacles remain. "In the states, legislatures are rushing to enact restrictive voting laws, the most significant since the Jim Crow era," he said. "Congress has the power to stop that cold, legally and constitutionally, and what it needs is the political will."

Given the 50-50 split in the Senate, the federal legislation will go nowhere unless Democrats are united on the contents — no small issue. "We are doing very well

with Democratic support," Klobuchar said, while noting that she is working hard to unite her party behind the bill.

The window for action is limited, and because of Republican opposition, Democrats will likely have to decide whether getting rid of the filibuster is the only avenue to enactment. "One can view the fight over H.R. 1 as a lens through which to view our politics right now," Persily said. "The Democrats at some point were going to have to decide whether they would use the 'nuclear option' [of eliminating the filibuster] and whether reforming democracy is the battlefield on which they want to have that fight. It's not clear that they are going to be able to pass any substantial legislation without elimination of the filibuster."

Klobuchar favors getting rid of the filibuster entirely, as do a growing number of Democrats beyond the party's liberal wing. "It is not that I am not bipartisan," she said. "I have a record of working across the aisle. . . . I still think that, if we're going to act, we can't wait anymore on things like immigration, climate change legislation — and significantly on this bill."

Biden's ambitious agenda could depend on whether Democrats are able to change the rules. Election revision could be the vehicle that answers that question.

Democrats and Republicans Are Battling Over Voting Rights in Congress and At Statehouses. Which Side Will Win?

BY DEBORAH BARFIELD BERRY | MARCH 6, 2021

As Republican state lawmakers across the country propose measures that would limit access to voting, Congressional Democrats are pushing sweeping legislation to expand voter access, setting up a national battle over voting rights ahead of the 2022 midterm elections.

The House, led by Democrats, passed Wednesday one of the most sweeping election reform measures introduced in Congress in decades. It includes same-day voter registration and expanding early voting.

“The right to vote is under attack,’’ Alabama U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell, a Democrat, said Wednesday. “Voter suppression is alive and well. Old battles have become new again.”

It's unclear if the Senate will pass the measure. Democrats have an advantage because Vice President Kamala Harris can break a 50-50 tie, but the legislation faces the prospect of a GOP filibuster, a congressional tactic that essentially requires 60 Senate votes.

If Democrats are unable to succeed, how and when votes are cast in 2022 and beyond could be determined by GOP state lawmakers, who have already made moves to limit voter registration, early voting days, mail balloting and other

provisions that some say disproportionately affect young voters, low-income voters and voters of color, groups that tend to vote for Democrats.

The election law showdown comes in the wake of allegations by former President Donald Trump and many congressional Republicans that the presidential election, which Trump lost by 7 million votes, was rigged. There is no evidence to back up these claims after months of debate that saw Republican-appointed judges and Trump election officials defend the integrity of the 2020 election, Trump supporters storm the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 while threatening to kill lawmakers over the election results, and Trump impeached for a second time over his alleged support for the attack.

Voting rights activists describe Republican efforts to make voting more difficult as an attempt to turn away voters, particularly people of color.

“I certainly think that voter suppression is the single greatest threat to undermining democracy,’’ said LaTosha Brown, co-founder of Black Voters Matter, which led a get-out-the-vote effort across the South and in battleground states last year. “We’re at this intersection of where America has to face her own sins.”

Republicans, however, argue their efforts, particularly at the state level, where elections are run, are to protect against fraud and make sure only eligible voters can cast ballots.

“Democrats did not design #HR1 to protect your vote,’’ House Minority Leader California U.S. Rep. Kevin McCarthy wrote on Twitter Wednesday. “They designed it to put a thumb on the scale of every election in America and keep the Swamp swampy.”

Trump, who has largely remained out of the public spotlight since leaving the White House in January, repeated his unfounded claims of election fraud Sunday at the Conservative Political Action Conference.

“We can never let this or other abuses of the 2020 election be repeated or happen again,” Trump said. “We need election integrity and election reform immediately. Republicans should be the party of honest elections.”

At the center of the election debate are a series of voting measures passed last year that made it easier to vote by mail, register to vote and vote early because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes saw a record number of Democrats and Republicans vote in the 2020 elections

GOP-controlled Legislatures are trying to roll back those election changes and impose barriers to make it harder to vote, said California U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren, chairwoman of the House Administration Committee.

“H.R.1 would put a stop to that,” she said.

GOP-led states seek to transform election laws

If enacted, the federal election overhaul would trump many state election laws, some election experts said.

“In general, H.R.1 would create much more uniformity in how elections are administered across the nation and that means states would have much less discretion,’’ said Wendy Underhill, director of elections for the nonpartisan National Conference of State Legislatures. “And that, if enacted, most would have a great deal of work to do to come into alignment.’’

The provisions would apply to federal elections, but most states adopt those measures for all their elections, such as state senate or mayoral races, said Wendy R. Weiser, vice president and director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's School of Law in New York City.

“H.R.1 would counter almost all of the vote suppression bills pending in state legislatures and would nullify all the worst restrictions,’’ she said.

House Democrats are also pushing for passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would, among other things, restore a key provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that required states with a history of discrimination to get federal clearance before making election changes.

State lawmakers debate hundreds of election laws

While Republican-controlled states have long adopted measures to restrict voting, election experts and voting rights activists said proponents of such provisions have stepped up their efforts in recent years.

“Over the past decade we've seen a growing and increasingly brazen push in states across the country to make it harder for eligible people to vote,’’ said Weiser, adding that the bills often target voters of color. “This year we've seen a dramatic spike.”

The Brennan Center has tracked more than 253 bills in 43 states seeking to restrict access to voting, such as by reducing early voting hours. That number is more than seven times the number introduced at the same time last year, Weiser said.

She said the push by Republican lawmakers is fueled in part by Trump's attack on the 2020 elections and "the big lie about that election being marred by widespread voter fraud.''

Former first lady Michelle Obama, co-chair of When We All Vote, a nonprofit civic engagement group, said some leaders are trying to reverse hard-fought voter protections.

"Our democracy remains under attack by the partisan and unpatriotic actions of those at the state level who are doing everything they can to curtail access to the ballot box," she said in a statement.

In all, more than 2,000 election-related bills have been introduced in states this session, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Of those, about 100 focus on expanding absentee and mail-in ballots.

Underhill said some measures aim to clarify the process, including setting rules for drop boxes, which hadn't existed in most places before the pandemic.

Roughly 700 bills proposed by state lawmakers aim to improve access to voting, including allowing for automatic voter registration, same-day registration, expanding online registration and restoring voting rights for people with criminal convictions, according to the Brennan Center.

"The news isn't all bad,'' Weiser said. "But it doesn't have the same threat level and momentum level right now. It doesn't negate the vote suppression."

GOP lawmakers warn of unsupported claims of fraud

In several states, lawmakers have already passed Republican-backed measures that would reduce voter access to the polls. Proponents argue the measures help provide election law uniformity in those states.

In Iowa, Republicans introduced measures that would reduce the period to request absentee ballots to 70 days from 120 days and shorten early voting from 29 days to 18 days.

“Setting absentee voting at 18 days will limit voter remorse, the length of time campaigning in this state and allow more time for informed voting,” said GOP state Sen. Roby Smith, the bill's sponsor, according to the Des Moines Register.

Earlier this week, the Georgia state House approved a bill that would require photo ID to vote absentee, among other changes.

Black activists push for voting access

The flurry of action by states to adopt new election laws or revise them is not new, experts said. After nearly every presidential election, there are proposals to change the electoral college and dates of primaries.

“What works in New Hampshire is not going to work in Washington state,” said Thomas Hicks, vice chair of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

Republicans and Democrats are introducing measures they claim will improve the process, said Hicks.

“There needs to be a real healthy debate on that so that whatever we have we make sure that people are able to cast their vote and have their votes counted as they intended,’’ he said.

Brown, of Black Voters Matter, said her group and other voting rights organizations have vowed to put pressure on the Senate, state legislatures and others, including businesses, to support bills expanding voting rights protections.

“This isn’t just a question around a political party. We’re saying this is a question around democracy … This is a question around what side are you on?’’ she said. “This should not be a battle just for Black people to fight.”

POLITIFACT

Fact-Checking Misleading Attacks on the H.R. 1 Voting Rights Bill

BY AMY SHERMAN | MARCH 5, 2021

Opponents of a voting rights bill would have you believe that the legislation will allow murderers, teenagers, welfare recipients and immigrants in the country illegally to vote en masse — and that every American will now only cast ballots by mail. These attacks on the legislation are rife with misinformation.

Known as the For the People Act, the 791-page H.R. 1 combines proposals for voter registration, absentee voting, in-person voting, campaign finance and ethics related to federal elections. The House passed the bill March 3 largely along party lines, with Democrats in favor Republicans opposed. It now goes to the Senate.

…

H.R. 1 "would force states to adopt universal mail-in ballots." — Former Vice President Mike Pence

This is False.

Several states currently conduct elections almost entirely by mail, sending ballots automatically to every registered voter. But H.R. 1 would not force every state to conduct elections this way.

Rather, the bill would ease the process of voting by mail for those who want to use it, by lifting rules that require an excuse to vote absentee. It would not require anyone to stop using either early in-person voting or in-person voting on Election Day.

H.R. 1 would mean "that millions of illegal immigrants are quickly registered to vote." — Pence

This rates False.

The bill does not permit voting by noncitizens in U.S. elections, whether they're in the country legally or not. Pence was referring to a provision that would require automatic voter registration for people using services at government agencies. But that section says government agencies would pass along a person's information for voter registration only if they are citizens. People would still be attesting that they are eligible to vote, with penalties for lying, and it would still be up to election officials to verify eligibility. The goal of the bill is to register eligible citizens. Pence's warning that "millions" of ineligible noncitizens would be quickly added to the rolls is unsupported.

H.R. 1 "would force states to restore the voting rights of convicted felons—including violent felons convicted of murder or rape." — U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif.

This is Half True.

The proposed legislation would restore voting rights for all people convicted of a crime once they've been released from incarceration. LaMalfa ignores the fact that the vast majority of states, including California, already restore voting rights

for people convicted of a felony, either automatically upon their release or after a period of time.

H.R. 1 "automatically registers every welfare recipient to vote." — Former President Donald Trump

This is Mostly False.

H.R. 1 includes an automatic voter registration provision under which government agencies, including those that provide public assistance, would pass along to election officials information about people who are eligible to vote.

But Trump's statement creates a misleading impression that people on welfare will have a special path to voter registration, regardless of eligibility. The legislation says that government offices that help people with other services, such as veterans or gun owners, would also get the same assistance in registering to vote. Under the bill, applicants could opt out, and election officials will still review applications for eligibility requirements before moving them to the voter rolls.

H.R. 1 would "prevent removal of ineligible voters from registration rolls." — U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y.

This rates False.

No section of the bill prevents an election official from removing an ineligible person on the voting rolls. One section of H.R. 1 details rules that states must follow for removing ineligible voters, including that they must notify the registrants.

H.R. 1 will allow members of Congress to draw a second salary "worth an estimated $600,000 per year!"— Act for America, a conservative political group

This is False. We found nothing in the legislation that would allow members of Congress to earn a second salary. There is a provision that allows non-incumbent candidates to use campaign funds to pay for expenses such as child care so that they are able to run for office.

H.R. 1 does not change an existing policy that allows candidates to draw a salary of up to $174,000 from campaign funds. That policy doesn't apply to those who are already in Congress.

H.R. 1 provides for a "16-year-old voter age" — Act for America

This is wrong. The bill says that states must accept an individual's application to register to vote if the individual is at least 16 years old. However, it also states that nothing in that provision "may be construed to require a state to permit an individual who is under 18 years of age at the time of an election for federal office to vote in the election."

This process is known as "preregistration" and is already allowed in some states for individuals who are 16 or 17. Some states also permit 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections, if they will turn 18 before the general election.

The House rejected a proposed amendment to lower the voting age to 16.

salon

Democracy on the Line: Senate Democrats Can't Let Trump's Big Lie Become a Zombie Lie

BY HEATHER DIGBY PARTON (OPINION) | MARCH 5, 2021

One of the more revealing political moments of recent times was when the Republican Party decided they weren't going to bother writing a platform for the national convention in 2020. They simply announced that they supported President Trump and pretty much left it at that. It's not that platforms necessarily guide the party's agenda, but they are an indicator of its priorities, philosophy, ideology, etc. Yet the erstwhile “party of ideas” didn't think it was important enough to even make a half-baked stab at writing them down ahead of the last election. That's because they don't have ideas anymore, at least any that could possibly be translated into a legislative program.

Maybe it's the influence of Donald Trump or the fact that the right-wing media's culture war machine is permanently turned up to 11, 24 hours a day, but the right has clearly decided that turning politics into a non-stop circus is all they need to do. That's why we have Republicans in Congress refusing to negotiate in good faith on the COVID relief bill and pulling stunts like forcing the clerk of the Senate to read the bill aloud for no good reason other than to delay the process.

And that's just Congress.

Out in the states, Republicans are a beehive of activity, putting all of their energy wherever they have any power to roll back voting rights. This isn't new, of course.

Conservatives have been trying to suppress the vote of their political opponents and racial minorities literally for centuries. But we had made some progress in the latter half of the 20th century with the enactment of the Voting Rights Act, which the Supreme Court recently ruled meant that we no longer needed the federal government to protect the right of those who've traditionally been disenfranchised.

Democrats knew that would unleash a wave of voter suppression and in the last Congress, the House passed H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which would expand voting rights, change campaign finance laws to reduce the influence of money in politics, limit partisan gerrymandering, and create new ethics rules for federal officeholders. Needless to say, the Senate under the leadership of Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., never took it up because they weren't in the business of doing anything but confirming judges, appearing on Fox News and golfing with the president if they were lucky.

Trump's Big Lie that the election was stolen has now allowed Republicans across the board to go into overdrive, fatuously insisting that they must pass hundreds of laws all over the country making voting as difficult as possible for poor and working people, students, racial and ethnic minorities and people who live in dense population areas, in order to "restore faith" in our elections. Lie blatantly about a stolen election and then use that as an excuse to steal future elections. You have to admire the chutzpah.

H.R. 1 once again passed the House this week on a party-line vote and the Senate will take it up once the Republicans get tired of putting on a sideshow and the COVID relief package is finally finished. This bill cannot be dealt with through the reconciliation process that allows for only a simple majority to pass so it is

subject to the filibuster and the Democrats are going to have to do a very serious gut check. This is an existential battle for the party and for American democracy.

…

Perhaps that's why former Vice President Mike Pence popped his head up for the first time since he was evacuated from the U.S. Capitol on January 6th to argue against this bill, accusing Democrats of trying to “give leftists a permanent, unfair, and unconstitutional advantage in our political system,” which is laughable considering the state of our tattered democracy.

The Democrats currently hold 50 Senate seats but represent 41,549,808 more people than the 50 Senate Republicans. GOP presidents appointed six of the nine Justices of the Supreme Court while winning the popular vote only once in the past seven elections. Of course, the anachronistic Electoral College can grant a Republican president the White House even though he or she might actually lose by millions of votes, and partisan gerrymandering in red states consistently benefits Republicans.

Unless Democrats can persuade centrist Sens. Joe Manchin, D-WV, Kyrsten Sinema, D-Az, and institutionalists like Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., that U.S. democracy is in dire straits and the filibuster has to either be eliminated or "reformed" in some way, H.R. 1 and the upcoming John Lewis Voting Rights Act will not pass and this barrage of voting restrictions and gerrymandering may very well cement GOP minoritarian rule permanently. Not passing these bills really isn't optional.

The U.S.-funded NGO Freedom House, which has been around since 1941, recently released its annual report on democracy around the world. The outlook is not good.

Democratic governments have been on the decline for 15 years and it's not getting any better. But the most startling finding is that the U.S., once the exemplar of modern democracy, has declined by 11 points on Freedom House's aggregate Freedom In The World score, placing it among the 25 countries that have suffered the steepest declines over the past 10 years.

The report discusses the long term degradation of America's democratic norms but focuses on the accelerating decline in U.S. freedom scores during the Trump years, "driven in part by corruption and conflicts of interest in the administration, resistance to transparency efforts, and harsh and haphazard policies on immigration and asylum that made the country an outlier among its Group of Seven peers." But it reserves its harshest criticism for Trump's attempt to overturn the election which it rightly characterizes as his most destructive act. And even more concerning was the fact that “nationally elected officials from his party backed these claims, striking at the foundations of democracy and threatening the orderly transfer of power.” That is not something any of us would have expected to read in a Freedom House report.

The Democrats have a small window of opportunity to prevent this undemocratic movement from gaining steam and securing minority rule for the foreseeable future. Trump himself is not out of the picture and his party is single-mindedly focused on attaining power by any means necessary. Democrats must act decisively now and make sure that all 50 Senators understand the stakes and do what is necessary to pass H.R. 1.

I would hope that neither Kyrsten Sinema or Joe Manchin want to be remembered as the Strom Thurmond of their time, but that's exactly who they will be if they allow the filibuster to once more stand in the way of ensuring voting rights for all Americans.

The Washington Post

Republicans Aren't Fighting Democrats. They're Fighting Democracy.

BY DANA MILKBANK (OPINION) | MARCH 5, 2021

On the conservative Bulwark podcast this week, two admirable never-Trumpers marveled at what has become of the Republican Party since President Donald Trump's attempt to overturn the election.

"I am a little amazed by the willingness to go just authoritarian, to really go anti-democratic," Bulwark editor-at-large Bill Kristol said.

Columnist Mona Charen was likewise puzzled. "The attraction of authoritarianism, I don't know, Bill," she said. "I'm really at a loss."

And I'm at a loss to understand their confusion. The Republican Party's dalliance with authoritarianism can be explained in one word: race.

Trump's overt racism turned the GOP into, essentially, a white-nationalist party, in which racial animus is the main motivator of Republican votes. But in an increasingly multicultural America, such people don't form a majority. The only route to power for a white-nationalist party, then, is to become anti-democratic: to keep non-White people from voting and to discredit elections themselves. In short, democracy is working against Republicans — and so Republicans are working against democracy.

You don't have to study demography to see that race is at the core of the GOP's tilt toward the authoritarian. You need only look at what happened this week.

On Monday, the Georgia state House passed a bill brazenly attempting to deter Black voters. The bill proposed to scale back Sunday voting — taking direct aim at the longtime "Souls to the Polls" tradition in which Black voters cast their ballots after church on Sundays. The bill also would increase voter I.D. requirements — known to disenfranchise Black voters disproportionately — and even would make it illegal to serve food or drinks to voters waiting in long lines outside polling places; lines are typically longer at minority precincts.

Georgia Republicans clearly are hoping they can suppress enough Black votes to erase the Democrats' narrow advantage that gave them both of the state's Senate seats and Joe Biden its electoral votes. But Georgia is just one of the 43 states collectively contemplating 253 bills this year with provisions restricting voting access, according to a tally by the Brennan Center for Justice.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court's majority signaled it would be open to more such voting restrictions. In oral arguments, the conservative justices indicated they would uphold two Arizona laws that would have the effect of disproportionately disqualifying the votes of non-White citizens. One law throws out ballots cast in the wrong precinct, a problem that affects minority voters twice as much as White voters because polling places move more frequently in minority neighborhoods. The other law bans the practice of ballot collection — derided by Republicans as ballot "harvesting" — which is disproportionately used by minority voters, in particular Arizona's Native Americans on reservations.

Representing the Arizona Republican Party in Tuesday's argument, lawyer Michael A. Carvin explained why the party supports laws tossing out ballots: "Politics is a zero-sum game."

It was a stark if inadvertent admission that Republicans have abandoned the idea of appealing to new voters.

Then, on Wednesday, House Republicans mounted lockstep opposition to H.R.1, a bill by Democrats attempting to expand voting rights. The bill would, among other things, create automatic voter registration, set minimum standards for early voting and end the practice of partisan gerrymandering.

In the House debate, Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), sounding like Trump, made unfounded claims of "voter fraud" and asserted that the law would mean "future voters could be dead or illegal immigrants or maybe even registered two to three times."

"This," McCarthy said, "is an unparalleled political power grab."

So, in the twisted reasoning of this white-nationalist incarnation of the Republican Party, laws that make it easier for all citizens to vote are a power grab by Democrats.

The foundation of a white-nationalist GOP has been building for half a century, since Richard Nixon's Southern strategy, through Ronald Reagan's welfare queen and George H.W. Bush's Willie Horton. But Trump took fear of non-Whites and immigrants to a whole new level.

Researchers have repeatedly documented that racial resentment is the single most important factor motivating Republicans and Republican-leaning voters. They have also shown that White evangelical Christians, a huge part of the GOP base and Trump's most reliable supporters, are highly motivated by appeals to white supremacy. By contrast, Democratic voters — White and non-White — are primarily driven by their favorable views toward a multiracial America.

President Biden's victory reveals the obvious political problem with the Republican move toward white nationalism: When voters turn out in large numbers, Democrats win. And the odds will only get worse for Republicans as racial minorities become the majority and the young, overwhelmingly progressive on race, replace the old.

This is why Republicans aren't really fighting Democrats. They're fighting democracy.

THE BALTIMORE SUN

Election Reform: Judge Sarbanes' Proposal on Merit, Not Partisan Advantage

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 5, 2021

There has always something essentially quixotic in Rep. John Sarbanes' "For The People Act," its title as idealistic as anything found on its nearly 800 pages of content. In sum, what H.R.1 attempts to do is fix much of what is broken in this nation's election system, chiefly by making voting more accessible, ending partisan redistricting, raising ethical standards, and exposing and reducing the influence of big money in politics.

Americans should be celebrating its passage in the U.S. House of Representatives late Wednesday and giving thanks to the 58-year-old Maryland Democrat, the eldest son of the late Sen. Paul Sarbanes, who has made this worthy cause a personal crusade. Don Quixote may have tilted at windmills, but John Sarbanes went after something real and far more daunting: a political system that runs on money and disenfranchises far too many Americans.

Yet, this remarkable achievement has, unfortunately, if predictably, fallen into partisan tooth gnashing and gross over-simplification. Republicans have reduced these sweeping reforms to one unifying idea — that it's a reckless power grab by Democrats. And they have done so by returning to the same prevarications about the last election that have been completely and utterly disproved, yet fueled an assault on the U.S. Capitol just two months ago that tested the very foundations of this democracy. Incredibly, just hours after the commanding general of the

District of Columbia National Guard testified in the Senate about the horrors of that day and the delay in Pentagon approval of a military response — and even as Capitol Police were still warning the public of yet another such potential plot on Thursday — Republican House members were blindly returning to the same old false rhetoric about rampant election fraud, rejecting H.R. 1 in a near complete party-line vote.

Like most political theater, there was no surprise here. For years, Republicans have followed a fairly conventional political wisdom that they do best in elections with the lowest participation rates. Nonwhites, younger and educated adults? They tend to vote Democratic. And, indeed, overall, more Americans identify as Democrats than they do as Republicans (33% to 29%, according to the most recent Pew Research Center survey). So Democrats see advantage in higher voter turnout. But in this case, they also happen to be correct. There is an undeniable public good in removing barriers to voting and establishing national voting rights standards. No-excuse mail voting, early voting, automatic voter registration, returning rights to felons who have served their time, these have broad societal benefits. And, as the last election demonstrated (and was confirmed by dozens of legal challenges), they do not give rise to rampant voter fraud.

Marylanders understand this better than most. With the notable exception of non-partisan redistricting, many of these reforms have already been successfully adopted here. And H.R. 1 gives the best path forward on redistricting, removing the power to gerrymander from all state legislatures whether they are controlled by Democrats, as is the case in Maryland, or by Republicans who claim majorities in most.

The sad reality is that after passing in the Democratically controlled House, the legislation's chances in the evenly-divided Senate, where matters of consequence face a 60-vote threshold because of the filibuster rule, are between slim and none. At least, they are if red state Americans don't get wise and start questioning why GOP senators are so unanimously against more people voting or tracking "dark money" contributions or requiring presidential candidates to release their federal tax returns. Polls show all these measures have broad support from the public. To whom do Republican lawmakers answer? To their constituents or to deep-pocketed special interest groups or fellow career politicians who might be disadvantaged by ethics reforms?

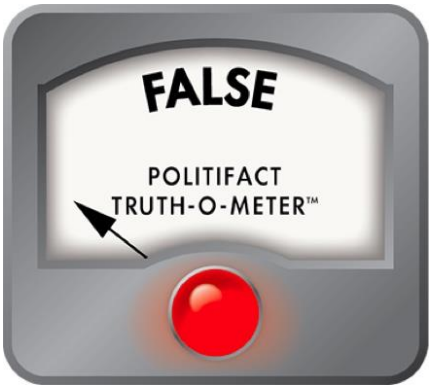
Granted, democracy is difficult. Politics are tough. But if Republicans are going to continue to look at the last election as some kind of scandal because so many more Americans were able to participate or, worse, make outrageous and false claims about fraudulent voting schemes (the kind that some people take seriously enough to stage an assault on our most sacred temple to democracy), they are going to encounter a lot worse problems than how their own congressional districts are drawn. Mr. Sarbanes may not defeat any ferocious giants on this day, but perhaps he will inspire others to take up the worthy cause of voting rights. They are certainly plenty of state houses where these essential democratic ideas are under attack from those who would benefit from turning back the clock and returning (or retaining) power among the privileged.

POLITIFACT

Mike Pence Is Wrong That HR 1 Forces States to Shift to Universal Mail Balloting

BY LOUIS JACOBSON | MARCH 5, 2021

As a Democratic-backed bill on elections and voting worked its way through Congress, former Vice President Mike Pence wrote an op-ed critical of the measure.



H.R. 1 combines proposals for voter registration, absentee voting, in-person voting, campaign finance and ethics related to federal elections. The House passed the bill on March 3, largely along party lines.

On the same day, Pence raised multiple objections to the bill in a column that appeared in the Daily Signal, a publication of the conservative Heritage Foundation.

The one we will check here is that “the bill would force states to adopt universal mail-in ballots.”

That’s not what the bill would do.

The bill’s focus is on lifting state restrictions on voters who voluntarily choose to cast their ballot by mail. Put simply, it merely requires states to give everyone access to voting by mail if they want to use it.

“Every state already uses some form of mail-in ballot,” said Matthew Weil, director of the elections project at the Bipartisan Policy Center. “The differences among states right now revolve around how many voters qualify to use them.”

Voting experts told PolitiFact that Pence’s phrase, “universal mail-in balloting,” isn’t a commonly used term.

…

Pence said H.R. 1 "would force states to adopt universal mail-in ballots."

This is incorrect. H.R. 1 would not force every state to conduct elections almost entirely by mail, as several do now by sending ballots automatically to every registered voter.

Rather, the bill would ease the process of voting by mail for those who want to use it, by lifting rules that require an excuse to vote absentee and mandating proof of identification beyond a signature. It would not require anyone to stop using either early in-person voting or in-person voting on Election Day.

We rate the statement False.

The New York Times

Voting Rights or the Filibuster?

BY DAVID LEONHARDT | MARCH 5, 2021

It's shaping up to be the most significant question about the new Democratic Senate: If forced to choose between the protection of voting rights and the protection of the filibuster, what will Democrats do?

They are now almost certain to face that decision.

Republican legislators in dozens of states are trying to make voting more difficult, mostly because they believe that lower voter turnout helps their party win elections. (They say it's to stop voter fraud, but widespread fraud doesn't exist.) The Supreme Court, with six Republican appointees among the nine justices, has generally allowed those restrictions to stand.

"I don't say this lightly," Michael McDonald, a political scientist at the University of Florida, recently wrote. "We are witnessing the greatest roll back of voting rights in this country since the Jim Crow era."

'Their best opportunity'

The only meaningful way for Democrats to respond is through federal legislation, like the voting-rights bill that the House passed on Wednesday. Among other things, it would require states to register many eligible voters automatically; allow others to register on Election Day; hold at least 15 days of early voting; expand voting by mail; and allow people with completed criminal sentences to vote. The

bill also requires more disclosure of campaign donations and restricts partisan gerrymandering.

But the bill seems to have no chance of winning the 60 votes in the Senate needed to overcome a filibuster. The Senate is divided 50-50 between the two parties (including two independents, who usually vote with Democrats). The bill will pass only if all 50 Senate Democrats agree to scrap or alter the filibuster, as they have the power to do.

“Proponents of eliminating the filibuster have said all along that their best opportunity to do so would come on a civil-rights bill, and this is the modern version,” Carl Hulse, The Times’s chief Washington correspondent, told me.

As Carl explained: “They intend to ratchet up the pressure on Democratic holdouts to overturning the filibuster by saying Republicans are using undemocratic means to hold up urgent protections for our democratic system. The votes still aren’t there, but opponents of the filibuster believe they are gaining ground.”

The swing votes include Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, two of the most moderate Democratic senators, who have both expressed support for the filibuster.

Status quo? Not an option.

The stakes involve both small-d democratic principles and partisan power. If the Senate does not pass a voting-rights bill, large numbers of Americans may find voting so difficult that they are effectively disenfranchised. And Republicans may enjoy a large built-in advantage for years to come, preventing Democrats from

holding power and passing laws on climate change, Medicare, taxes, the minimum wage and more.

“If we don’t pass a redistricting reform, our chance of keeping the House is very low,” David Shor, a Democratic strategist, told New York magazine.

Shor noted that gerrymandering has already helped create a situation in which Democrats don’t just need to win the national popular vote to hold House control; they need to win it by more than three percentage points. He also argued that a fight over voting rights and gerrymandering would benefit the party politically in the 2022 campaign.

There does not appear to be a compromise path on this issue. Democrats can overhaul the filibuster — and, by extension, transform the Senate, ushering in an uncertain era in which both parties would be able to pass more of the legislation they favor. Or Democrats can effectively surrender on voting rights. It’s one or the other.

The Intercept_

An Absolutely Crucial Voting Reform Measure Just Passed the House. What's Next?

BY RYAN GRIM | MARCH 4, 2021

On Wednesday night, the House of Representatives passed a sweeping package of voting rights and campaign finance reform that, if enacted, would reshape the structure of American politics, expanding the franchise and diminishing the power of wealthy interests.

…

H.R. 1, also known as the For the People Act, creates a national system of automatic voter registration, which is expected to bring millions of new voters to the ballot box, and cracks down on voter suppression tactics. Crucially, it mandates nonpartisan redistricting commissions in order to outlaw gerrymandering. Without passage of the legislation, Republicans are well positioned to retake the House of Representatives in 2022 without persuading a single voter to switch parties or turning out new voters, but simply by gerrymandering in the wake of the Trump administration's rigged census.

…

The bill tackles the influence of the superrich on politics by creating a "Freedom From Influence Fund." For every contribution up to $200 received by a candidate

in a primary or general election campaign, the fund matches by six times, turning that $200 into $1,200. The contribution is not eligible for a match, however, if the donor gave more than $1,000 to the candidate, an effort to make sure members of Congress are funded by regular people rather than the rich. No taxpayer money is involved: The matching money is to be funded by a surcharge levied on top of fines doled out to those convicted of white-collar financial crimes. The logic is straightforward: Those abusing the democratic system should pay to fix it.

The bill has strong support among Democrats in the Senate, support that is only growing stronger as Republicans unleash a wave of voter suppression laws — particularly in Arizona and Georgia, where Democrats will be defending new gains in the upcoming midterms. While Republicans across the country support the legislation, their elected representatives in Congress are dead set against it. That means passage requires busting or evading the filibuster. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, an advocate of drastically reforming the filibuster to return the Senate to a majority-run institution, said that the idea of a democracy reform exception to the filibuster has been discussed if it appears that full repeal is not in the cards.

HUFFPOST

Republicans Who Voted to Overturn Election Say Congress Should Stay Out of Elections

BY SEAN NEUMANN | MARCH 4, 2021

A stunning 147 Republicans in Congress voted to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election based on lies about widespread voter fraud — lies that, by lawmakers' own admission, incited supporters of then-President Donald Trump to violently storm the U.S. Capitol in January.

The ultimately unsuccessful effort sought to toss out electoral votes from Arizona and Pennsylvania, potentially disenfranchising millions of Americans.

Now, many of those same Republican lawmakers are up in arms about a Democratic bill on voting and campaign finance reform that passed by a near party-line vote in the House of Representatives on Wednesday. The legislation, called the For The People Act, would effectively nullify the new wave of voter restrictions that Republicans are pushing at the state level. It faces exceedingly difficult odds of passage in the Senate.

Among other provisions, the bill mandates that states provide no-excuse absentee voting, at least 15 days of early voting and provisional ballots; requires that states establish automatic voter registration; and restores voting rights to people convicted of felonies upon release from prison in states that ban them from voting. In essence, it would maintain and expand voter accommodations that some states made during the coronavirus pandemic.

Republicans are objecting to the House bill on the grounds that it would force states to adopt procedures decreed by the federal government, arguing that states should be left free to decide how they run elections. This is a principle that many Republicans abandoned in January when they sought to overturn the 2020 presidential election because they opposed state laws governing that election, which were passed in some cases by GOP-controlled state legislatures.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (Calif.), one of those 147 Republicans who voted to toss the Electoral College results, claimed that the Democratic bill would “put a thumb on the scale of every election in America.”

Sen. John Kennedy (La.), one of seven GOP senators who voted to throw out the election results, said the bill “takes all the things that went wrong in our election of Nov. 3 and makes them the law.”

“Basically, Speaker [Nancy] Pelosi just wants to federalize elections. She wants to federalize everything,” Kennedy told HuffPost.

But just two months ago, it was Republicans in Congress arguing that the federal government should interpret state laws in ways that would help Trump overturn the results of the 2020 election he lost.

In objecting to the election results from Pennsylvania, which President Joe Biden won by 81,660 votes, Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) argued that Congress should effectively overturn a law passed by the Republican-controlled state legislature in 2019 because, according to Hawley’s interpretation of Pennsylvania state law, it violated the state’s constitution.

“Pennsylvania elected officials passed a whole new law that allows universal mail-in balloting, and did it irregardless of what the Pennsylvania Constitution said,” Hawley contended on Jan. 6.

Normally, such a dispute would have been handled by Pennsylvania state courts, but no one challenged the bipartisan law after it passed in 2019. Republicans challenged it only after Trump lost the state in November 2020. These challenges failed before every judge at the state and federal level, all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. But Hawley still thought that Congress should ignore these decisions and that of the state legislature to impose its own legal interpretation.

When Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) objected to the election results from Arizona, he did not mention any specifics about Arizona’s election laws. He instead proposed the creation of a special electoral commission made up of federal officials to investigate the six states where Trump falsely claimed fraud had cost him the election.

Yet on Thursday, Cruz chided House Democrats for displaying “arrogance” in advancing a bill that would exert federal standards over state election systems and, he charged, create opportunities for voter fraud.

“Today’s Democratic Party will do anything in pursuit of political power,” Cruz told HuffPost.

To Democrats, however, all this GOP criticism of the House election bill sounds disingenuous given the events of Jan. 6, when Republicans tried to erase the results of elections administered by the states even after an armed mob invaded the U.S. Capitol in hopes of forcing them to do so.

“I think that their conduct in the wake of the election disqualifies them from being experts or even responsible commentators on what democracy in America should look like,” said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the lead sponsor of the House bill.

“They have spent the last month complaining about these state laws and how we need to have change,” said Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), one of the lead sponsors of the corresponding Senate bill. “They want to have commissions look at things. Well, here’s your chance, man.”

Michelle Obama Lauds Major New Voting Rights Bill and Urges Senate to Pass It

BY IGOR BOBIC AND PAUL BLUMENTAL | MARCH 4, 2021

Michelle Obama is applauding Democratic lawmakers' push this week to enact an expansive voting-rights bill that just passed the House of Representatives and next moves to a more uncertain future in the Senate.

The former first lady and voting rights activist said Thursday, however, that the Senate should also pass the For the People Act "as soon as possible — because there is nothing more important to the health and future of our democracy than safeguarding the right to vote."

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives passed the proposal, which would help create a nationwide automatic voter registration system, expand mail-in voting, restore voting rights to people with a past felony and protect against state's individual attempts to create restrictive new laws surrounding voter identification.

The bill passed the House with most Democratic lawmakers voting in favor of it and most Republicans voting against it.

To pass the Senate, it would need 10 Republican votes — a daunting prospect given conservative criticism of what they cast as federal intervention in local elections, despite what numerous advocates say is needed intervention to protect democracy.

Obama, 57, has become a national voice for voting rights with her When We All Vote organization, started in 2018.

“From the very beginning, When We All Vote has been focused on making it easier for everyone — especially young people and people of color — to vote in every election at every level,” she said Thursday. “I'm so proud that we saw a record turnout in the 2020 election. I'm proud of all those who voted and volunteered to make sure that, even in the middle of a pandemic, Americans everywhere could exercise their unalienable right to vote.”

“But while we celebrate these historic gains, unfortunately too many leaders are working to reverse that progress and make it harder for people with every right to vote to cast a ballot,” she continued. “Our democracy remains under attack by the partisan and unpatriotic actions of those at the state level who are doing everything they can to curtail access to the ballot box.”

“Make no mistake — the idea that we cannot both hold secure elections and ensure that every eligible voter can make their voices heard is a false choice. It's based on lies and it flies in the face of our history,” the former first lady said. “It is sad. It is infuriating. And it is a genuine threat to our future that must be taken seriously.”

She hailed the For the People Act as helping “make sure that our system of government remains in the hands of the many, and not the few.”

House Passes Sweeping Voting Rights Bill Over GOP Opposition

BY BRIAN SLODYSKO | MARCH 4, 2021

House Democrats passed sweeping voting and ethics legislation Wednesday over unanimous Republican opposition, advancing to the Senate what would be the largest overhaul of the U.S. election law in at least a generation.

House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process, was approved on a near party-line 220-210 vote. It would restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political causes.

The bill is a powerful counterweight to voting rights restrictions advancing in Republican-controlled statehouses across the country in the wake of Donald Trump's repeated false claims of a stolen 2020 election. Yet it faces an uncertain fate in the Democratic-controlled Senate, where it has little chance of passing without changes to procedural rules that currently allow Republicans to block it.

The stakes in the outcome are monumental, cutting to the foundational idea that one person equals one vote, and carrying with it the potential to shape election outcomes for years to come. It also offers a test of how hard President Joe Biden and his party are willing to fight for their priorities, as well as those of their voters.

This bill “will put a stop at the voter suppression that we’re seeing debated right now,” said Rep. Nikema Williams, a new congresswoman who represents the Georgia district that deceased voting rights champion John Lewis held for years. “This bill is the ‘Good Trouble’ he fought for his entire life.”

…

The measure has been a priority for Democrats since they won their House majority in 2018. But it has taken on added urgency in the wake of Trump’s false claims, which incited the deadly storming of the U.S. Capitol in January.

Courts and even Trump’s last attorney general, William Barr, found his claims about the election to be without merit. But, spurred on by those lies, state lawmakers across the U.S. have filed more than 200 bills in 43 states that would limit ballot access, according to a tally kept by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

…

Conservatives, meanwhile, are mobilizing a $5 million pressure campaign, urging moderate Senate Democrats to oppose rule changes needed to pass the measure.

…

So what’s actually in the bill?

H.R. 1 would require states to automatically register eligible voters, as well as offer same-day registration. It would limit states’ ability to purge registered voters

from their rolls and restore former felons' voting rights. Among dozens of other provisions, it would also require states to offer 15 days of early voting and allow no-excuse absentee balloting.

On the cusp of a once-in-a-decade redrawing of congressional district boundaries, typically a fiercely partisan affair, the bill would mandate that nonpartisan commissions handle the process instead of state legislatures.

Many Republican opponents in Congress have focused on narrower aspects, like the creation of a public financing system for congressional campaigns that would be funded through fines and settlement proceeds raised from corporate bad actors.

They've also attacked an effort to revamp the federal government's toothless elections cop. That agency, the Federal Election Commission, has been gripped by partisan deadlock for years, allowing campaign finance law violators to go mostly unchecked.

Another section that's been a focus of Republican ire would force the disclosure of donors to "dark money" political groups, which are a magnet for wealthy interests looking to influence the political process while remaining anonymous.

Still, the biggest obstacles lie ahead in the Senate, which is split 50-50 between Republicans and Democrats.

On some legislation, it takes only 51 votes to pass, with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaker. On a deeply divisive bill like this one, they would need 60 votes under the Senate's rules to overcome a Republican filibuster — a tally they are unlikely to reach.

Some Democrats have discussed options like lowering the threshold to break a filibuster, or creating a workaround that would allow priority legislation, including a separate John Lewis Voting Rights bill, to be exempt. Biden has been cool to filibuster reforms and Democratic congressional aides say the conversations are fluid but underway.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has not committed to a timeframe but vowed “to figure out the best way to get big, bold action on a whole lot of fronts.”

He said: “We’re not going to be the legislative graveyard. ... People are going to be forced to vote on them, yes or no, on a whole lot of very important and serious issues.”

Democracy on the Brink

BY ANDY KROLL | MARCH 4, 2021

In the coming weeks, the battle over democracy's future in America will hit a boil.

On one side is a group that looks at the last election and sees a resilient but damaged system. A system that withstood — sometimes only barely — a raging pandemic, a conspiracy-theory-peddling president, a major political party all too eager to amplify that president's lies, a wave of hail-mary lawsuits intended to overthrow the election result, and a violent insurrection in the halls of the U.S. Capitol.

The other side of this battle sees that rickety system and wants to break it so badly the voters can never get in their way again.

On Wednesday night, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives passed H.R. 1, the For the People Act, the most sweeping set of democratic reforms since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and an effort to fortify our democratic system after the turbulence of the past six months. H.R. 1's passage sets up a clash in the U.S. Senate where the bill stands little chance of passage without amending or removing the filibuster, an anti-democratic relic of the Jim Crow era that gives a minority of senators the power to block most legislation. Unless Senate Democrats reform the filibuster, H.R. 1 is dead on arrival, and the best hope for repairing and improving our democracy dies with it.

At the same time, Republican lawmakers in state capitals across the nation are introducing hundreds of bills to restrict the right to vote, using former President Donald Trump's lie about a stolen election as a rallying cry and as political cover. This wave of legislation, experts say, will disproportionately restrict access to the ballot box for young, black, and brown voters — the most reliable voting blocs for the Democratic Party.

Without major change in Washington, the GOP backlash at the state level could lock in draconian new laws disenfranchising huge swaths of voters while gerrymandering state and congressional political maps for another decade. These anti-democratic maneuvers, political analysts say, could all but ensure that Republicans retake some or all of Congress in 2022, and make it easier to win back the White House in 2024.

The stakes of this moment aren't lost on those leading the push for reform. "This is not a matter of 'we can do it now or later,'" Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), one of the architects of H.R. 1, tells Rolling Stone. "If we don't do it now, there may not be a later."

DANGLING BY A THREAD

There were many close calls. So many moments in the past few months when it felt like the country came within a hair's breadth of democratic collapse.

Consider the insurrection on January 6th: What if Officer Eugene Goodman hadn't lured the mob away from the Senate chamber just in time for members to escape? What if then-Vice President Mike Pence had followed Trump's orders and disrupted the certification process? What if the violence had stopped the Electoral College certification?

Yet there were other near-misses before that day, choke points and bottlenecks when the transfer of power could've gone off the rails. Had Aaron Van Langevelde, a Republican member of the Michigan board of state canvassers, bowed to the pressure heaped on him by the Trumpist GOP and refused to certify Biden's victory in the state, we might've entered into uncharted waters about who has the authority to certify an election result. Had the Republican leadership in Pennsylvania or Arizona or Wisconsin insisted that it did have the power to override the will of the voters and appoint its own electors, there might have been chaos in the counting of the Electoral College. Or had a judge allowed one of the post-election hail-mary lawsuits filed by Sidney "Unleash the Kraken" Powell or the other conspiracy-theorizing lawyers to proceed, it could've swamped the transition in a legal morass and maybe even led to the Supreme Court to helping determine the outcome, akin to what happened in 2000.

"We narrowly averted disaster," says Rick Hasen, an election-law expert and professor at the University of California-Irvine law school.

There was no outright election meltdown in 2020 and 2021: The system held. But the treacherous path from election day to inauguration day revealed like never before the difference between laws and norms, written statutes spelled out on paper versus traditions and practices that men and women can choose, or not choose, to respect. "There's just so much the law can do," Hasen says. "Beyond that, you're in the realm of a potential coup or raw power politics where the law doesn't matter."

THE NEW JIM CROW

Republican lawyers and legislators weren't able to disrupt the 2020 election sufficiently to ensure Trump's reelection, but they've wasted little time this year

turning Trump's "big lie" about election fraud into party gospel and using it to justify a nationwide assault on voting rights. By mid-February, legislators in 43 states had carried over, pre-filed, or introduced more than 250 bills to make it harder to vote, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. That's more than seven times the number of voter-suppression bills put forward compared to roughly this time last year. Marc Elias, a Democratic election lawyer who assisted the Biden campaign during the 2020 campaign, calls it "the most massive voter suppression effort since Jim Crow."

The bills run the gamut. They seek to curtail mail-in voting, slash the number of days of early in-person voting, scale back the use of drop boxes to make it easier to submit mail-in ballots, and in some cases reduce the hours for voting on Election Day itself. In Pennsylvania, Republican lawmakers have gone so far as to say they now want to throw out reforms that made it easier to vote like no-excuse absentee voting — reforms that, less than two years ago, they themselves had voted in favor of. "It's like they are in a competition for who can pass the worst, most anti-voting law," Elias says.

What these attempted rollbacks have in common, says Michelle Kanter Cohen, a senior counsel at the Fair Elections Center, is they take aim at voting options favored by young, black, and brown voters who turned out en masse in 2020. "In response to that, politicians who want to choose their voters rather than the other way around are moving to restrict voting," she says.

Marc Elias predicts this new wave of suppression bills will lead to long lines at polling places in 2022, especially in minority communities and places where young people tend to vote. "If you are not in a pandemic, and you make voting by mail harder, and we know historically that black voters in particular in the South

like to vote early in person, you're going to have terrible lines unless you expand the polling places," he says.

Alongside their suppression campaign, GOP legislatures have continued to push Trump's "big lie" about the last election — that it was marred by fraud and stolen from him. (There is, it should be noted, no evidence to support this claim.) In Pennsylvania — the decisive state in the 2020 presidential race — the GOP-controlled legislature held a series of 14 hearings, all intended to determine if the election had been marred by widespread fraud. In some cases, these hearings served as little more than a venue for state lawmakers to parrot Trump's claims and browbeat state election officials.

One of those officials is Kathy Boockvar, the Pennsylvania secretary of state. In an interview, Boockvar said she went into her job well aware of the problem of election-related disinformation. Lately, what stunned her, she told me, was hearing so much of that disinformation originate not from a foreign adversary but from Americans, even elected officials.

"This was the most heavily scrutinized, transparent election that we've ever had in American history," she told me. "Despite that, there were these folks trying again and again to undercut the will of the people. It's really disappointing. And to me, just as a human being, as an American, those people, a lot of whom are our elected officials, are doing the most un-American thing that I could imagine doing."

FIX THE FILIBUSTER — OR BUST

Rep. John Sarbanes says it's no coincidence that for two sessions in a row House Democrats chose the For the People Act as their symbolic first bill: H.R. 1.

At 791 pages long, the bill is a mammoth piece of legislation that drags dark money into the sunlight, endorses statehood for D.C. and Puerto Rico, reins in partisan gerrymandering, calls for greater lobbying disclosure, paves the way for automatic voter registration, blocks candidates from coordinating with super PACs, and guards against foreign election interference. The first 300 or so pages of the bill alone are devoted to a dramatic expansion of voting rights and were authored by John Lewis, the late Georgia congressman and civil rights icon.

“The legislation is much the same as it was [in 2019] because we built it pretty carefully to respond to the grievances we heard from people out there,” Sarbanes says. But after the January 6th attack and the attempt to thwart the 2020 election outcome, he adds, “I think the appetite in the country for this kind of change is even broader and deeper than it was two years ago.”

In 2019, every single House Democrat voted in favor of H.R. 1; the same happened again on Wednesday evening. This time, however, the commander-in-chief is also a supporter of the bill, with the Biden administration saying in a statement that H.R. 1 was “urgently needed.”

But yet again, H.R. 1 faces a likely demise in the Senate. With only 50 members, Senate Democrats lack the votes to overcome a filibuster of any non-budget-related bills — and their Republican counterparts have made plenty clear they plan to filibuster H.R. 1 to death.

The fate of H.R. 1 will bring to the surface a battle that was inevitable: whether to change or abolish the filibuster. Both Democrats and Republicans have chipped away at the filibuster in the past decade, mostly to make it easier to confirm judicial nominees. A move to change the filibuster to pass bills like H.R. 1 on a simple-majority vote would be a more drastic move.

The fate of any filibuster reform will likely depend on the positions of a few moderate or conservative Democrats, senators like Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona. So far, there isn't any indication those swing senators want anything to do with filibuster reform. "Never!" Manchin shouted at a journalist who'd asked him about reforming the filibuster. "Jesus Christ, what don't you understand about 'never'?"

Still, there's movement elsewhere in the Democratic caucus toward filibuster reform. This week, Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), who had previously expressed skepticism about the idea, told Mother Jones that she now favored ending the filibuster, citing the surge in anti-voting bills at the state level. "We have a raw exercise of political power going on where people are making it harder to vote and you just can't let that happen in a democracy because of some old rules in the Senate," she said.

For the Democratic Party, the political ramifications are obvious, maybe even existential. Gerrymandered maps, the clustering of Democratic voters in urban and suburban regions, the rural skew of the Senate — all of this and more means the party needs real democratic reform to keep power in Washington and have any hope of passing legislation to address climate change, income inequality, civil rights, you name it. As the progressive data-scientist David Shor put it in a recent interview, "Basically, we have this small window right now to pass redistricting reform and create states. And if we don't use this window, we will almost certainly lose control of the federal government and not be in a position to pass laws again potentially for a decade."

None of those reforms can happen with the filibuster intact. Rep. Sarbanes, the H.R. 1 architect, told me he understands this. Democrats, he says, should look at "every possible consideration for how we can get this thing over the finish line."

“I think the public wants to see this,” he told me. “And if we don’t deliver that, what are we saying to people across the country who feel so desperate right now? This is a moment of truth for lawmakers and our democracy.”

But the battle over H.R. 1, the filibuster, and democratic reform won’t necessarily be won or lost inside the Beltway. Kathy Boockvar, the Pennsylvania secretary of state, told me that what kept her going through the turbulent past few months was the realization that there were far more people on the side of truth, facts, and democracy than against it. The people on her side, she said, may not have been as loud as the “Stop the Steal” crowd or the insurrectionists on January 6th, but they had them beat in the numbers, and could be just as loud if they made their voices heard.

“There’s far more of us who actually want to work for the truth, who want to rebuild our faith, who want to rebuild our everything it is to be American again,” she says. “We need to build on our own strength. Let’s be talking about calling out lies when we hear them. Let’s be out there talking about truth.”

House Approves Major Election Reform and Voting Rights Bill

BY ALANA WISE | MARCH 4, 2021

The House has once again passed a bill aimed at voter reform and campaign finance overhaul. The Wednesday night vote was 220-210.

Democrats reintroduced the bill in January, after passing it in 2019, banking on the party's narrow majority in the Senate to get it passed through both chambers this cycle.

The bill seeks to “to expand Americans' access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, strengthen ethics rules for public servants, and implement other anti-corruption measures for the purpose of fortifying our democracy, and for other purposes.”

The bill's language calls for a complete overhaul of the current system, which varies widely by state and which critics say promote unfair barriers to voting. Included in the act is mandatory automatic voter registration, restoring voting rights to people with completed felony sentences, and a reversal of state voter ID laws that would allow citizens to make a sworn statement affirming their identity if they are unable to produce an ID.

The 2021 “For the People Act” is a reboot of a 2019 bill of the same name. At the time, the House passed the bill along party lines, but it never had a chance to move forward in the Senate, which was controlled then by Republicans.

In addition to revamping voting laws, the bill also takes aim at "dark money" in politics by requiring organizations to disclose large donors and creates a matching system for small donations.

“Our democracy is in a state of deep disrepair. During the 2020 election, Americans had to overcome rampant voter suppression, gerrymandering and a torrent of special interest dark money just to exercise their right to vote. Across the country, people of all political persuasions – including Democrats, Independents and Republicans – are profoundly frustrated with the chaos, corruption and inaction that plague much of our politics,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Administration Chair Zoe Lofgren and Rep. John Sarbanes said in a joint statement earlier this year.

“That's why House Democrats are doubling down on our longstanding commitment to advance transformational anti-corruption and clean election reforms by again passing H.R. 1, the For the People Act.”

House Democrats have fresh motivation to pass the bill. In the most recent election cycle, Senate Democrats were able to capture 50 of the 100 seats. Vice President Harris casts the final vote in the event of a tie, effectively giving Democrats a slim majority in the chamber.

Republicans, however, are fighting against efforts to simplify the voting process, and GOP-led state legislatures are in fact seeking to make it more difficult in a dozens of states after the party's 2020 election losses.

GOP lawmakers cite election security as cause for the efforts to tighten voter laws, but claims of widespread voter fraud are rooted in disinformation.

The Washington Post

House Democrats Pass Sweeping Elections Bill as GOP Legislatures Push to Restrict Voting

BY MIKE DEBONIS | MARCH 3, 2021

The House late Wednesday night passed expansive legislation to create uniform national voting standards, overhaul campaign finance laws and outlaw partisan redistricting, advancing a centerpiece of the Democratic voting rights agenda amid fierce Republican attacks that threaten to stop it cold in the Senate.

The bill, titled the “For the People Act,” was given the symbolic designation of H.R. 1 by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), and it largely mirrors a bill passed two years ago in the early weeks of the House Democratic majority.

This year, however, the bill has taken on additional significance because of the new Democratic majority in the Senate and President Biden’s November win, as well as the efforts underway in dozens of Republican-controlled state legislatures to roll back voting access in reaction to former president Donald Trump’s loss and his subsequent campaign to question the election results.

Democrat after Democrat said this week that the GOP’s state-level efforts made it more important than ever to act at the federal level to preserve expansive voting laws. Many invoked the gains won in the 1960s civil rights movement by activists including John Lewis, the Georgia Democrat who died of cancer last year.

“The right to vote is under attack,” said Rep. Terri A. Sewell (D-Ala.). “Voter suppression is alive and well. Old battles have become new again. The legacy of the foot soldiers like John Lewis requires that we pick up that baton — the baton of voter access, the baton of voter equality — and we continue the next leg. Their cause is now our cause, too.”

The bill’s voting provisions would guarantee no-excuse mail voting and at least 15 days of early voting for federal elections; require states to use their existing government records to automatically register citizens to vote; restore voting rights to felons who have completed their prison sentences; and mandate the use of paper ballots.

Other provisions would create new disclosure requirements for “dark money” donations to political groups; require states to appoint independent commissions to draw congressional districts; and create new federal standards for election equipment vendors.

The bill also would require tech platforms to disclose political advertising information; establish a code of ethics for Supreme Court justices for the first time; restructure the Federal Election Commission to an odd number of members to break partisan deadlocks; and require presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns.

…

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) said this week that she expects to usher companion legislation through the Senate Rules Committee later this spring and ultimately to bring it to the floor. Senate Majority Whip Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.)

said, “If you’re ranking the most important legislation of the year, that is way up there.”

…

Republicans sought to highlight and attack various provisions of the bill, with a particular focus on the public campaign financing provision that would provide a 6-to-1 federal match for small-dollar donations raised by congressional candidates.

Democrats argued the bill would reduce the influence of wealthy donors. Although they were careful to construct the system to be funded out of corporate-fine revenue — not out of direct taxpayer funds — that did not stop the GOP attacks.

THE 19th

House Democrats Pass Major Legislation on Voting Rights and Government Ethics

BY BARBARA RODRIGUEZ | MARCH 3, 2021

House Democrats on Wednesday night approved a sweeping voting rights and government ethics bill that seeks to expand voting access and make campaign finance more transparent. The nearly 800-page bill, which would overhaul key areas of elections administration, faces steeper odds in the closely divided Senate.

“It establishes all the best practices and standards that we want to see when it comes to how people register and vote in America,” Democratic Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland, the chief sponsor of the bill known as H.R. 1, said during a conference call Tuesday. “And we have the opportunity to get it done.”

The legislation is advancing as Republicans in statehouses around the country are pushing for dozens of new restrictions on voting after record turnout in the 2020 election, which federal officials in President Donald Trump’s administration called “the most secure in American history.”

The turnout handed Democrats control of the White House and both chambers of Congress, and helped Republicans expand their majorities in statehouses. It also

spurred Republicans, led by Trump, to repeatedly make false claims about a rigged election and call for new restrictions on early and absentee voting.

The House passed a similar voting rights bill in 2019. Unlike then, Democrats now control the evenly split Senate, but the legislation still faces difficult odds.

Sarbanes acknowledged that the barriers ahead in the Senate “are tricky.” Some Democrats are pushing for an end to the filibuster rule that requires a 60-vote majority for most legislation, but there does not appear to be enough support within the party at this time. Sarbanes said there is a “powerful” sense that the opportunity to enact such expansive voting protections may not be there in the future.

“The general environment and atmosphere that this change is coming forward in, this bill is being presented in, increases the chances that we can get it over the finish line,” he said. “Exactly how that gets done, I’m not going to pre-judge. But I think it can happen, and I think it can happen early enough in this election cycle that many of these important changes can be implemented in time for the 2022 midterms.”

The bill has several provisions aimed at standardizing rules across states to make it easier to vote, including expanding early and absentee voting. The legislation would allow for online and same-day voter registration and would make voter registration automatic when a person interacts with a government agency like a department of motor vehicles, unless they opt out. The bill would also require super PACs and other organizations that spend money in elections or judicial nominations to disclose more information about donors who give more than $10,000 during an election cycle.

Republicans in state legislatures are targeting several of the same provisions but with a potentially opposite effect: more restrictions for when and how people can vote, and in some cases new identification requirements. The Brennan Center for Justice estimates that as of February 19, more than 250 bills in 43 states have been carried over, prefiled or introduced that, in their view, would make it harder to vote.

Some voting bills have advanced quickly in statehouses in recent weeks. In Iowa, the Republican-controlled legislature had back-to-back votes late last month on a bill that would shorten the number of early voting days in the state and add new restrictions around when and how mail-in ballots can be returned. The measure has been sent to the governor's office.

In Georgia, Republicans who control the statehouse have introduced several major election bills. On Monday, the state House passed a bill that, in its current form, would add new restrictions around absentee voting and restrict weekend voting ahead of Election Day. That comes days after the state Senate passed a separate elections bill that would add identification requirements for absentee voting.

Voting advocates say some provisions, such as limiting weekend early voting in Georgia, appear to be aimed directly at Black voters. Trump has falsely argued that fraud in cities, with large numbers of voters of color, cost him the election. The former president and some Republicans have said explicitly that making it easier for Americans to vote would mean they would lose elections. Black voters and other voters of color were among key voting blocs in swing states like Georgia, Arizona and Pennsylvania, where President Joe Biden defeated Trump.

Tiffany Muller, president of End Citizens United and its affiliate Let America Vote, said more federal oversight of elections is needed.

“Look, it is the federal government’s duty to step in and to protect people’s constitutional right to vote. And right now what we’re seeing is discriminatory voter suppression methods across the country,” she said. “The federal government absolutely needs to step in and say, “No, we’re going to have a fair and free and secure democracy.’ And that starts with making sure that everyone can vote, making sure it is easier not harder to vote, that we end partisan gerrymandering and that we get money out of politics.”

In many states, it’s already harder for some people of color to vote. Research published in 2017 by Stephen Pettigrew, a data scientist and political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, showed that voters in predominantly minority neighborhoods are three times as likely to wait longer than 30 minutes in line to vote and six times as likely to wait more than an hour. More recent research by Pettigrew indicates those wait times have an effect: For every additional hour a voter waits in line to vote, their probability of voting in the next election drops by one percentage point.

Courts repeatedly found after the 2020 election that there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud; more than 40 lawsuits filed by the Trump campaign and allies were later dismissed in court. The idea that the election was stolen from Trump led his supporters to attack the U.S. Capitol on January 6, causing the deaths of at least five people. A Quinnipiac University poll conducted at the end of January and early February showed that although 59 percent of Americans said they do not believe there was widespread voter fraud in the 2020 election, nearly three-quarters of Republicans said they did.

A more conservative U.S. Supreme Court is also considering the future of a key provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the landmark legislation that prohibits racial discriminiation in voting laws. In 2013, the high court effectively gutted a part of the law that required certain states with a history of racial discriminiation to get approval from the federal government before changing election laws; on Tuesday, justices heard oral arguments over a case that could alter another part of the law intended to protect racial minorities' right to vote.

The White House, through the Office of Management and Budget, released a statement Monday expressing support for H.R. 1. Several organizations that support the bill are rallying around it through public campaigns.

"We know that this bill is needed because Washington has never been more broken. People are being told by their elected leaders to doubt the security of our elections," said Muller with End Citizens United and Let America Vote. "We saw a mob storm the U.S. Capitol. And too often, special interest and big money are setting the policy agenda in D.C. So now's the moment to make changes needed to really restore and strengthen our democracy."

Republicans in Congress who oppose the legislation argue it effectively gives the federal government more control of the country's elections system. Others claimed in tweets leading up to the vote that it would benefit the Democratic Party.

Republican Rep. Andy Biggs of Arizona, who objected to certifying the legitimate results of the 2020 election, expressed opposition to several proposals in the bill, including the creation of a public financing program that supporters say would help candidates who cannot raise large amounts of money to run for office. Democrats have specified that the program would not use taxpayer dollars.

“The Democrats are trying to tip the scales of elections to their party,” Biggs said from the House floor this week.

The American Action Network, a conservative super PAC, has begun funding ad campaigns that target House lawmakers who support the bill. The group is run by the president of the Congressional Leadership Fund, the super PAC that helps Republican House candidates.

The American Civil Liberties Union has also expressed concern with provisions in the bill around campaign disclosure rules, though the organization also supports several of the bill’s proposals around voting.

Norman Eisen is counsel for the Voter Protection Program, an organization that is working with state and federal officials to support policy that they believe strengthens elections. Eisen said people should not discount the public support around codifying voter protections as Republicans continue to push false claims about widespread voter fraud.

“We need to keep an open mind as to what will happen next in the Senate, but anybody who is prematurely predicting the demise of this critical bill is not paying attention to all the evidence,” he said.

Other provisions in H.R. 1 and S. 1 (also titled the For the People Act of 2021):

- Adds language aimed at ensuring voters have at least 14 days of early voting.

- Curbs the practice of removing registered voters from rolls.

- Restores voting rights for people who were previously incarcerated.

- Creates independent commissions to determine congressional redistricting in an effort to stop partisanship in the map drawing process.

- Adds rules to how super PACs function in an effort to further prevent coordination with candidates.

- Requires more transparency around digital advertisements.

- Creates a voluntary public finance program for candidates, with a matching component for small-dollar donations. The program relies in part on corporate penalties to pay for it and not individual taxpayer money.

- Requires candidates for president and vice president to disclose their individual tax returns and certain business tax returns.

NBC NEWS

House Passes Sweeping Voting Rights, Ethics Bill

BY DARTUNORRO CLARK | MARCH 3, 2021

The House on Wednesday passed the For the People Act, a sweeping bill that seeks to change campaign finance, voting and ethics laws.

The bill would expand access to the ballot box by creating automatic voter registration across the country, restoring the voting rights of the formerly incarcerated, expanding early voting and modernizing America's voting systems.

The House measure passed 220-210, with one Democrat joining all Republicans in voting against it.

The bill would also strengthen oversight of political lobbying and campaign finance by preventing members of Congress from serving on corporate boards and requiring presidents to release their tax returns.

Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., first introduced the legislation, also known as H.R. 1, in 2019, when it passed the House but it stalled in the Senate, which was controlled by Republicans at the time. He reintroduced the act in January.

"The 2020 election underscored the need for comprehensive, structural democracy reform. Americans across the country were forced to overcome

rampant voter suppression, gerrymandering and a torrent of special-interest dark money just to exercise their vote and their voice in our democracy," Sarbanes said in a statement.

…

The White House Office of Management and Budget released a statement Monday in support of the bill, which would also commit to restore the Voting Rights Act, combat voter purging and reform redistricting.

President Joe Biden said in a statement Thursday that he would work with Congress to refine and advance the bill and applauded its passage following the events leading up to the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol and state-level efforts to pass restrictive voting laws.

"The right to vote is sacred and fundamental — it is the right from which all of our other rights as Americans spring," Biden said in touting the bill's provisions. "This landmark legislation is urgently needed to protect that right, to safeguard the integrity of our elections, and to repair and strengthen our democracy."

The New York Times

Targeting State Restrictions, House Passes Landmark Voting Rights Expansion

BY NICK FANDOS | MARCH 3, 2021

House Democrats pushed through a sweeping expansion of federal voting rights on Wednesday over unified Republican opposition, opening a new front in a raging national debate about elections aimed at countering G.O.P. attempts to clamp down on ballot access.

The bill, adopted 220 to 210 mostly along party lines, would constitute the most significant enhancement of federal voting protections since the 1960s if it became law. It aims to impose new national requirements weakening restrictive state voter ID laws, mandate automatic voter registration, expand early and mail-in voting, make it harder to purge voter rolls and restore voting rights to former felons — changes that studies suggest would increase voter participation, especially by racial minorities.

The vote was the latest bid by Democrats to beat back Republican efforts in statehouses across the country to enact new barriers to voting that would consolidate power for the G.O.P. amid false claims of rampant election fraud trumpeted by former President Donald J. Trump and many of his allies in Congress.

But the measure, which is supported by President Biden, appears to be doomed for now in the Senate, where Republican opposition would make it all but impossible to draw the 60 votes needed to advance. Democratic leaders have

vowed to put it up for a vote anyway, and progressives were already plotting to use Republican obstruction of the bill to build their case for jettisoning the legislative filibuster in the months ahead.

“Everything is at stake. We must win this race, this fight,” Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Democrat of California, said as Democrats rallied on the Capitol steps before the vote. “At the same time as we are gathering here to honor our democracy, across the country over 200 bills are being put together, provisions are being put forward to suppress the vote.”

The 791-page bill, designated H.R. 1 by Democrats to reflect its importance to their agenda, would also eliminate partisan gerrymandering, impose new transparency on dark money used to finance campaigns, tighten government ethics standards and create a public financing option for congressional campaigns.

The prominence of the debate demonstrated the immense stakes of the fight over election laws, both for how Americans exercise their right to vote and how both parties aggregate political power. While Congress has worked for decades to expand access to the ballot, often with bipartisan support, the issue has become a sharply partisan one in recent years, as shifting demographics and political coalitions have led Republicans to conclude that they benefit from lower voter participation rates, particularly around cities.

“You can win on the basis of your ideas and the programs you put forward, which is what we choose to do,” said Representative John Sarbanes, Democrat of Maryland and a leading author of the bill. “Or you can try to win by suppressing the vote, drawing unfair districts across the country and using big money to spread disinformation.”

Republicans made remarkably similar arguments, but sought to turn them back on Democrats. While they did not outright argue for making it harder to vote, they said that states — not the federal government — were best positioned to determine how to conduct their elections with integrity, and that the bill would lead to rampant fraud benefiting liberal candidates.

Study after study, including by Mr. Trump's own Justice Department, has concluded no widespread fraud exists.

…

States under conservative control have succeeded in recent years in imposing new strictures that studies suggest disproportionately affect Black voters and those living in urban areas. Proponents argue that the steps are necessary to combat potential election fraud. But the effort has been turbocharged in some places since Mr. Trump's loss, with states racing to strengthen voter ID laws, to make it harder to vote by mail or vote early, and to limit the role outside groups can play in helping Americans vote.

And on Tuesday, the conservative-dominated Supreme Court signaled it was likely to uphold two restrictive Arizona election measures and potentially chip away further at the Voting Rights Act of 1965. A 2013 ruling by the justices struck down key enforcement provisions in the law and helped pave the way for the success of many Republican-led states in putting in place new rules.

All told, state lawmakers have introduced more than 250 bills in 43 states that would tighten voting rules, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. The most prominent may be Georgia, where Republican leaders reeling from Democrats' unexpected statewide victories have unabashedly

sought to clamp down on ballot access by advancing sharp limits to voting by mail and early voting on Sundays, when many Black voters cast ballots after church services.

…

H.R. 1's voting provisions were originally drafted by Representative John Lewis, the Georgia Democrat and civil rights icon who died last year.

If the bill were to become law, states would be required to automatically register eligible voters, hold at least 15 consecutive days of early voting for federal elections and provide drop boxes for absentee ballots like the ones Mr. Trump falsely claimed led to fraud. It would make it far easier to vote by mail and far harder to purge voters from the rolls.

The legislation also targets partisan gerrymandering of House seats, requiring states to use independent commissions to draw districts based on apolitical metrics rather than ones that would maximize the influence of one party over another. Both parties gerrymander, but the practice has benefited Republicans more over the last decade. With new districts set to be drawn this fall, Republicans are expected to make even greater gains.

Democrats intend to hold a separate vote in the coming months on legislation to restore the enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act that the Supreme Court struck down.

The challenge for Democrats is moving any of the bills through a 50-50 Senate, where 10 Republicans would have to vote yes. Under Mr. Trump's leadership, the Republican Party adopted increasingly hard-line tactics on voting and other

government reform initiatives, rallying around his winner-take-all political style and the outright lies on which he based his attempt to overturn his election loss.

“This monster must be stopped,” Mr. Trump said of the Democratic bill last weekend at the Conservative Political Action Conference. “It cannot be allowed to pass.”

Democrats so far have rejected changing the Senate rules to allow them to move legislation with 51 votes rather than 60. But advocates of scrapping the filibuster believe the stalled voting bills could eventually prove the most persuasive in winning over moderate senators who are reluctant to support the move.

“Voting rights is preservative of all other rights, and we have to do everything we can to preserve the voices of the people in our democracy,” said Senator Raphael Warnock, one of the Georgia Democrats whose victory has prompted the state’s new election laws. “I think the issues are urgent enough to leave all options on the table.”

House Democrats Pass Election Reforms as GOP Moves to Change Voting Laws

BY BEN SIEGEL | MARCH 3, 2021

The House on Wednesday is expected to pass a sweeping ethics and voting rights package first introduced in 2019, one Democrats say is urgently needed as GOP-controlled state legislatures scramble to change voting laws in the wake of the presidential election.

The “For the People Act of 2021” would automatically register people to vote and restore the voting rights of felons. It would also mandate more than two weeks of early voting, encourage voting-by-mail and expand absentee ballot drop boxes across the country -- along with other provisions meant to address concerns raised by election officials during the 2020 election cycle.

“We’re not pursuing this reform against the backdrop of the status quo. We’re pursuing it against the prospect that the Republicans will take things in the wrong direction, and in a significant way,” Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., the lead sponsor of the bill told ABC News.

Following Donald Trump’s loss to Joe Biden in November, Republicans across the country have introduced hundreds of proposals to change voting laws, arguing that the changes are needed to restore trust in the election system.

The efforts follow Trump and some Republicans' extended campaign to undermine the election results with unproven claims of widespread voter fraud, and the Trump campaign's repeated failures to challenge state-level results in court.

…

In addition to the voting law changes, the legislation would require presidential candidates to release at least ten years of tax returns, and the spending of presidential inaugural committees -- along with other provisions crafted in 2019 in response to Trump's unwillingness to share his tax returns, and the federal investigation into his inaugural spending. It would also require campaigns to report any contacts with foreign officials.

The nearly 800-page package also includes provisions to bolster election security at the state and federal levels, require social media platforms to maintain databases of political ads, and require states to set up independent redistricting commissions to redraw their congressional districts and prevent partisan gerrymandering -- two provisions Democrats point to ahead of the redrawing of the congressional map following the 2020 census.

The legislation would also create a new 6-to-1 matching system for political donations of up to $200 for presidential and congressional candidates who reject large contributions -- which Republicans have decried as public financing of campaigns. The funds would be generated by financial and corporate settlements.

The legislation, like other key pieces of House Democrats' agenda, will head to the Democrat-controlled Senate, but is expected to languish given a lack of

Republican support. Democrats need the backing of 10 Republicans to advance the package past the 60-vote threshold.

Still, advocates say the passage of the measure is necessary in the House to put more pressure on Senate Democrats to consider changing the chamber's rules and eliminating the legislative filibuster, in order to pass their priorities through the narrowly-divided Senate when Democrats control Congress and the White House.

"It's going to be hard without looking at reforming the filibuster," Sarbanes said of passing H.R. 1. "This sends a very clear message to our colleagues in the Senate of the high priority."

The Washington Post

A Senator's Surprise Call for Filibuster Reform Shows the Urgency of the Moment

BY GREG SARGENT (OPINION) | MARCH 3, 2021

On Wednesday evening, the House will vote on a massive package of pro-democracy reforms. It includes measures that would make it easier to vote and register in numerous ways, place sharp limits on voter suppression and other hurdles to participation, and end extreme gerrymanders.

It is inconceivable that anything like this package — known as H.R. 1 — could ever pass the Senate as long as the legislative filibuster remains. Which is why it was welcome when Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) came out in support of ending the filibuster if it is necessary to pass measures defending voting rights.

Unfortunately, the way Klobuchar described the issue also inescapably highlights how few other Democrats are discussing it in these terms.

…

What's critical here is that Klobuchar, who is decidedly not a member of the party's liberal wing, bluntly described the central question as one over whether Democrats will allow themselves to be steamrolled by a Republican exercise of power.

Across the country, GOP state legislatures are using the power they have to tilt the future electoral playing field to their anti-majoritarian advantage, making it harder to vote wherever possible and even boasting that extreme gerrymanders will help them recapture the House.

Will Democrats really allow the filibuster — itself an anti-majoritarian relic of Jim Crow — to constrain them from using their power to defend voting rights and the majoritarian features of our democracy even as Republicans undermine them as comprehensively as they possibly can?

…

Whatever Republican senators' "opinions," the incentives tilt against them engaging in a "bipartisan process," since refraining is better for their party overall. Ironically, without the filibuster, GOP senators might be more inclined to negotiate to place their stamp on legislation they know might pass without them.

Playing this ugly game is McConnell's right under Senate rules, but no one is obliged to pretend not to understand how the filibuster actually functions: In reality, it gums up the functioning of government and incentivizes raw partisan power politics.

In the case of voting rights, this will be even more stark. Republicans are doing everything they can to rig democracy to their anti-majoritarian advantage wherever possible, for purely partisan purposes.

…

As Ronald Brownstein writes, the GOP escalation of these tactics — revealing a party entirely unchastened about its full-scale effort to overturn a national election — suggests we may be at a “turning point in the history of U.S. democracy”:

> Against the backdrop of the red-state voting offensive, the fate of H.R. 1 looks like a genuine inflection point. If Democrats can’t persuade Manchin, Sinema, and any other filibuster proponents to kill the parliamentary tool, Senate Republicans will be able to shield their state-level allies from federal interference.

Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the sponsor of H.R. 1, told Brownstein: “If we can’t get these changes in place in time for the 2022 midterm election,” it may be too late, and Republicans may “lock in this voter-suppression regime.”

Mother Jones

The House Is Poised to Pass a Major Voting Rights Bill — and Create a Helluva Battle in the Senate

BY ARI BERMAN | MARCH 3, 2021

With a supercharged assault on voting rights that includes introducing more than 250 new laws aimed at restricting voting in 43 states, the Republican Party this year has initiated a nationwide crusade against the foundation of American democracy. This week, House Democrats in Washington launched a counteroffensive that will soon move to the Senate, where this critical fight will likely lead to an all-out battle over how that chamber conducts its business.

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives was scheduled to vote on — and presumably pass — H.R. 1, dubbed the For the People Act, the most significant democracy reform bill since the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The bill would go a long way toward thwarting the new GOP voter-suppression efforts by enacting a wide range of pro-voter measures for federal elections. This includes nationwide automatic and Election Day registration; two weeks of early voting in every state; the expansion of mail-in voting; the restoration of voting rights to people convicted of a felony who have served their time; restrictions on discriminatory voter-ID laws and voter purges; and the creation of independent redistricting commissions for House districts to prevent extreme gerrymandering. The bill also cracks down on dark money by implementing public financing for congressional campaigns, and it establishes new ethics rules for federal officeholders.

Nearly identical legislation passed the House in March 2019, but it was blocked in the Senate by then–Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), who called it a "power grab" for Democrats. It has become an increasingly urgent priority for Democrats this year, following Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election, the insurrection at the Capitol, and the wave of GOP-backed proposals to restrict voting rights in key states, such as Georgia. The GOP wish list includes rolling back mail-in voting, restricting ballot drop boxes, limiting early voting, and repealing automatic voter registration.

After being passed in the House on a party-line vote, the measure is expected to be blocked once again by Republicans in the Senate — that is, unless Senate Democrats eliminate the filibuster, which would require a supermajority of 60 votes for passage. In the 50–50 divided Senate, it is highly improbable that the Democrats will be able to win over 10 GOP votes to defeat a Republican filibuster. So a Senate clash over H.R. 1 is likely to become a key front in the ongoing battle over the Senate filibuster. And Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), a chief sponsor of the voting rights legislation, tells me she supports killing the filibuster to pass this legislation.

"I would get rid of the filibuster," Klobuchar says. "I have favored filibuster reform for a long time and now especially for this critical election bill."

In the past, Klobuchar, who chairs the Senate Rules Committee, has indicated she was open to eliminating the filibuster, but these comments to Mother Jones are her most definitive statement to date. Though her Democratic colleagues Sens. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) have said they would not support abolishing the filibuster, Klobuchar notes that the spread of new GOP anti-voting bills boosts the need for Democrats to enact H.R. 1 — and that increases the pressure to end or alter the Senate filibuster.

“We have a raw exercise of political power going on where people are making it harder to vote and you just can’t let that happen in a democracy because of some old rules in the Senate,” she says.

Klobuchar calls the GOP’s assault on voting rights “the defining issue of the year.” She adds, “We had an insurrection at the Capitol with rioters who were trying to literally dismantle our democracy. The fundamental issue is do people get to vote or not and are we going to make it easy for them to vote or are we going to put up barriers to make it impossible?”

It’s become clear since the November election that Republicans are doubling down on anti-democratic policies, such as voter suppression and gerrymandering, to consolidate their power at the state level and increase their odds of winning back control of Washington in 2022 and 2024. “Much of what H.R. 1 is trying to do is restore majority rule in America,” says Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the chief House sponsor of H.R. 1. “We’ve seen an effort to narrow participation in the political arena through voter suppression, partisan gerrymandering, the use of dark money. You put that together and that creates minority rule in America, which producers a lot of anger and frustration. That makes it easier for extreme elements to access the political space without accountability.”

The GOP’s intensified attack on voting rights at the state level has raised the stakes for Democrats in Washington. “It’s having a huge impact,” says Adam Jentleson, onetime staffer to former-Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and author of The Kill Switch: The Rise of the Modern Senate and the Crippling of American Democracy. “It demonstrates that Biden’s victory is, at most, a reprieve from the threat of minority rule by white conservatives. Short of urgent action by

Democrats, Republicans will take back power despite representing a minority of voters."

That makes the fight over voting rights a fight over the filibuster. "I've always thought HR 1 would be the most likely place for the filibuster to come to a head," says Jentleson. "It's a question of existential survival for Democrats and democracy writ large. And Republicans will go to the mat to keep it from passing. You'll never see 10 Republicans support it."

Klobuchar plans to hold hearings on S. 1, the Senate version of the voting rights bill, in the Rules Committee this month and then advance the bill to the Senate floor, setting up a potential showdown over the filibuster. Democrats have a few options at their disposal. They could end the filibuster outright with a simple majority vote (with Vice President Kamal Harris casting a tie-breaking vote), or they could abolish the filibuster only for election-related bills that are critical for democracy, an idea floated by Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) They could also force Republicans to speak continuously on the Senate floor to sustain a filibuster — as was done in the old days — which would make it tougher for Republicans to wield the filibuster. Another option: lower the threshold for passing filibustered bills from 60 votes to 55 votes.

The filibuster was once the primary tool used to block legislation that would protect voting rights, such as a proposed law banning the poll tax. "In the 87 years between the end of Reconstruction and 1964, the only bills that were stopped by filibusters were civil rights bills," Jentleson writes in his book. Abolishing the filibuster to pass H.R. 1 would be "poetic justice," he says. "You would be ending the filibuster on an issue of civil rights."

The House Is Going to Vote on a Sweeping Voting Rights Act. What's in It?

BY SAVANNAH BEHRMANN | MARCH 3, 2021

The House is expected to pass the For the People Act this week, which would provide sweeping reforms to protect voters' rights, increase election security, mandate independent redistricting and more.

The For the People Act, also known as H.R. 1, was first introduced and passed in 2019 during the last Congress and reintroduced by Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md.

In a statement, Sarbanes said the "2020 election underscored the need for comprehensive, structural democracy reform. Americans across the country were forced to overcome rampant voter suppression, gerrymandering and a torrent of special-interest dark money just to exercise their vote and their voice in our democracy."

The bill had no chance of becoming law when Republicans controlled the Senate, with then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., calling it a "terrible bill" and not giving it any floor time. Now with a 50-50 Senate, and Senate Democrats in control, it has somewhat of a higher chance of making it to President Joe Biden's desk.

However, it faces the prospect of a GOP filibuster, a congressional tactic that essentially requires 60 Senate votes.

Former President Donald Trump, speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference on Sunday, called the bill a "disaster" and "monster."

Here's some of what the legislation would do:

Expand the Voting Pool

The bill seeks to increase voter turnout by expanding early voting, lessening identification requirements, allowing same-day registration and requiring states to set up automatic registration for federal elections for eligible voters.

The legislation says, “States and localities have eroded access to the right to vote through restrictions on the right to vote including excessively onerous voter identification requirements, burdensome voter registration procedures, voter purges, limited and unequal access to voting by mail, polling place closures, unequal distribution of election resources, and other impediments.”

About 165 bills that would restrict voting have been introduced this year in 43 states this year, a nearly fivefold increase from the same period in 2020, according to the Brennan Center for Justice.

The legislation would work to combat some of these restrictions by also requiring states to establish electronic voter registration and permit voters to register on Election Day, which Republicans say would make verification harder and lead to increased fraud.

The bill additionally would require states to automatically register felons once they've completed their sentences.

The legislation also would expand voter access to absentee and mail-in voting, as well as set ground rules for how voters drop off their ballots, apply to vote-by-mail and more.

Voting by mail skyrocketed in the 2020 election as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and uncertainty about voting in person. Some Republicans, including Trump and members of his campaign, falsely alleged it led to voter fraud and his loss.

Mandate Independent Redistricting

The legislation would lessen the influence of gerrymandering and require states to establish a bipartisan independent commission to redraw their congressional districts every 10 years.

Currently, a majority of states rely on their state legislatures to draw congressional lines following the census, leading to districts being disproportionately drawn and protective of either party.

However, the redistricting reforms wouldn't kick in until the 2030 Census, “pursuant to the” next “decennial census.”

Ensure Voting Rights

One provision in the bill would restrict voter-roll purges by states that civil rights groups say disproportionately affect minority and low-income residents.

Another of the bill's many provisions calls for Congress to improve voting protections that civil rights groups say have been eroded, notably by a 2013 Supreme Court decision.

That ruling, in Shelby County (Alabama) v. Holder, threw out a section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that required states and other jurisdictions with a history of voter discrimination to obtain “pre-clearance” from federal officials before making election changes.

The legislation would limit states from purging nonactive voters from their voter rolls without verifying they are ineligible from voting in that state.

The bill aims to make casting a ballot take 30 minutes or less.

During the 2020 primaries and general elections, voters in several states sometimes waited for hours to cast a vote.

It would give the Department of Justice more power to step in to enforce voting rights.

Requires Presidential Tax Returns

Trump never released his tax returns while in office and fought bitter legal battles for years to keep his tax returns under wraps.

If the legislation becomes law, presidents, vice presidents and candidates for the White House would be required to release their annual tax filings. It also would require the president and the vice president to file a financial disclosure form within 30 days of taking office.

Increase Election Security

The legislation would increase the security of elections by requiring the use of paper ballots, encourage risk-limiting audits of the ballots and more.

It would also crack down on voter intimidation and the spread of disinformation, including the promotion of false information regarding the right to vote.

House to Vote on Sweeping Government Ethics and Election Bill

BY CLARE FORAN AND ANNIE GRAYER | MARCH 3, 2021

The House is expected to vote Wednesday on H.R. 1, a sweeping government, ethics and election bill that Democrats have made a signature legislative priority.

H.R. 1 passed the House during the last Congress after Democrats won back the majority, but it failed to advance in the Republican-controlled Senate. Now that Democrats also control the White House and the Senate, House Democrats, led by Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland, are poised to pass the legislation again. It is still likely to hit a roadblock in the Senate, however, where it's not clear there would be enough Republican support to overcome a filibuster.

Democrats describe the package as anti-corruption legislation that would expand voting access and improve accountability and transparency in Washington.

“I don't think the urgency has ever been greater,” Sarbanes told CNN in an interview. “When you look at what Republicans are doing across the country in statehouses to roll back access to the ballot box, we need to do what we can to establish baseline standards and best practices that allow people to register and vote in America without it being an obstacle course for them.”

“All of these things are designed to restore people's faith in democracy at a time when we can see with our own eyes that things are pretty shaky,” the congressman said.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, a Maryland Democrat, echoed that message, telling reporters Tuesday, “We believe that H.R. 1 needs to pass because the Republican state legislators, concerned about their losses, either in their own states or in the country, are again upping their efforts to make it more difficult for people to vote.”

…

When H.R. 1 gets a floor vote, it will be largely the same as the version that passed during the last Congress. Notable changes, however, include revisions that Democrats say will make it safer and easier to vote amid the coronavirus pandemic as well as measures to protect against foreign interference in elections.

Despite the narrow Senate majority, which limits what Democrats can do in the chamber, Sarbanes said he is "optimistic about the path" forward.

“I think that our responsibility in the House is to put as much power behind this effort as we possibly can with a strong vote,” he said. “I think if there's the will, and I believe there is the will ... then there should be a way to get this done.”

The congressman added, “We have to take advantage of this moment, and I think there will be an appreciation of that in the United States Senate. We'll see if it can be done on a bipartisan basis. If not, then I think it makes sense to step

back and reevaluate the filibuster and whether that makes sense and figure out if there's another path forward.”

Key provisions of the legislation

The legislative package calls for far-reaching ethics and government changes that would impact Congress, the president and even the Supreme Court.

It would institute an ethics code for the US Supreme Court that would apply to justices and would implement measures intended to prevent presidential conflicts of interest.

H.R. 1 would ban congressional lawmakers from sitting on corporate boards. It would also stop lawmakers from using taxpayer money to reach settlements in employment discrimination cases stemming from their own actions.

The bill takes aim at Citizens United, the landmark 2010 Supreme Court decision, by calling for a constitutional amendment to overturn the ruling, which opened the door to unlimited spending by corporations and unions to influence elections.

The legislation also bars states from restricting the ability to vote by mail and, among other provisions, calls for states to use independent redistricting commissions to create congressional district boundaries.

The Atlantic

Democrats' Only Chance to Stop the GOP Assault on Voting Rights

BY RONALD BROWNSTEIN (OPINION) | MARCH 3, 2021

The most explosive battle in decades over access to the voting booth will reach a new crescendo this week, as Republican-controlled states advance an array of measures to restrict the ballot, and the U.S. House of Representatives votes on the federal legislation that represents Democrats' best chance to stop them.

It's no exaggeration to say that future Americans could view the resolution of this struggle as a turning point in the history of U.S. democracy. The outcome could not only shape the balance of power between the parties, but determine whether that democracy grows more inclusive or exclusionary. To many civil-rights advocates and democracy scholars I've spoken with, this new wave of state-level bills constitutes the greatest assault on Americans' right to vote since the Jim Crow era's barriers to the ballot.

"This is a huge moment," Derrick Johnson, the president and CEO of the NAACP, told me. "This harkens to pre-segregation times in the South, and it goes to the core question of how we define citizenship and whether or not all citizens actually will have access to fully engage and participate."

In Georgia, Texas, Arizona, Iowa, and Montana, Republican governors and legislators are moving forward bills that would reduce access to voting by mail, limit early voting, ban ballot drop boxes, inhibit voter-registration drives, and

toughen identification requirements—measures inspired by the same discredited claims of election fraud that Donald Trump pushed after his 2020 loss. Earlier this week, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives in Georgia, for instance, passed a sweeping bill that would do almost all of those things.

The Supreme Court's 6–3 conservative majority is unlikely to block many, or perhaps any, of these state laws. As a result, Democrats may have a single realistic opportunity to resist not only these proposals, but also GOP plans to institute severe partisan congressional gerrymanders in many of the same states. That opportunity: using Democrats' unified control of Washington to establish national election standards—by passing the omnibus election-reform bill known as H.R. 1, which is scheduled for a House vote today, and the new Voting Rights Act, which is expected to come to the floor later this year.

Democrats may have only a brief window in which to block these state-level GOP maneuvers. Typically, the president's party loses House and Senate seats in the first midterm election after his victory. Democrats will face even worse odds if Republicans succeed in imposing restrictive voting laws or gerrymandering districts in the GOP's favor across a host of red states.

If Democrats lose their slim majority in either congressional chamber next year, they will lose their ability to pass voting-rights reform. After that, the party could face a debilitating dynamic: Republicans could use their state-level power to continue limiting ballot access, which would make regaining control of the House or the Senate more difficult for Democrats—and thus prevent them from passing future national voting rules that override the exclusionary state laws.

"There's an increasing appreciation," Democratic Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland, H.R. 1's chief sponsor, told me, that "if we can't get these changes

in place in time for the 2022 midterm election, the efforts that Republicans are taking at the state level to lock in this voter-suppression regime" and maximize their advantage via partisan gerrymanders "will reshape the environment in a way that makes it impossible to get this, or frankly many other things, done."

The outcome in the House for both H.R. 1 and a new VRA isn't in much doubt. No Democrat voted against either bill when the chamber first passed them in 2019. This year, every House Democrat has already endorsed H.R. 1, ensuring its passage today. Although some Senate observers have questioned whether the moderate Democrat Joe Manchin, of West Virginia, will support H.R. 1's Senate equivalent, most election-reform advocates I've spoken with expect that, in the end, Manchin and every other Senate Democrat will back both voting-rights bills, as they did in the previous Congress.

How far the party will go to make them law remains in doubt, however. Senate Republicans are likely to try to kill these bills with a filibuster. Senator Jeff Merkley of Oregon, the principal sponsor of H.R. 1's Senate analogue, has been urging his colleagues to consider ending the filibuster for these bills alone, even if they are unwilling to end it for all legislation. But so far, at least two Democrats remain resistant to curtailing the filibuster in any way: Manchin and Senator Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona.

One White House official, who asked not to be identified while discussing internal strategy, told me that "the president is committed to defending the voting rights of all Americans, and keenly aware of the ongoing threats to those rights." But several activists and scholars who support the election-reform bills told me they fear that neither the Biden administration nor Senate Democrats are sufficiently worried about the threat to small-d democracy coalescing in the red states. They are especially dumbfounded that Manchin and Sinema—and maybe others—

would protect the filibuster on the grounds of encouraging bipartisan cooperation when Senate Republicans would be using it to shield red-state actions meant to entrench GOP control. “What’s the point of being a Democrat if you are just going to let Republicans systematically tilt the playing field so that Democrats can’t win?” Lee Drutman, a senior fellow at the centrist think tank New America, told me. “At that point, you should just be a Republican.”

Although Democrats first introduced H.R. 1 and the new VRA long before the 2020 campaign, everything that has happened since Election Day has underscored the stakes in this struggle. The GOP’s state-level offensive amounts to an extension of the assault Trump mounted in the courts, in state legislatures, and ultimately through the attack that he inspired against the Capitol. If nothing else, the GOP’s boldness can leave Democrats with little doubt about what they can expect in the years ahead if they do not establish nationwide election standards. “This is a very brazen effort by lawmakers across the country to enact provisions that make it harder for Americans to vote,” Eliza Sweren-Becker, a counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice who is tracking the GOP’s state-level measures, told me. “There is no subtlety and no attempt to obfuscate what is going on here.”

In its latest tally, the Brennan Center counts 253 separate voter-suppression proposals pending in 43 states. That’s significantly more than the number of bills it tracked after the 2010 election—180 bills, in 41 states—when significant GOP gains in the states triggered a similar wave of laws.

Some advocates remain optimistic that the most extreme proposals (such as repealing some states’ on-demand absentee balloting) will be thwarted by public resistance; many Americans are now accustomed to the expanded voting options that many states have offered amid the pandemic. Such measures can also

backfire by angering voters, who then become more determined to cast their ballot. But there's no question that election law can heavily influence how easy or difficult participation is for voters—particularly low-income, young, and minority voters less attached to the political system. Among the laws under consideration in the states are these:

- On a pure party-line vote, Iowa's legislature has approved a bill that cuts the number of early-voting days, reduces by one hour how long polls are open on Election Day, and requires all absentee ballots to be received by the time the polls close on Election Day. (The current rule allows all mail-in ballots to be counted so long as they are postmarked within one day of the election.)

- In Georgia, the state Senate approved legislation last month imposing new voter-ID requirements for requesting an absentee ballot, a step that critics say will disproportionately burden low-income voters. A state Senate committee voted Friday to end the policy that automatically registers voters when they obtain a driver's license or access other government services, and to eliminate the on-demand absentee-ballot system the state has employed since 2005. Earlier this week, the state House approved a bill that would mandate the absentee-ballot voter-ID requirement, curtail the window during which voters can request an absentee ballot and the availability of ballot drop boxes, and retrench early voting on weekends, when Black churches traditionally hold "souls to the polls" mobilizations. Taken together, the state Democratic Party recently calculated, these provisions and others under consideration would outlaw the manner in which more than 2.2 million Georgians cast their ballots in 2020.

- In Arizona, the Republican-controlled legislature is advancing bills that would purge as many as 200,000 people from the roll of voters who automatically receive absentee ballots; reduce the number of early-voting days; impose tougher ID requirements for absentee ballots; require that absentee ballots be mailed by the Thursday before the election and received by the time the polls close on Election Day; and create new reporting requirements for groups conducting voter-registration drives. The purge alone could disenfranchise as many as 50,000 of the state's Latino voters, Randy Perez, the democracy director at LUCHA, a community-organizing group, told me. "That could be 7 percent of our state's Latino voters gone in a flash."

The GOP is on the offensive elsewhere too. Republicans in Montana and New Hampshire are pushing proposals that would make voting more difficult for college students. In Florida, state House Republicans are moving a bill that would require voters to reapply for mail-in ballots more frequently, and Republican Governor Ron DeSantis wants to reduce the availability of drop boxes and create more stringent standards for signature verification on absentee ballots, among other measures. Republican legislators in Texas recently introduced a bill to ban voting at night, after Harris County (which includes Houston) generated huge turnout last year by, in part, holding one session of all-night voting meant to provide access for workers who could not get to the polls at any other time.

In red states, civil-rights and government-reform groups are struggling to combat these restrictions. Courts have uniformly rejected Trump's illusory claims of fraud, but polls show that the majority of Republican voters believe them—and that's translated into substantial pressure on GOP legislators to impose new

obstacles to voting. “We are getting drowned out,” Perez said. “Every legislator I talk to tells me the same thing: ‘I get thousands of emails a day telling me the election was stolen and I need to fix it.’” Voters, he added, “might be in for a big shock if we can’t stop this.”

Federal courts are unlikely to step in: Although the Supreme Court refused to intervene in the far-fetched efforts of Trump and his allies to overturn the 2020 election, under Chief Justice John Roberts, the conservative Court majority has consistently refused to block state limits on voting access or to prevent partisan gerrymanders. Critics argue that in the Court’s 2013 Shelby County decision, Roberts fired the starting gun for the current barrage of voter-suppression measures—by eviscerating the provision of the original VRA that required states with a history of discrimination to receive “preclearance” from the Justice Department for changes in their voting laws.

Assessing this turbulent landscape, Michael McDonald, a political scientist at the University of Florida who specializes in voter turnout, recently concluded: “We are witnessing the greatest roll back of voting rights in this country since the Jim Crow era.”

H.R. 1 would reverse many of the restrictive policies advancing in red states. As I wrote recently, the bill would require all states to provide online, automatic, and same-day registration; ensure at least 15 days of in-person early voting; provide all voters with access to no-excuse, postage-free absentee ballots; and offer drop boxes where they can return those ballots. It would also end gerrymandering by requiring every state to create independent commissions for congressional redistricting and by defining national criteria to govern the process.

Against the backdrop of the red-state voting offensive, the fate of H.R. 1 looks like a genuine inflection point. If Democrats can't persuade Manchin, Sinema, and any other filibuster proponents to kill the parliamentary tool, Senate Republicans will be able to shield their state-level allies from federal interference. And that could produce a widening divergence between elections in red and blue states—as well as a lasting disadvantage for Democrats in the battle for control of Congress. Such a chasm will fuel "competing narratives that are inherently corrosive and destructive," Sarbanes told me. "The more you have this bifurcated system of how elections are conducted in this country, the more oxygen you are going to give to some of the conspiracy theories that come from the other side."

Yet even that equilibrium—with blue states expanding the franchise and red states restricting it—might not be stable. First, voter-suppression laws and gerrymanders in red states could help Republicans regain one or both congressional chambers in 2022. Then, efforts to restrict the vote could help Republicans recapture the presidency in 2024. Today, Democratic governors in key swing states—Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania—can block any restrictive laws, but if the party loses any of those governorships in 2022, it'll be virtually powerless to stop new voter-suppression efforts from the Republican-controlled state legislatures.

In that nightmare scenario for Democrats, new laws across the Rust Belt, combined with what's already happening in Arizona and Georgia, would put enough states at risk to seriously endanger Democratic hopes of holding the White House in 2024. If Republicans win unified control of the White House and Congress that year, they could try to set national voting standards that impose the red-state voting rules on blue states. Republican Senator Rick Scott of Florida, for instance, has already proposed legislation that would bar all states from offering automatic voter registration and using drop boxes, and would

require them to adopt stiff voter-ID rules. In his speech to CPAC on Sunday, Trump also called for establishing a national voter-ID requirement, as well as rules banning early voting and most mail balloting.

More and more Democrats, Sarbanes said, are coming to recognize that “this isn’t just about trying to do something now that we can do later. This is about doing something now that we may not get the chance to do again for another 50 years.” Democrats face an unforgiving equation: a fleeting window in which to act, and potentially lasting consequences if they don’t. “If you look at all the stakes that are involved,” Sarbanes continued, “the notion that you would miss this opportunity becomes incomprehensible.”

Roll Call

After Four Difficult Years, Let's Open Government Up 'For the People'

BY STENY H. HOYER (OP-ED) | MARCH 3, 2021

In 2018, House Democrats won the majority on a promise that we would refocus the chamber on delivering "For the People."

The centerpiece of that effort was H.R. 1, the For the People Act, comprehensive legislation to root out corruption in government, increase transparency and accountability, impose higher ethics standards, strengthen voting rights, limit the influence of dark money in our politics, and reform the way we draw the maps for congressional districts to make them fairer.

Within weeks of assuming control, thanks to the leadership of Rep. John Sarbanes and input from across our caucus, we brought H.R. 1 to the floor and passed it. Unfortunately, the Republican-controlled Senate refused even to consider it and let it die with the 116th Congress.

This week, as one of the first actions of the 117th Congress, I am proud to bring H.R. 1 to the floor again, this time with a Democratic-led Senate and a president in the Oval Office committed to governing For the People. As we seek to return the focus of American government to the people, Democrats will press forward with our reform agenda, which starts with H.R. 1. With the bill's key reforms, Congress can renew Americans' faith that government exists to serve them,

elevate their voices, and help them get ahead — by placing the power of government back in their hands.

First and foremost, H.R. 1 would enhance voting rights protections to ensure that our democracy works For the People. It would make voter registration automatic, expand early voting opportunities so more people can avoid long lines and participate on their own schedule, and restore voting rights to those who have paid their debts to society and ought to be full participants in our democracy.

H.R. 1 would also end the practice of partisan redistricting, replacing it with a nonpartisan process nationwide, to ensure that all voters' voices are heard equally. I was proud to lead the last major legislative reform of our voting rules in 2002, when Congress passed my bill, the Help America Vote Act. Now, it is time to enact H.R. 1 and take the next steps forward.

H.R. 1 would finally require super PACs to reveal their donors, shining the disinfecting light of truth into what has become the darkest corners of our politics. Since the Supreme Court began allowing undisclosed donations to super PACs in 2013, a tide of dark money has drowned our elections in negativity, misinformation and hyperpartisanship. It's time for that to end; it's time for a return to transparency in our elections.

The past four years have been a stark reminder that those who serve in public office must be held to the highest standards of ethics and accountability. That's why H.R. 1 would require presidential and vice-presidential candidates to release a decade's worth of tax returns, revealing potential financial conflicts of interest. It also would impose higher ethics standards, and it would close the loophole that currently allows presidential inaugural committees to raise money without disclosing their donors.

Democrats are cognizant that we cannot restore the people's trust overnight. No single piece of legislation alone will accomplish that. But H.R. 1 will go a long way toward that aim. This is an effort that unites Democrats and enjoys broad popular support among Americans across the political spectrum. When the House passed this bill in 2019, not a single Republican voted in favor. That was disappointing, and I hope that, this time around, Republicans eager to move forward from the corruption and ethical lapses of the past four years will join us in sending a message that government can and must do better.

When government works — when it is truly "of the people, by the people and for the people" — it can be a powerful tool to help our people attain the justice, opportunity and economic security that enable them to make it in America. As we face the twin crises of a deadly pandemic and its severe economic impact, opening government up and making it more accountable and transparent will help us build back better and stronger by ensuring that all Americans are full participants in this great national effort.

That's why H.R. 1 is so critical — and why Congress and the president must do all we can to see it enacted.

House Prepares to Pass Landmark Voting Rights, Ethics Bill

BY BRIAN SLODYSKO | MARCH 3, 2021

House Democrats are poised to pass a sweeping elections and ethics bill, offering it up as a powerful counterweight to voting rights restrictions advancing in Republican-controlled statehouses across the country.

House Resolution 1, which touches on virtually every aspect of the electoral process, would restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a murky campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to anonymously bankroll political causes.

“Our purpose was to remove ... obstacles of participation for Democrats or Republicans. That’s what the law requires, that was the right thing to do,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Tuesday on the House floor. “That’s what this legislation does.”

….

The measure, which was all but certain to pass the House in a vote expected Wednesday, has been a priority for Democrats since they won their majority in 2018. But it has taken on added urgency in the wake of Donald Trump’s repeated false claims of a stolen 2020 election.

Courts and even Trump's last attorney general, William Barr, found his claims about the election to be without merit. But, spurred on by those lies, state lawmakers across the U.S. have filed more than 200 bills in 43 states that would limit ballot access, according to a tally kept by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

In Iowa, the legislature has voted to cut absentee and in-person early voting and prevent local elections officials from setting up additional locations to make early voting easier. In Georgia, the House on Monday voted for a law to require identification to vote by mail and allow counties to cancel early in-person voting on Sundays, when many Black voters cast ballots after church.

"They are not even being coy about it. They are saying the 'quiet parts' out loud," said Tiffany Muller, the president of End Citizens United, a left-leaning group that aims to curtail the influence of corporate money in politics. "For them, this isn't about protecting our democracy or protecting our elections. This is about pure partisan political gain."

…

The bill would require states to automatically register eligible voters and offer same-day registration. It would limit their ability to purge registered voters from their rolls and mandate the restoration of former felons' voting rights in states where they aren't allowed to vote. It would also require states to offer 15 days of early voting and allow no-excuse absentee balloting.

Many Republican opponents in Congress have homed in on narrower aspects of the measure, railing against provisions that would create a public financing system for congressional campaigns.

Davis charged that it would “launder corporate dollars” to publicly fund congressional campaigns. What the bill would actually do is use fines and settlement proceeds raised from corporate bad actors to create a pool of money open to candidates who meet certain requirements.

…

Still, the biggest obstacles lie ahead in the Senate, which is split 50-50 between Republicans and Democrats.

On some legislation, it takes only 51 votes to pass, with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaker. On a deeply divisive bill like this one, they would need 60 votes under the Senate’s rules to overcome a Republican filibuster — a tally they are unlikely to reach.

Some have discussed options like lowering the threshold to break a filibuster, or creating a workaround that would allow some legislation to be exempt. Democratic congressional aides say the conversations are fluid but underway.

The Washington Post

Why Sarbanes Was His Own Campaign-Finance Guinea Pig. The House Weighs His Bill Wednesday.

BY MEAGAN FLYNN | MARCH 3, 2021

For years, Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) had an ongoing experiment: testing his campaign-finance legislation on his own reelection races.

He would set aside hundreds of thousands in high-dollar donations and would not touch it, not until he had raised at least $1,000 in small-dollar contributions from 100 different precincts in his district.

Cold-calling donors on Election Day in 2014, he told one skeptical constituent: “In a sense, I’m calling from the future. I’m calling from a time when candidates will have an incentive to reach out to the small donors of the world.”

On Wednesday, the House will consider whether to make that world a reality.

The public campaign-financing system Sarbanes envisions will go up for a vote as part of a sweeping campaign-finance and voting-access package he’s worked on for the better part of 15 years.

In the wake of the Jan. 6 Capitol breach and an unprecedented assault on the integrity of the 2020 election, Democratic congressional leaders have made passing it their top priority.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) called Sarbanes the “godfather” of the legislation in a speech on the House floor Tuesday, crediting his “long-term dedication” to advancing democracy.

The bill — H.R. 1, the For the People Act — seeks to drastically broaden access to the ballot at a time when GOP state lawmakers are trying to advance more voting restrictions. It would expand early, absentee and mail-in voting, while also enabling automatic voter registration and trying to end partisan gerrymandering.

And it seeks to amplify the power of grass-roots donors to counter the influence of big money in politics, through a small-dollar donor matching system.

“The stakes could not be higher,” said Sarbanes, a Baltimore native who chairs the Democrats’ Democracy Reform Task Force and is the son of the late Sen. Paul Sarbanes.

A similar version of the bill was approved by the Democratic-majority House in 2019, but died in the Republican-controlled Senate.

With Democrats now holding 50 Senate seats and the tiebreaking vote of Vice President Harris, some liberal lawmakers are pushing to get H.R. 1 through that chamber without a single Republican vote — a scenario that would require ditching the filibuster.

“We’ve never needed it more than we needed it in this moment, when you look at what’s happening across the country,” Sarbanes said, citing Republican attempts to restrict voting access as well as President Donald Trump’s effort to sow distrust in the U.S. electoral system leading up to the Capitol attack.

“We’ve got a piece of legislation that can stop that voter suppression effort in its tracks, broadly expand people’s access to the ballot box . . . and push back against this undue influence that big money has on our politics and the way we govern in America,” Sarbanes said.

Under the campaign-finance overhaul included in H.R. 1, candidates would be able to opt into a six-to-one matching system for small-dollar donations. Just like in Sarbanes’s experiment, they would only qualify to unlock the funds if they raise $50,000 from at least 1,000 small-dollar donors first, and agree not to take certain PAC money.

The matching funds would be sourced not from taxpayers — as Republican critics have frequently and incorrectly asserted — but from civil settlements or criminal fees the federal government wins against corporate wrongdoers or major tax evaders.

In the future Sarbanes envisions, a $50 donation from a donor of modest means would be worth $350 to the candidate.

Sarbanes, a lawyer who worked for the state Education Department before running for Congress, said he became interested in campaign-finance issues soon after taking office, when he saw gun-control and climate-change legislation stymied by opposing lobbyists and fat checks from special-interest groups.

Then came the Citizens United Supreme Court ruling in 2010 — “unleashing super PACS on our politics,” he said.

“What it did was it kind of woke up the public to the role that big money was having,” Sarbanes said.

He began experimenting with his own campaign finance in the 2012 cycle. In his gerrymandered central Maryland district, he didn't have much to lose. "The idea was to pilot by my own design, in my own district, a set of incentives that would track with or mimic what a small-donor matching system might look like," he said.

A growing number of states and localities — including Maryland, the District and Montgomery County — have adopted public matching-fund systems in recent years, although theirs use taxpayer money.

But no such system exists for congressional candidates.

So Sarbanes improvised. He found himself hosting more in-district events to reach voters, including in poorer neighborhoods whose residents would not be targeted by most politicians. But Sarbanes didn't want $5,000 from them, only $5.

"The impact it had on my own behavior taught me a lot about the virtues of a system like this," he said.

His breakthrough moment, he said, came in the Glen Burnie shopping mall parking lot that day in 2014, when he convinced the skeptical woman to give him $5. There was something more rewarding about it, he recalled, than any check from a lobbyist could have been.

"I think maybe the future is now," he said Tuesday. "We've reached the point where if we can get a system like this in place, all the incentives can shift, and you'll see candidates that will finally reach out and build those bridges and connections to everyday Americans who maybe don't have a ton of money, but they can give something, and they want their voice to be heard."

Roll Call

Why Congress Must Pass H.R .1 and the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act

BY SYLVIA ALBERT (OP-ED) | MARCH 2, 2021

In the 2020 election, we used our vote, whether it was cast early, by mail or on Election Day, to determine the future for our family, community and country. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice and the confusion and sudden changes to the voting process thrown at us, we showed up and decided the outcome of a free and fair election.

Now, after showing our power as voters, some partisan politicians in state legislatures are pushing bills that would restrict our freedom to vote, while Congress is on the verge of passing laws to protect and strengthen it.

Already in 2021, more than 250 bills in 43 states have been introduced by Republican state legislators that create more unnecessary barriers to voting. From cutting early voting, to increasing purges of voter registration lists, to limiting absentee voting options, these bills are shameless, partisan attempts to silence us. It is not a coincidence that these bills are being introduced after a free, fair and secure election with record turnout. Americans exercised their right to vote, and these politicians' response is "We don't want you to vote." Under the guise of "election integrity," many of these bills target voters of color and young voters who already face many barriers to the ballot box. They have nothing to do with election integrity and are simply an attack on our freedom to vote.

Instead of erecting new barriers to voting, we should be working to build a democracy that is truly of, by and for the people, where all eligible Americans can vote and make their voices heard. That's why Congress must pass, and President Joe Biden must sign into law, the For the People Act and the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act.

Let's start with the For the People Act, which the House is expected to vote on this week. It's the boldest pro-democracy reform package introduced in Congress since the Watergate era. If enacted, it would strengthen our ethics and conflict-of-interest laws, stop unaccountable secret and special interest money from corrupting our politics, end partisan gerrymandering and protect voting rights and election security.

The For the People Act would set standards so every voter, regardless of their race, age or ZIP code, has equal access to the ballot box. The bill would improve our elections in several ways. First, it would streamline the voter registration process by allowing voters to register securely online or on Election Day. It would also stop the purging of voters from registration records and instead modernize the process by simply registering eligible voters when they interact with a state government agency.

Secondly, the bill would increase the security and integrity of our elections by requiring the use of paper ballots, increasing oversight of election vendors and encouraging states to conduct risk-limiting election audits, which help us have confidence in the election results. The For the People Act would also crack down on voter intimidation and the spread of disinformation by increasing penalties for promoting false information about the right to vote.

Finally, the For the People Act would ensure that there are more secure and accessible options to vote and reduce long voting lines by expanding early and absentee voting. It would also restore the right to vote to people who have completed their felony sentences and declare that Washington, D.C., residents deserve full voting rights and representation by supporting D.C. statehood.

The other bill Congress must pass to protect voting rights is the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act (introduced in the Senate as the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act). In 2013, in a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court eroded key parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which protected voters from racial discrimination and intimidation. This decision led to numerous states passing new anti-voter laws that restrict access to the ballot box and cut the number of polling places in our communities.

These changes have disproportionately restricted the freedom to vote for voters of color, often leading to long lines and less resources to run accessible elections in Black and brown communities. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act is our chance to reverse this trend by restoring the Voting Rights Act and strengthening the provisions in it to protect the freedom to vote for all Americans, particularly voters of color.

As more Republican state legislators seem focused on selling debunked conspiracy theories and lies about the integrity of our elections, we — the voters who determine the outcome of our elections — need to make sure our members of Congress know they must focus on delivering bold action to protect voting rights.

Nothing, including the filibuster, which is a relic of the Jim Crow era and subverts the basic notion of majority rule in our democracy, should stop Congress from

passing comprehensive democracy reform to strengthen our elections like the For the People Act and the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act.

Why Millennials and Gen Z Have the Most to Lose in the Voting Wars

BY RONALD BROWNSTEIN | MARCH 2, 2021

In an epic struggle over voting rights, the future political influence of the diverse generations now aging into the electorate could pivot on the fate of legislation the House is expected to consider this week.

Even as Republican-controlled states, drawing on former President Donald Trump's groundless claims of massive fraud in 2020, are advancing a wave of proposals making it tougher to vote, House Democrats this week will consider H.R. 1, sweeping legislation that would establish a nationwide baseline of voting rights.

Although many of the provisions in H.R. 1 would ease the way for more young people to participate in politics, particularly important may be its measures requiring every state to create systems for automatic, same-day and online voter registration. That could significantly reduce what many experts consider the biggest barrier to more young people voting in American elections: a complex and varying registration system that far fewer younger than older voters have been able, or willing, to navigate.

That barrier is often especially daunting for younger voters of color, who represent a growing share of the nation's emerging electorate. In fact, in many of

the states where Republicans are moving most aggressively to erect new obstacles to voting – including Georgia, Arizona, Texas and likely Florida – young people of color composed a clear majority of everyone who has turned 18 since the 2016 election, according to census figures.

If that barrier is entrenched, it could suppress for years the political emergence of these younger generations. Conversely, advocates argue, the nationwide standards of voting and registration rights established in H.R. 1 could greatly accelerate the pace at which millennials, Generation Z and eventually their younger siblings – the most racially and religiously diverse generations in American history – achieve political clout commensurate with their growing numbers.

The nationwide floor of voting rights in H.R. 1 would “make the electorate look more like the population,” says Ben Wessel, executive director of NextGen America, a group that mobilizes young voters for progressive causes. “The goal of a democracy should be that the people who are participating in it look a lot like the people who live in it. Right now, the electorate is older, Whiter and wealthier than the population writ large. And this rights that wrong.”

While H.R. 1 is certain to pass the House – every House Democrat has endorsed it – it is also virtually certain to die beneath a Republican filibuster in the Senate unless Democrats vote to eliminate or retrench that legislative tactic. (At this point, two Democratic senators, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, are opposed to ending or curtailing the filibuster.) That decision could shape not only the balance of power between the parties through the coming decade, but between the generations as well.

“That rising American electorate, however you want to characterize it, their voice is very dependent on being able to access these baseline standards when it comes to registering and voting across the country,” Democratic Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland, the chief sponsor of H.R. 1, told me.

Though multiple studies and investigations have found that voter fraud is extremely rare, Republicans for more than a decade have sought to impose tougher restrictions on voting across a wide range of states. Their political assumption has been that Republicans benefit when turnout is lower, because their base of middle-aged and older Whites are often the most reliable voters. Ironically, Trump's success in turning out huge numbers of previously nonvoting Whites (especially those without college degrees) has demolished the theory that higher turnout always benefits Democrats.

But that hasn't stopped the GOP offensive against voting access; instead, with Trump conditioning most Republicans to vote solely on Election Day itself, state Republicans are targeting the voting tools that encourage participation by Democratic-leaning constituencies of young people and minorities – among them mail ballots and early voting days. Trump, in his speech Sunday at the Conservative Political Action Conference, signaled his support for nationwide rules that would severely restrict the former and ban the latter.

The immediate context for the surge of proposals in Republican-controlled states that would make it more difficult to vote or register is Trump's unfounded claims of massive fraud in the 2020 election, which polls consistently show about three-fourths of Republican voters say they believe, despite the rejection of his supposed “evidence” by courts across the country.

But the larger context is that this ferocious struggle over access to the ballot – what some analysts consider the broadest assault on voting rights since the Jim Crow era in the segregated South – is occurring at a moment of profound generational and racial transition. Particularly in rapidly changing states across the Sun Belt, the voter suppression measures Republicans are advancing amount to stacking sandbags against a rising demographic tide.

Younger population edging out its elders

The baby boom generation – which is predominantly White because America admitted very few immigrants from 1924 through 1965 – is ending a nearly four-decade run as the dominant generation in the U.S. electorate. Baby boomers have made up the largest generation of eligible voters since 1980, according to calculations by the nonpartisan States of Change project, which studies voting trends and demographic change.

But in 2024, the group projects, the diverse younger generations of Americans born in 1981 or after –millennials and Generation Z – for the first time will represent a much larger share of eligible voters (nearly 45%) than the baby boomers and "silent generation," born before 1964 (who will compose about 35% of voters).

By 2028, millennials and Generation Z will make up almost exactly half of eligible voters, and those born before 1964 will fall below 3 in 10.

The forward edge of this transition is already reshaping the electorate, particularly in many of the Sun Belt states where Republicans now control state government with a coalition that revolves around older, non-college and non-urban Whites. From 2016 through 2020, a clear majority of the young people who

turned 18 – and thus became eligible to vote – were people of color in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Arizona and Texas, according to calculations provided to me by demographer William Frey of the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program.

All of these numbers point toward a potential shift of political influence. But the impact of these burgeoning generations is diluted because they don't turn out to vote at near the rate of the oldest voters: The States of Change project, for instance, forecasts that even though young people born after 1981 will exceed older Americans born before 1964 among eligible voters in 2024, the older group, because of much higher turnout, will still equal them as a share of actual voters.

Wessel, whose group focuses on turning out younger voters, says the complex voter registration rules, which vary from state to state, are a key reason for that disparity. Census figures from 2020 aren't yet available, but in 2018, only about half of eligible young adults aged 18-24 were registered to vote, compared with three-fourths of seniors and around 7 in 10 of those aged 45-64.

“Having to register to vote is one of the biggest barriers to getting young people to participate in our elections,” Wessel says. “Registration is an intentionally complicated process in many states ... for young people who are itinerant, who aren't used to filling out government forms like this ... who are intimidated by not wanting to screw something up in general – all of which defines people who are just entering adulthood.”

Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, who's been a leading proponent of registration revisions, agrees. “So many times, when you have students and young people and they are new at this ... you just have to make it easier,” she told me.

For Klobuchar and other Democrats, the answer is the three big registration mandates in H.R. 1 and its Senate equivalent, S. 1. The bills would require every state to adopt “automatic voter registration,” in which eligible adults are automatically registered to vote whenever they come in contact with government agencies, usually the department of motor vehicles. It would also require every state to permit “same day registration,” in which voters can register when they show up to cast their ballots, either during an early voting period (which is also mandated by the bill) or on Election Day. Finally, it would also require every state to allow voters to register online.

All but 11 states already permit online registration (though the holdouts include the key states of Texas and North Carolina). But only about 20 states now offer either automatic or same-day voter registration. Most of the states that make these options available – particularly the automatic voter registration – lean toward the Democrats.

Georgia and automatic registration

One exception to this pattern has been Georgia, a changing but historically red state, which provides for automatic registration (though not same-day registration). Last October, the state's Republican secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, issued a news release celebrating the milestone that the state had reached an all-time high of nearly 7.6 million adults registered to vote; automatic registration through the state's Department of Driver Services accounted for more than 5 million of those voters, his office reported.

Data provided to me by Catalist, a Democratic targeting firm, show that the number of registered voters has grown substantially for all racial groups in Georgia since the state adopted automatic voter registration in 2016. But under

the automatic system, new registrations have grown much faster for Blacks, Asian Americans and Hispanics than for Whites: From 2016 to 2020, the state added roughly twice as many new Black voters and almost 10 times as many new Hispanic voters as it had from 2010 through 2016, the Catalist figures show.

Automatic registration does not account for all of that change – state Democrats led by 2018 gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams have mounted a sustained effort to register and mobilize voters in recent years – but it has eased the process. Even Raffensperger noted in his release last fall: “The continued growth of Georgia's registered voting population is a testament to the simple and easy registration options the Secretary of State's office provides to Georgia voters, including automated registration through DDS.”

These racial trends may help explain why a committee in the Republican-controlled Georgia Senate voted last Friday to end the state's automatic voter registration system. (The same committee voted to revoke the state's law allowing any voter to cast an absentee ballot on request. On Monday, the Republican-controlled Georgia House of Representatives approved a separate slate of voting restrictions, including new voter ID requirements for mail ballots and cutbacks in the Sunday early voting "souls to the polls" option popular with African American churches.)

Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, along with several GOP colleagues, recently proposed legislation that would ban any state from using automatic voter registration for federal elections.

“What we saw this past election was confusion and chaos caused by inconsistent standards and last-minute changes to established election laws by state officials

and activist judges," Scott insisted in a statement. "It's now more clear than ever that there is a serious need for major reforms to our election systems."

Yet the states that have implemented automatic and same-day voter registration have mostly seen positive results. In a 2019 study, the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School concluded that states with automatic registration saw consistent boosts in the share of eligible voters who registered; another study, by the University of Southern California and California Civic Engagement Project, found more uneven impacts, with little change in some places, but clear positive impacts in other states. Political scientist Michael McDonald of the University of Florida, a leading student of voting patterns, told me in an email that "numerous studies have found about a 5-7 point voter turnout increase" in states that use same-day registration.

An unequal opportunity?

Colorado is one of the few states that already offer automatic, same-day and online registration, the trifecta of revisions that H.R. 1 would mandate. Secretary of State Jena Griswold told me that 90% of eligible voters were registered for the 2020 election, an extraordinary number. (Roughly three-fourths of eligible Colorado voters cast ballots last fall, among the highest turnout rates in the country, according to McDonald's U.S. Elections Project.) Though 2020 figures aren't yet available, the Census Bureau found that in 2018, the share of young people aged 18-24 who were registered in Colorado greatly exceeded the national average.

"It's 2021, and I think Americans expect things to be accessible," Griswold says. "Automatic voter registration, same-day voter registration and online voter registration are a modernization of our elections that Americans should expect.

Being able to sign up to exercise your constitutional right to vote should be accessible, and that's what those three programs do."

Like Griswold, Myrna Perez, director of the Brennan Center's voting rights and election program, says the registration policies in H.R. 1 could work together synergistically. "One of the things to remember is just like one anti-voter policy is not going to stop everyone from voting, one pro-voter policy isn't going to be the magic bullet that gets everybody voting," she says. "You need different policies because different communities are different."

Klobuchar, for instance, notes that of these policies, "Same-day registration particularly helps young people who haven't voted before and don't have a registration that's always been in place for, say, 20 years before."

Estimates vary on how many new voters could be added to the rolls if the registration provisions in H.R. 1 become nationwide law. But evidence from the states that have adopted these rules is prompting some dramatic forecasts. Jacob Hacker, a Yale University political scientist known for his writing on political polarization, recently estimated that the H.R. 1 changes could lead to as many as 50 million more registered voters; the Brennan Center has also concluded gains of that magnitude are possible, though other factors would matter too, such as whether Americans remain as engaged in politics as they have been during the past few years, notes Perez.

Looming over every aspect of this debate is the profound generational and racial transition in which the diverse cohorts of young people born since 1981 now constitute a majority of the American population – but still a distinct minority of voters. With a nationwide baseline of guaranteed registration and voting rights, those emerging generations could rapidly reshape the electorate over the next

decade. But their influence could grow much more slowly, and unevenly, if they face barriers to participation across most of the red states – which include many of the Sun Belt states at the epicenter of the demographic change.

For that reason, the split-level struggle over access to the vote – with Republicans in the states mostly seeking to limit it while Democrats in Washington try to expand it – returns to a core question that is becoming even more urgent as the nation inexorably grows more diverse: Will all Americans have equal opportunity to participate in the democracy?

“We are talking about Americans' constitutional rights, and I believe that all Americans should have access to exercising those rights,” says Griswold. “If you happen to be a person of color voting in Alabama you should have the same access as in Colorado. It's not about the state: It's about the voter. Your ability to vote shouldn't depend on your ZIP code, your state, the amount of money in your bank account, the color of your skin, or your gender or anything else.”

White House Backs Bill to Expand Voting Rights, Curb Gerrymandering

BY REBECCA BEITSCH | MARCH 1, 2021

The White House on Monday formally threw its backing behind a massive voting rights bill that seeks to shore up voting rights and limit gerrymandering ahead of the 2021 redistricting cycle.

“In the wake of an unprecedented assault on our democracy, a never before seen effort to ignore, undermine, and undo the will of the people, and a newly aggressive attack on voting rights taking place right now all across the country, this landmark legislation is urgently needed to protect the right to vote and the integrity of our elections, and to repair and strengthen American democracy,” the White House said in a statement of administrative policy.

The For the People Act, also called H.R. 1, was introduced by Democrats in 2019 and passed the House later that year, but it was never taken up by the GOP-led Senate.

The House is now set to take it up again next week, this time with a slim majority in the Senate.

The bill would expand opportunities to vote by mail, require states to establish electronic voter registration, and would make Election Day a federal holiday.

It would also give the Justice Department greater powers to step in and enforce voting rights.

Along with campaign finance reform measures, it would also require states to use independent redistricting commissions, a move that often takes the power to draw political boundaries out of the hands of state legislators.

…

“The president is committed to protecting the fundamental right to vote and making it easier for all eligible Americans to vote,” said White House press secretary Jen Psaki. His campaign was about fighting for democracy, and we're going to continue to fight for democracy in the White House.”

The Washington Post

The Republican Party Is Making Jim Crow Segregationists Proud

BY EUGENE ROBINSON | MARCH 1, 2021

The Republican Party's biggest problem is that too many people of color are exercising their right to vote. The party's solution is a massive push for voter suppression that would make old-time Jim Crow segregationists proud.

The Conservative Political Action Conference circus last week in Orlando showed how bankrupt the GOP is — at least when it comes to ideas, principles and integrity. Some might argue that the party, in buying into the lie that last year's election was somehow stolen, is simply delusional. I disagree. I think Republican leaders know exactly what they're doing.

The GOP may have lost the White House and the Senate, but it remains strong in most state capitols. So far this year, according to the Brennan Center for Justice, Republicans in 33 states "have introduced, prefiled, or carried over 165 bills to restrict voting access." The thrust of virtually all these measures is to make it more difficult for African Americans and other minorities to vote.

These efforts at disenfranchisement are more numerous, and more discriminatory, in several of the swing states President Biden carried narrowly: Arizona, Pennsylvania and Georgia. That should come as no surprise. GOP officials who had the temerity to follow the law and count the November vote honestly, such as Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, have been all but excommunicated by their state Republican Party organizations.

In Georgia — where not only did Donald Trump lose to Biden by 11,779 votes, but also two incumbent GOP senators were defeated by Democratic challengers — Republicans are using their control of the statehouse to try to eliminate all early voting on Sundays. That would put an end to “Souls to the Polls,” a popular Sunday get-out-the-vote initiative in which Black churches help parishioners get to polling places and cast their ballots.

“Souls to the Polls” eliminates barriers to voting that thousands of Black Georgians otherwise might face, such as transportation for the elderly or finding time during the workweek for others. Georgia Republicans want to put those barriers back up — and raise them even higher.

Other proposals being pushed by Georgia GOP state legislators include getting rid of no-excuse absentee voting, which has been allowed for decades; eliminating the use of convenient drop boxes for casting absentee votes; and abolishing automatic voter registration at the Department of Driver Services offices where Georgians go to renew their driver’s licenses and vehicle registrations.

Trump’s wild and false claims of election fraud aren’t the only things driving these efforts; Republican efforts to restrict voting are hardly new. Republican officials in Georgia know the state’s electorate at a granular level and are capable of performing basic addition and subtraction. They see how the populous suburbs around Atlanta, once GOP strongholds, have been steadily trending Democratic. They may not be able to halt that process. But perhaps they can compensate by suppressing the African American vote in economically disadvantaged areas of Atlanta proper; in the wide “Black Belt” stretching southwest across the state, roughly from Augusta to Columbus; and in the heavily African American area around Savannah.

In strongly Hispanic Arizona, which Biden won by 10,457 votes and where the Brennan Center tallies 19 voter-suppression bills filed since the election, the state Senate has rejected — for now — a Republican measure that would have stricken roughly 200,000 names from a list of voters who automatically receive mail-in ballots. That courtesy is considered the primary reason most Arizonans cast their votes by mail.

But another still-pending measure would require early ballots to be hand-delivered to a polling place rather than returned by mail, negating the benefits of mail voting. And another proposed bill would simply disregard the will of the voters altogether, allowing the GOP-controlled state legislature to appoint its own slate of presidential electors. Democracy, after all, can be so inconvenient.

Elsewhere across the country, Republican legislators are trying to tighten voter-identification laws that are already too restrictive. And they are trying to find ways to disqualify more mail-in ballots — perhaps for future occasions when GOP candidates need to “find” enough favorable votes, or lose enough adverse ones, to deny victory to a Democrat.

It amounts to an outrageous and shameful attempt to establish and perpetuate minority rule in a nation in which the Republican candidate for president has won the popular vote only once in the past eight elections.

At the state level, Democrats must fight these efforts relentlessly. And at the federal level, they should use any means necessary — including eliminating or suspending the Senate filibuster — to pass H.R. 1, the “For the People Act,” which would invalidate much of the most anti-democratic legislation the GOP is trying to enact.

And voters of color must resolve not to be deterred. This is not a “Whites only” democracy. Not anymore.

HUFFPOST

Republicans Are Pushing A Wave of Voter Restrictions. Democrats' Top Priority Would Stop Them.

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | FEBRUARY 28, 2021

Ex-President Donald Trump's lies about election fraud did not just lead to the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol meant to overturn a free and fair democratic election. His lies also led to a new wave of more than 250 voting restriction bills introduced by Republican governors and state legislators across the country that would make it harder to vote.

But almost all of these restrictive laws could be nullified if Congress passes Democrats' top legislative priority: the For The People Act, a package of voting rights, campaign finance, election and ethics reforms.

The For The People Act would set national standards for voter registration, early voting, absentee or mail voting, election administration and provisional balloting while limiting voter roll purges and voter identification laws. If enacted, these new rules would ban almost all of the new voting restrictions that GOP lawmakers are looking to enact in the wake of Trump's reelection loss.

"H.R. 1 would not negate every harm posed by these legislative assaults due to the delegation of power to the states with regards to election administration," Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia Democratic gubernatorial candidate and founder of voting rights nonprofit Fair Fight Action, said at a House committee hearing on the For The People Act on Thursday. "However, the provisions of

H.R. 1 create a uniform foundation for democracy in America that does not rely on geography."

The bill is assured to pass the House the week of March 1 as all 221 Democrats have stated their support. But it faces the prospect of a GOP filibuster led by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, who calls the bill "socialism," and a "power grab."

Democrats will need to find a way around, over or through this filibuster if they hope to quash the new wave of Trump lie-inspired voter restrictions designed to suppress the vote.

"The attack on our democracy right now, in almost half of state legislative chambers around the country, if not dealt with as part of dealing with the fallout of the insurrection is something we will live with this for a long time in this country," Lauren Groh-Wargo, CEO of Fair Fight Action, said. "This is not something that can wait."

New Wave of Voter Restrictions

Republican lawmakers have introduced more than 250 new bills to limit voting, according to a study by the Brennan Center for Justice, a pro-voting rights nonprofit that supports the For The People Act. These bills would limit early, absentee and provisional voting, introduce new voter identification restrictions, expand voter roll purges and make it harder to register to vote.

"There's an explosion of Republican activity, governors and legislatures across the country, working to pass bills to keep people from voting," Sen. Jeff Merkley

(D-Ore.), a lead sponsor of the For The People Act, said. “To me, this is entirely anti-democratic.”

The biggest targets for these new voter restrictions are, unsurprisingly, the biggest targets of Trump’s election fraud lies: Arizona and Georgia. Trump lost both states by a little more than 10,000 votes apiece and became the first Republican to lose both since George H.W. Bush in 1992. The response of Republicans in both states, where they occupy the governor’s office and hold majorities in the legislature, has been to push legislation to make it harder to vote.

“The wave we are seeing is unlike something we haven’t seen since 2010,” Myrna Pérez, director of the Brennan Center’s voting rights program, said. That previous wave of restrictions came after President Barack Obama’s first election victory, which set turnout records at the time, particularly among Black and minority communities.

Republicans have been clear that the goal of making it harder to vote is to help their own prospects.

“They don’t have to change all of them, but they’ve got to change the major parts of them so that we at least have a shot at winning,” Alice O’Lenick, the Republican chair of the Gwinnett County, Georgia, board of elections, said about proposed changes by Republicans in the state.

Georgia Republicans didn’t only lose their state’s presidential race, but they also lost two Senate seats. Both losing senators, David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, have since invoked Trump’s election lies in order to push for more restrictive voting laws.

“I am hopeful that the Georgia Assembly, along with our statewide elected officials, will correct the inequities in our state laws and election rules so that, in the future, every legal voter will be treated equally and illegal votes will not be included,” Perdue said in a statement announcing he would not run against Sen. Raphael Warnock (D) in 2022. He noticeably invoked Trump’s false assertion that he won the 2020 election if you only “count the legal votes.”

Loeffler launched her own nonprofit to register Republican voters and support laws aimed at restricting voter access among groups that vote more heavily for Democrats.

“We had unprecedented changes to our election laws in 2020 because of the pandemic,” Loeffler said upon announcing her new group. “And we need to take a really hard look at the impact of those changes and why it drove trust in our elections so far down.”

Trump’s lies are now the justification for new voting restrictions because he made Republicans not trust democratic elections.

In the past week alone, the Georgia Senate has passed bills to end no-excuse absentee voting, eliminate automatic voter registration and add new voter identification barriers to absentee voting in the state. Both no-excuse absentee voting and automatic voter registration were adopted by Republican legislatures and signed into law by Republican governors. Even more voter restriction bills are under consideration in the state House and Senate. An omnibus House bill would enhance voter identification laws, limit absentee voting and early voting, including ending Sunday early voting, which is aimed specifically at restricting the Souls to the Polls get-out-the-vote effort in Black communities.

“At the end of the day, these bills are a complete and utter backlash to the Democratic win and it’s all based on the lie of voter fraud that the former president propagated,” Groh-Wargo said.

That is clear by the push to eliminate no-excuse absentee voting, which Republicans dominated until 2018.

“We are seeing policies targeted that didn’t ruffle any feathers until they were used by communities of color,” Pérez said.

In Arizona, statehouse Republicans pushed a bill to end the state’s permanent early mail voting list by requiring anyone who does not vote in both primary and general elections for two consecutive cycles to be removed. Republicans in the state are reeling from the loss of both Senate seats since 2018 and Biden’s victory in the state, the first presidential win by a Democrat since 1992. This bill failed after one Republican state senator sided with Democrats to kill it, but more restrictive legislation awaits consideration.

The wave of voter restrictions is not limited to the states where Trump tried to overturn his election losses.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) called for the Republican-controlled state legislature to pass sweeping new voter restrictions in the state that would force voters to sign up for the mail voting list every election and limit the use of ballot drop boxes and ability of counties to receive outside funding for elections.

“We need to make sure that our citizens have confidence in the elections,” DeSantis said without noting that any lack of confidence was fueled by Trump’s lies about election fraud.

In Iowa, Republicans are pushing bills to limit early voting and place new restrictions on absentee voting. A bill in Tennessee introduced by Republicans would eliminate early voting entirely. In Montana, Republicans are advancing bills to limit student voting by imposing new identification restrictions. Nebraska Republicans aim to pass voter identification rules. In Mississippi, they're pushing to purge voters from the rolls who don't vote in a four-year period. And in Wyoming, they are limiting absentee voting.

"This wave of restrictions is all the evidence anyone needs that we need H.R. 1 and S. 1," said Danielle Lang, a voting rights lawyer with the Campaign Legal Center, a nonprofit that backs the For The People Act. "It would provide a national baseline for the access to the right to vote and make it so these states can't jerk voters back and forth based on political whims."

The Solution

If passed into law, the For The People Act would override or circumvent almost all of the new voter restrictions proposed at the state level today and those passed in years past.

Absentee and mail-in voting are the most common targets of laws restricting voter access advancing in states after the 2020 election. The For The People Act forbids states from restricting voter access to mail voting, including forbidding the requirement of identification and witnesses or notarization and setting standards for states that require signature matching that provide voters a chance to correct signature mismatch errors. The bill would also set baseline rules for the operation of ballot drop boxes and require states to include prepaid postage on ballot return envelopes.

The bill would also override new restrictions forcing voters to reapply for the vote-by-mail list every election, like those pushed in Arizona and Florida, by requiring states to count any registration for a vote-by-mail ballot as permanent, unless the voter removes themselves from the list.

Legislation to limit or reduce early voting, as pushed by Republicans in states like Georgia, Iowa and Tennessee, would also be defanged. The For The People Act mandates all states allow at least 15 consecutive days of early voting while also providing for access near public transportation and within rural communities.

Voter registration restrictions, like those proposed in Alaska, Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi and Texas, would be nullified by the For The People Act's requirement that states automatically register all eligible residents to vote unless that person affirms they do not want to register to vote.

States like Mississippi, Nebraska and New Hampshire, where Republican legislators have proposed new voter identification requirements, would be required to allow voters without identification to sign an affidavit affirming their identity in order to vote.

The For The People Act would further limit overly broad voter purges by restricting states from removing voters from the rolls simply for not voting in a prior election and without first verifying that the voter is ineligible to vote in the state.

This would not necessarily mean that future state governments could not find new ways to restrict voting access.

“The story of voting access in America is one of ingenious new restrictions popping up where old restrictions are shut down,” Lang said.

That’s why voting rights advocates endorse the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would restore a key section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act requiring Justice Department review of election laws passed in the states that could potentially restrict or suppress minority voting rights, a practice known as pre-clearance. Conservative justices on the Supreme Court struck down this section of the Voting Rights Act in 2013.

For both the provisions of the For The People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to go into effect, though, the bills will need to pass the Senate, where Democrats hold a slim 50-vote majority thanks to Vice President Kamala Harris’ ability to break ties. With very low chances of either bill receiving any Republican support, Democrats would need to change the Senate’s filibuster rules to pass the bill.

If Senate Democrats let the filibuster stand, this new wave of voting restrictions inspired by Trump’s lies could be enacted into law ahead of the 2022 midterm elections. And that could leave the party’s razor-thin majorities hanging in the balance

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The New York Times

In Statehouses, Stolen-Election Myth Fuels a G.O.P. Drive to Rewrite Rules

BY MICHAEL WINES | FEBRUARY 27, 2021

Led by loyalists who embrace former President Donald J. Trump's baseless claims of a stolen election, Republicans in state legislatures nationwide are mounting extraordinary efforts to change the rules of voting and representation — and enhance their own political clout.

At the top of those efforts is a slew of bills raising new barriers to casting votes, particularly the mail ballots that Democrats flocked to in the 2020 election. But other measures go well beyond that, including tweaking Electoral College and judicial election rules for the benefit of Republicans; clamping down on citizen-led ballot initiatives; and outlawing private donations that provide resources for administering elections, which were crucial to the smooth November vote.

And although the decennial redrawing of political maps has been pushed to the fall because of delays in delivering 2020 census totals, there are already signs of an aggressive drive to further gerrymander political districts, particularly in states under complete Republican control.

The national Republican Party joined the movement this past week by setting up a Committee on Election Integrity to scrutinize state election laws, echoing similar moves by Republicans in a number of state legislatures.

Republicans have long thought — sometimes quietly, occasionally out loud — that large turnouts, particularly in urban areas, favor Democrats, and that Republicans benefit when fewer people vote. But politicians and scholars alike say that this moment feels like a dangerous plunge into uncharted waters.

The avalanche of legislation also raises fundamental questions about the ability of a minority of voters to exert majority control in American politics, with Republicans winning the popular vote in just one of the last eight presidential elections but filling six of the nine seats on the Supreme Court.

The party's battle in the past decade to raise barriers to voting, principally among minorities, young people and other Democrat-leaning groups, has been waged under the banner of stopping voter fraud that multiple studies have shown barely exists.

"The typical response by a losing party in a functioning democracy is that they alter their platform to make it more appealing," Kenneth Mayer, an expert on voting and elections at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said. "Here the response is to try to keep people from voting. It's dangerously antidemocratic."

Consider Iowa, a state that has not been a major participant in the past decade's wars over voting and election rules. The November election saw record turnout and little if any reported fraud. Republicans were the state's big winners, including in the key races for the White House and Senate.

Yet, in a vote strictly along party lines, the State Legislature voted this past week to cut early voting by nine days, close polls an hour earlier and tighten rules on absentee voting, as well as strip the authority of county auditors to decide how election rules can best serve voters.

State Senator Jim Carlin, a Republican who recently announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate, made the party's position clear during the floor debate: "Most of us in my caucus and the Republican caucus believe the election was stolen," he said.

State Senator Joe Bolkcom, a Democrat, said that served as justification for a law that created "a voting system tailored to the voting tendency of older white Republican voters."

"They've convinced all their supporters of the big lie. They don't see any downside in this," he said in an interview. "It's a bad sign for the country. We're not going to have a working democracy on this path."

The issues are particularly stark because fresh restrictions would disproportionately hit minorities just as the nation is belatedly reckoning with a racist past, said Lauren Groh-Wargo, the chief executive of the voting advocacy group Fair Fight Action.

The Republican push comes as the rules and procedures of American elections increasingly have become a central issue in the nation's politics. The Brennan Center for Justice, a liberal-leaning law and justice institute at New York University, counts 253 bills in 43 states that seek to tighten voting rules. At the same time, 704 bills have been introduced with provisions to improve access to voting.

The push also comes as Democrats in Congress are attempting to pass federal legislation that would tear down barriers to voting, automatically register new voters and outlaw gerrymanders, among many other measures. Some

provisions, such as a prohibition on restricting a voter's ability to cast a mail ballot, could undo some of the changes being proposed in state legislatures.

Such legislation, combined with the renewed enforcement of federal voting laws, could counter some Republican initiatives in the 23 states where the party controls the legislature and governor's office. But neither that Democratic proposal nor a companion effort to enact a stronger version of the 1965 Voting Rights Act stands any chance of passing unless Democrats modify or abolish Senate rules allowing filibusters. It remains unclear whether the party has either the will or the votes to do that.

On the legal front, the Supreme Court will hear arguments on Tuesday in an Arizona election lawsuit that turns on the enforcement of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. That section is the government's main remaining weapon against discriminatory voting practices after the court struck down another provision in 2013 that gave the Justice Department broad authority over voting in states with histories of discrimination.

Those who back the Republican legislative efforts say they are needed to restore flagging public confidence in elections and democracy, even as some of them continue to attack the system as corrupt. In Arizona, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, for example, the chairs of House election committees refused for weeks or months to affirm that President Biden won the election. The chairs in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin urged U.S. House members or former Vice President Mike Pence to oppose the presidential electors certified after Mr. Biden won those states' votes.

Some respected Republican lawmakers reject charges that election proposals are bad-faith attempts to advance Republican power. "These are really big

tweaks. I get that," said State Senator Kathy Bernier, who heads an election committee in Wisconsin. "But we do this routinely every session." Ms. Bernier said the party's election-law bills, two of which would strengthen ID requirements for absentee ballots and limit ballot drop boxes to one per municipality, were honest efforts to make voting more secure.

That said, proposals in many states have little or nothing to do with that goal. Georgia Republicans would sharply limit early voting on Sundays, when many Black voters follow church services with "souls to the polls" bus rides to cast ballots. On Friday, a State Senate committee approved bills to end no-excuse absentee voting and automatic voter registration at motor vehicle offices.

Iowa's legislation, passed this past week, also shortens the windows to apply for absentee ballots and petition for satellite polling places deployed at popular locations like college campuses and shopping centers.

Bills in some states to outlaw private donations to fund elections are rooted in the unproven belief, popular on the right, that contributions in 2020 were designed to increase turnout in Democratic strongholds. The nonprofit Center for Technology and Civic Life distributed the $400 million that the Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, donated to underwrite coronavirus protective equipment, polling place rentals, drop boxes and other election needs.

Unsurprisingly, some of the most vigorous efforts by Republicans are in swing states where last year's races for national offices were close.

Republicans in Georgia, which Mr. Biden won by roughly 12,000 votes, lined up this week behind a State Senate bill that would require vote-by-mail applications

to be made under oath, with some requiring an additional ID and a witness signature.

Arizona Republicans are backing bills to curtail the automatic mailing of absentee ballots to voters who skip elections, and to raise to 60 percent the share of votes required to pass most citizen ballot initiatives. Legislatures in at least five other Republican-run states are also considering bills making it harder to propose or pass citizen-led initiatives, which often involve issues like redistricting or tax hikes where the party supports the status quo.

And that is not all: One Arizona Republican has proposed legislation that would allow state lawmakers to ignore the results of presidential elections and decide themselves which candidate would receive the state's electoral votes.

In Wisconsin, where gerrymanders of the State Legislature have locked in Republican control for a decade, the Legislature already has committed at least $1 million for law firms to defend its redistricting of legislative and congressional seats this year. The gerrymander proved impregnable in November; Democrats received 46 percent of the statewide vote for State Assembly seats and 47 percent of the State Senate vote, but won only 38 percent of seats in the Assembly and 36 percent in the Senate.

In New Hampshire, where Republicans took full control of the Legislature in November, the party chairman, Stephen Stepanek, has indicated he backs a gerrymander of the state's congressional map to "guarantee" that at least one of the state's two Democrats in the U.S. House would not win re-election.

"Elections have consequences," he told the news outlet Seacoastonline. He did not respond to a request for comment.

And in Nebraska, one of only two states that award electoral votes in presidential contests by congressional district, conservatives have proposed to switch to a winner-take-all model after Mr. Biden captured an electoral vote in the House district containing Omaha, the state's sole Democratic bastion.

Conversely, some New Hampshire Republicans would switch to Nebraska's current Electoral College model instead of the existing winner-take-all method. That would appear to help Republicans in a state where Democrats have won the past five presidential elections.

Pennsylvania's Legislature is pushing a gerrymander-style apportionment of State Supreme Court seats via a constitutional amendment that would elect justices by regions rather than statewide. That would dismantle a lopsided Democratic majority on the court by creating judicial districts in more conservative rural reaches.

Many Republicans argue — and some election experts at times agree — that fears about restrictive election laws among Democrats and civil liberties advocates can be overblown. Republicans point to record turnout in November as proof that restrictive laws do not suppress votes.

Ms. Bernier of Wisconsin, for example, said she saw little problem with a bill that would allot one ballot drop box for voters in towns like New Berlin, with 40,000 residents, and one for voters in Milwaukee, with 590,000 residents. There were no drop boxes at all, she noted, until state officials made an emergency exception during the pandemic.

"The Legislature could say that no drop boxes are necessary at all," she said.

Nathaniel Persily, a Stanford University political scientist and election expert, said he disagreed. Presidential elections always draw more voters, he said, but the grunt work of democracy often occurs in off-year votes for lesser offices where interest is lower. In those elections, “if there are barriers placed in the way of voters, they’re not going to turn out,” he said.

Mike Noble, a Phoenix public-opinion expert, questioned whether the Arizona Legislature’s Trumpian anti-fraud agenda has political legs, even though polls show a level of Republican belief in Mr. Trump’s stolen election myth that he calls “mind-boggling.”

Republicans who consider themselves more moderate make up about a third of the party’s support in Arizona, he said, and they are far less likely to believe the myth. And they may be turned off by a Legislature that wants to curtail absentee ballot mailings in a state where voters — especially Republicans — have long voted heavily by mail.

“I don’t see how a rational person would see where the benefit is,” he said.

Some other Republicans apparently agree. In Kentucky, which has some of the nation’s strictest voting laws, the solidly Republican State House voted almost unanimously on Friday to allow early voting, albeit only three days, and online applications for absentee ballots. Both were first tried during the pandemic and, importantly, were popular with voters and county election officials.

If that kind of recognition of November’s successes resonated in other Republican states, Mr. Persily and another election scholar, Charles Stewart III of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, wrote in a recent study, it could bode well for easing the deep divisions over future election rules. If the stolen election

myth continues to drive Republican policy, Mr. Persily said, it could foretell a future with two kinds of elections in which voting rights, participation and faith in the results would be significantly different, depending on which party had written the rules.

“Those trajectories are on the horizon,” he said. “Some states are adopting a blunderbuss approach to regulating voting that is only distantly related to fraud concerns. And it could mean massive collateral damage for voting rights.”

The Economist

Checks and Balance

BY JOHN PRIDEAUX | FEBRUARY 26, 2021

Imagine you had the opportunity to design a democratic system of government: where would you start? One approach would be to consult The Economist Intelligence Unit's annual democracy index, look at the countries coloured a beautiful shade of navy blue (which signifies a top ranking) and inquire how they do it. The political systems of Canada, New Zealand, Ireland and the Nordic countries have many differences but share some core principles.

Your ideal system would empower the majority party or parties, because that's sort of the point of democracy, but not so much that the minority gets trampled on. You would try to remove power over how elections are run from the people competing in those elections, because otherwise they will game the system in their favour. You would also set some clear rules about corruption.

America's democracy ignores some of these principles. The federal government does not always empower the majority: thanks to the system of electing a body of electors, who then choose the president (a wheeze no other democracy has copied), a president can win power despite winning fewer votes than his opponent. In the Senate, too, the requirement to get 60 votes to avoid a filibuster empowers the minority to block legislation. No other democracy does that either.

A second feature of America's system that prevents it from attaining that desirable shade of navy is that politicians are handed a lot of power over rules

governing the elections that they themselves compete in. This is most obviously the case in gerrymandering, which is when state politicians from the majority party get to redraw district boundaries to make elections less competitive. A new round of that begins this year as the new census data comes in.

America's system hands politicians power to tweak laws over things like voting by mail, ID requirements and polling booths and early voting to try to tilt elections in their favour. Since the November presidential election, lawmakers in Republican states have introduced a barrage of such measures. The political science lit suggests the effects of these changes to election rules are marginal, but the people who actually compete in elections clearly do not see things that way.

The combination of these two things—empowering the minority and allowing politicians to rewrite election rules to make it easier for them to win—means that in America a party does not necessarily need to be competitive, in the sense of regularly winning more than half of the votes cast, to exercise power. That in turn helps to explain one of the most head-spinning features of politics at the moment.

Usually when a party loses an election it really ought to have won, that party changes. Under Donald Trump's leadership, the Republican party lost a trifecta (House, Senate, White House) faster than any party has for more than 100 years. The party lost both Senate seats in Georgia, the political equivalent of tossing a pancake and getting it stuck on the ceiling. And yet the Republican Party remains a wholly owned subsidiary of the Trump Organisation, as this weekend's Conservative Political Action Conference is about to show.

This is happening because the feedback loop that ought to result in the Republican Party changing direction after a big defeat is broken. Many things

have made that rupture possible, not least the tear to the fabric of reality that allowed such a large number of voters to believe that Mr. Trump actually won the election. Some of those things are really hard to fix. Yet others could in fact be ameliorated with a dose of political reform.

To be clear, this is not the main reason for interest in H.R. 1, the bill proposed by House Democrats that would end gerrymandering and the gaming of election laws to make it harder to vote. Those things are worth doing anyway: they might even result in our colleagues at the EIU splashing the navy blue about. But a Republican Party that is more responsive to voters, rather than to the base of hardcore Trump supporters who now control primary elections, would be good for the Republicans—and for democracy too.

Democrats Launch Sweeping Bid to Overhaul U.S. Election Laws

BY BRIAN SLODYSKO | FEBRUARY 25, 2021

Stacey Abrams, whose voting rights work helped make Georgia into a swing state, exhorted Congress on Thursday to reject “outright lies” that have historically restricted access to the ballot as Democrats began their push for a sweeping overhaul of election and ethics laws.

“A lie cloaked in the seductive appeal of election integrity has weakened access to democracy for millions,” Abrams, a Democrat who narrowly lost Georgia’s 2018 gubernatorial race, said during a committee hearing for the bill, which was introduced as H.R. 1 to signal its importance to the party’s agenda.

Democrats feel a sense of urgency to enact the legislation ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, when their narrow majorities in the House and Senate will be at risk. The bill, which good-government groups have championed, is advancing against a backdrop of Republican-controlled states seizing on former President Donald Trump’s false claims about a stolen 2020 election to push legislation that would make it more difficult to vote. Democrats argue that voters of color, a key constituency for the party, would be disproportionately affected.

It also comes on the cusp of a once-in-a-decade redrawing of congressional districts, a highly partisan affair that is typically controlled by state legislatures. With Republicans controlling the majority of statehouse, the process alone could

help the GOP win enough seats to recapture the House. The Democratic bill would instead require that the boundaries be drawn by independent commissions.

“Every political player knows what’s at stake,” said Fred Wertheimer, the president of Democracy 21, a nonpartisan good-government group based in Washington. “There is a race between what is going on in Republican state legislatures, and this effort to pass federal rules to protect the right to vote of every eligible citizen.”

To Republicans, the proposal amounts to a massive federal intrusion in locally administered elections. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., blasted the measure the last time it was up for debate in Congress, calling it the “Democrat Politician Protection Act.”

“If this bill were to become law, it would be the largest expansion of the federal government’s role in elections that we have ever seen,” said Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Ill. “The harm to the states’ electoral process outweighs the minor burdens imposed on the rights to vote.”

The debate over the measure comes in the tumultuous aftermath of the 2020 election, which saw record mail-in voting because of the pandemic. After losing the White House, Trump repeated ad nauseam a false claim that the outcome was due to widespread voter fraud as he sought to overturn President Joe Biden’s win.

But there was no widespread fraud, as has been confirmed by election officials across the country and then-Attorney General William Barr. Dozens of legal

challenges to the election put forth by Trump and his allies were dismissed, including by the Supreme Court.

Republican-controlled state legislatures, spurred to action by Trump's claims, have nonetheless moved to put in place new voting restrictions in dozens of states, including Abrams' Georgia.

That's where congressional Democrats' effort comes into play.

Citing Congress' constitutional authority to set the time, place and manner of federal elections, Democrats want national rules that they say would make voting more uniform, accessible and fair across the nation. The bill would stymie state GOP efforts by mandating early voting, same-day registration and other long-sought reforms that Republicans reject.

The 791-page measure, which was first introduced two years ago, would also require dark money political groups to disclose anonymous donors, as well as create reporting requirements for online political ads. It would appropriate nearly $2 billion for election infrastructure upgrades. And in a rearview nod at Trump, it would obligate presidents to disclose their tax returns.

Despite staunch GOP opposition, the bill is all but certain to pass the House. But daunting challenges lay ahead in the Senate, which is split 50-50 between Republicans and Democrats. On some legislation, it takes only 51 votes to pass, with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tiebreaker.

On a deeply divisive bill like this one, they would need 60 votes under the Senate's current rules to overcome a Republican filibuster — a tally they are unlikely to reach.

Under pressure from the party's left flank, Democrats have proposed eliminating the filibuster but lack the votes to do so. It's an open question whether Democrats will find ways around that hurdle, potentially by mustering the votes to change the filibuster rules to exempt specific types of legislation — including those that deal with voting rights.

Given the closing window to pass legislation before 2022, many in the party remain hopeful it will be signed into law by Biden, whose administration has said the bill is a priority.

"We may not get the opportunity to make this change again for many, many decades, so let's not miss that window," said John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat who is the bill's lead sponsor. "Shame on us if we don't get this done."

Newsweek

As GOP Opposes H.R. 1, Poll Finds Majority of Republicans Support Election Reform Bill

BY ALEXANDRA HUTZLER | FEBRUARY 25, 2021

The reintroduction of a sweeping election reform bill has earned the criticism of Republican lawmakers, but a new survey found that a majority of their party's voters support the legislation.

In fact, the Data for Progress poll found H.R. 1 — also known as the For the People Act — has broad public support. More than two-thirds of likely voters (68 percent) said they would back the proposal. Just 16 percent said they opposed it.

The support also transcended party lines, with 70 percent of Democrats, 68 percent of independent or third-party voters and 57 percent of Republican voters expressing approval for the bill.

H.R. 1 would work to expand voter access, improve election integrity and security, revise rules for political spending and set out provisions related to ethics for all three branches of the federal government, according to a summary of the legislation.

Every single House Democrat signed on to the For the People Act on Monday, arguing it will help to “clean up corruption in Washington, empower the American people and restore faith and integrity to our government.”

“The 2020 election underscored the need for comprehensive, structural democracy reform. Americans across the country were forced to overcome rampant voter suppression, gerrymandering and a torrent of special-interest dark money just to exercise their vote and their voice in our democracy,” Representative John Sarbanes (D-Md.) said in a statement.

Sarbanes, the chair of the House's Democracy Reform Task Force, reintroduced the bill in the 117th Congress. “It shouldn't have to be this way,” he said.

Republicans, on the other hand, have continued to mount opposition to the reform bill. Earlier this week, former Homeland Security Deputy Secretary Ken Cuccinelli announced he was launching the Election Transparency Initiative to “act quickly to defeat the efforts of Democrats in Washington to federalize election laws through H.R.1, while simultaneously going on offense at the state level to rally the grass roots around meaningful reforms.”

On Thursday, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell criticized Democrats for attempting to “recycle failed legislation” with their renewed push to pass the For the People Act, calling it a “federal takeover.”

McConnell said the bill would allow Democrats to “grab unprecedented power over how America conducts its elections and how American citizens can engage in political speech.”

Representative Byron Daniels (R-Fla.) made a similar argument in an editorial for Fox News. He wrote that H.R. 1 was the Democratic Party's “latest attempt to disregard the Constitution in their ruthless power grab in the form of ‘election reform.’”

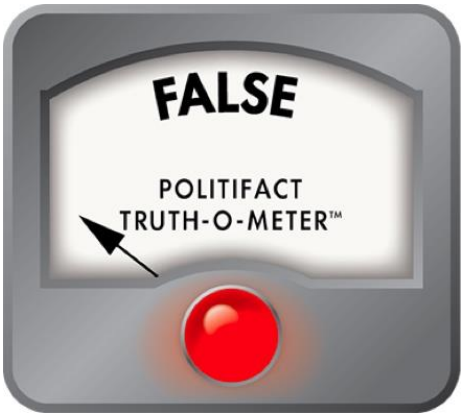
But the Data for Progress poll also found that a majority of respondents support major provisions of the bill. The measures that received the most support from likely voters were the prevention of foreign interference, limiting money in politics and increasing election security.

More than half of the respondents — 58 percent — said they supported voting by mail, a method that was heavily used by nearly every state during the 2020 election because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Group Makes Bogus Attack on H.R. 1 Over Congressional Salaries

BY AMY SHERMAN | FEBRUARY 25, 2021

Members of Congress already earn six-figure paychecks. A conservative group says that a Democratic-backed bill would allow them to earn a second paycheck worth even more. But that's bogus.



The claim from Act for America pertains to H.R. 1, the For the People Act. The bill combines previous proposals that aim to make it easier to vote, and it changes campaign finance rules to help Americans who aren't rich run for federal office. The House is expected to vote on the bill in March.

Act for America wrote a plea for Congress to reject the bill. In a claim about proposals for the use of campaign funds, the group said that based on an estimate from the Congressional Budget Office, "members of Congress will be

able to draw a SECOND salary from that money worth an estimated $600,000 per year!"

This would be "on top of the generous taxpayer-funded paychecks and perks they already give themselves!" the group said.

But there’s no such provision in the bill, and Act for America did not reply to our requests for evidence. After we inquired about the claims, we noticed that the webpage no longer included the $600,000 figure.

Act for America calls itself the "nation’s premier national security grassroots organization." The Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League say the group is anti-Muslim.

CROOKED

The For the People Act Is Popular, Pass It Right Away

BY EVANGEL PENUMAKA | FEBRUARY 25, 2021

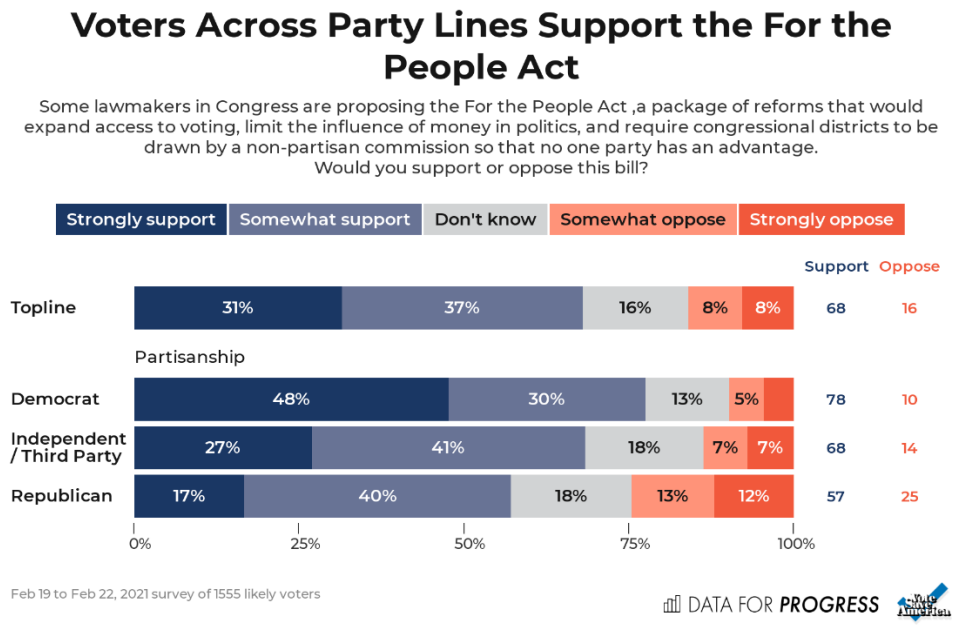
Next week, members of the House of Representatives will be voting on H.R. 1, otherwise known as the For the People Act. The act calls for sweeping reforms to reduce barriers to voting, such as extending early voting periods and automatic voter registration, increasing transparency around money in politics and elevating the voices of small donors. The legislation would also require states to use independent, nonpartisan commissions to form congressional districts. These reforms are urgently needed particularly when reflecting on Republicans' ongoing battle both during and following the past November election to drastically restrict voting access, actions that would pointedly suppress the votes of people of color.

In a mid-February poll by Data for Progress and Vote Save America, we examined attitudes on H.R. 1 through a national sample of 1,555 likely voters. We find that voters overwhelmingly support the legislation and key reforms that the legislation would implement — from limiting money in politics to independent commissions for redistricting.

First, we examined general support for the legislation. Here, respondents were told that the For the People Act is a package of reforms to: "expand access to voting, limit the influence of money in politics, and require congressional districts to be drawn by a non-partisan commission so that no one party has an advantage."

We find the bill enjoys overwhelming support: 68 percent of likely voters support the bill, while only 16 percent oppose it — constituting an extraordinary 52-

percentage-point approval margin. We also find notable levels of support across party lines. Seventy percent of Democrats, 68 percent of Independent / third party voters and 57 percent of Republican voters support H.R. 1.



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These results underscore the need for Congress to pass H.R. 1 as quickly as possible. The bill itself has strong support among voters and across party lines.

We have a small window of opportunity to modernize our electoral system and stop backward antidemocratic tactics that disproportionately suppress voters of color. Members of Congress must seize this opportunity to reform our democracy and create a fair, equal system with accountability and transparency—one that a large majority of the voting public supports.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Why Biden Needs a Prime-Time, Oval Office Speech to Declare War on Voter Suppression

BY WILL BUNCH (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 25, 2021

In 2021, a slow-motion Selma is unfolding in statehouses from Harrisburg to Phoenix, with Republican lawmakers — using a falsehood so monstrous that critics are right to call it "the Big Lie," even with its echoes of Nazi Germany — racing to roll back voting rights at a faster pace than any time since the Jim Crow laws of the late 19th Century. And it's imperative that President Biden — this year's new POTUS, trying hard to center his own war on the poverty of a pandemic — grasp the full import of this voting crisis, and quickly channel his inner LBJ. If Biden and congressional Democrats don't laser-focus on voter suppression — urgently, and rapidly — American democracy is on the clock.

…

There are, for the moment, two critical bills. The first is the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, named for the Selma hero who spent the second half of his life as a congressman from Georgia until his death in 2020. It's a direct response to the 2013 ruling by the Roberts Supreme Court that essentially gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which had one barred states (like Georgia) with a history of discrimination from restricting voting without an OK — called "preclearance" — from the U.S. Justice Department. The bill named for Lewis would restore that provision and also likely expand the number of covered jurisdictions. That's critical but also not quite enough for this dangerous new era.

That's where the second measure, known as the For the People Act, or HR 1, comes into play. The bill is a broader, sweeping reform package that would make it much easier to register, including automatic registration when applying for a

driving license, would mandate same-day registration and allow voting by the formerly incarcerated in all federal elections. It would also tackle broader threats to democracy such as gerrymandering or so-called “dark money” donations.

…

It won’t be easy — historians would note that Johnson had a much larger majority in Congress to work with — but there’s also little alternative for Biden. If Republicans win in the 2022 midterms not by the power of their ideas but by picking who gets to cast a vote, the rest of the Biden/Democratic agenda will be dead, and that won’t be the worst of it for the American Experiment. Either will shall overcome voter suppression in the 2020s, or true democracy will perish on U.S. soil.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Stacey Abrams Backs Federal Protection as Georgia Election Bills Draw More Criticism

BY TIA MITCHELL, MARK NIESSE AND DAVID WICKERT
FEBRUARY 25, 2021

Stacey Abrams says new federal protections for voting rights are needed because too many states, including Georgia, are trying to hinder access.

Legislation proposed this year by Republicans in the Georgia's General Assembly would eliminate or limit automatic voter registration, early in-person voting and mail-in voting, Abrams said. These changes are unnecessary and amount to voter suppression, she told the U.S. House Administration Committee on Thursday, urging members to move forward with a bill that could prevent those changes from becoming law.

"Federal legislation and federal courts have been long necessary to permit actual access to voting for millions of Americans who happen to live in states where we do not have those who believe our voices should be heard," Abrams told the committee.

The For the People Act is a wide-ranging voting, elections and campaign finance bill that Democrats say would strengthen American democracy and eliminate racial inequities. In addition to mandating early voting and automatic voter registration, it also would restore voting rights to people convicted of felonies, create independent redistricting commissions in every state and close dark money loopholes in federal law.
The measure is such a top priority in the Democratic-controlled U.S. House and Senate that leaders in each chamber assigned it the first available bill number,

H.R. 1 and S. 1. The House could vote on the measure as early as next week, but it has a more uncertain future in the Senate where Republicans might use the filibuster to thwart action.

The Washington Post

Republicans' War on Democracy Is Ramping Up

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | FEBRUARY 24, 2021

Republicans' war on democracy is gaining steam. Unable to persuade a majority of voters to vote for their presidential standard-bearer or Senate candidates in some key races, many have decided that instead of trying to compete in a free and fair vote they will make the contest less free and less fair. Republican state lawmakers are introducing voter-suppression bills all over the country. But ground zero is Georgia, where former president Donald Trump and two Republican Senate incumbents unexpectedly lost.

Two monstrous election bills emerged in the Georgia state legislature this week. One, in the state Senate, would end no-excuse absentee voting. Only Georgians who meet specific criteria, such as being over 65, could cast mail-in ballots. Even if they have a valid excuse, the bill would require voters to find witnesses to sign their absentee ballots, and voters would have to attach photocopies of their IDs, making the process vastly more difficult.

Georgia Republicans were not previously so wary of mail-in voting, perhaps in part because older and rural voters tend to use it. Other states run their elections almost entirely by mail with a high degree of security. There was no substantial fraud in the 2020 vote, in Georgia or elsewhere, implicating either mail-in ballots or in-person voting. The difference is that Democrats embraced absentee balloting in 2020, avoiding polling places because of coronavirus concerns. Suddenly, Republicans are determined to roll back a proven, reliable and increasingly popular voting option.

Meanwhile, in the state House, Republicans passed out of committee Wednesday afternoon a bill that would restrict Sunday early voting, a blatant attempt to suppress Black voter turnout. Black churches often run “Souls to the Polls” voting drives during the early voting period, in which worshipers vote after they attend services. The bill would also limit mail-in ballot drop boxes, allowing them only inside polling locations or elections offices, and it would narrow the time when voters could request absentee ballots.

Following a presidential election that experts deemed the most secure in U.S. history, there is no rational explanation for all of this — if, that is, the goal is to ascertain the will of the people. The most common excuse: Republican constituents are concerned about the integrity of the vote, and lawmakers must take measures to assure them. Of course, it is Republican leaders themselves, led by Mr. Trump, who encouraged baseless suspicions about the 2020 election. Now, Republicans use the fact that many of their voters believed their lies to restrict voting, focusing on the types of voters who tend to favor Democrats.

Georgia Republicans are hardly alone. New York University law school’s Brennan Center for Justice reported that, “as of February 19, 2021, state lawmakers have carried over, prefiled, or introduced 253 bills with provisions that restrict voting access.”

Congress must step in, requiring that states run federal elections in a convenient, open and fair manner. That includes absentee-ballot policies based in reality, ample early voting, smart post-election audits and an end to partisan gerrymandering. Democrats have a bill — H.R. 1 — that would do this and more. It must be a top priority this session.

The Washington Post

Republican Voter Suppression Kicks into High Gear

BY PAUL WALDMAN (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 23, 2021

Voter suppression has long been a Republican interest, but now they're getting really serious about it.

So serious, in fact, that they're starting entire organizations dedicated to finding ways to keep Democrats from the polls.

Ken Cuccinelli, the far-right former attorney general of Virginia and Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security under President Donald Trump (that was his actual title), has formed a group called the Election Transparency Initiative. Its goal: to make sure election laws aren't changed to make it easier for people to vote, especially people who might vote for Democrats.

Its initial focus is on defeating H.R. 1, the voting rights bill Democrats hope to pass through Congress. Here's how one article described the need that gave rise to Cuccinelli's effort:

> The legislation they oppose would create automatic voter registration nationwide, expand early voting, and make it easier to vote by mail. It is the exact opposite of what conservatives want, and it is coming at a moment when conservative faith in the integrity of elections has never been lower.

None of that has anything to do with "transparency," but it's an accurate description of the problem as Republicans see it. Conservative faith in the integrity of elections has indeed never been lower, because conservatives have come to believe that elections Democrats win are fraudulent by definition, and

since Democrats recently won key elections, the system must therefore be lacking in integrity.

This belief is not just the province of gullible retirees watching hour upon hour of Fox News and Newsmax every night. It extends all the way up to the Supreme Court, where Justice Clarence Thomas just wrote a dissent recycling inaccurate claims about mail ballots being rife with fraud. It goes to Republican congressional leaders who won't admit that President Biden won the 2020 election fair and square.

Cuccinelli is being joined by former Georgia senator Kelly Loeffler, who apparently took two lessons from her defeat in the recent runoff election: Too few Republicans turned out to vote, and too many Democrats did.

So Loeffler has launched her own organization in the state, committed to registering Republican voters and seeking "transparency and uniformity in our election process." "We had unprecedented changes to our election laws in 2020 because of the pandemic," Loeffler told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "And we need to take a really hard look at the impact of those changes and why it drove trust in our elections so far down."

Of course, it wasn't changes to the election laws that led Republicans to believe the election was stolen from them, and in Georgia the only relevant change was a consent decree made by the state's Republican leadership that reduced the number of legitimate absentee ballots being thrown out. What drove down "trust" was the relentless lies and propagandizing of Trump, aided by people like Loeffler.

But her fellow Georgia Republicans saw Biden win the state and then watched as Democrats won two Senate seats there, and they have now sprung into action. Republicans in the state legislature have introduced a sweeping series of voter suppression measures, including eliminating early voting on Sundays (when

Black churches often mount “Souls to the Polls” voting drives), requiring photo ID to both request and return absentee ballots, and limiting the use of drop boxes.

Drop boxes are probably of no particular benefit to Democrats. But Trump somehow got it into his head that they were the locus of conspiracies of fraud, so now all Republicans have to pretend they’re a terrible threat to democracy.

If you can explain why it’s “transparent” to allow early voting on Monday through Saturday but not “transparent” to allow it on Sunday as well, you have a future as a Republican legislator. But this has long been the pattern of Republican voter suppression: Take an example of fraud — vanishingly rare, or even nonexistent but hypothetically possible — then use it as justification to make voting more difficult for huge swaths of the population, so long as those affected will be more likely to be minorities, young people, urban dwellers and anyone else who might vote for Democrats.

The operating philosophy is that if we must disenfranchise 100,000 people to keep one guy from filling out the absentee ballot of his mother who died before Election Day, then we ought to do it. So long as most of the disenfranchised are, you know, the kind of people we’d rather not have voting in the first place.

Something tells me these aren’t the last conservative organizations we’ll see devoting themselves to fighting the expansion of voting rights and promoting voter suppression. The GOP’s policy priorities are widely unpopular, and its most well-known elected officials are the targets of revulsion and ridicule.

The Republican Party knows that it cannot win a national majority if voting is easy and smooth for everyone. So election laws must be shaped to make it harder for some people than others. It’s about the most important political project Republicans have..

The New York Times

How Not to Be at the Mercy of a Trumpified G.O.P.

BY JAMELLE BOUIE (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 23, 2021

Last year, in his eulogy for Representative John Lewis, President Barack Obama urged Congress to pass a new voting rights act to continue the work of the lifelong civil rights activist.

“If politicians want to honor John, and I’m so grateful for the legacy of work of all the Congressional leaders who are here, but there’s a better way than a statement calling him a hero,” Obama said. “You want to honor John? Let’s honor him by revitalizing the law that he was willing to die for.”

Obama then called on federal lawmakers to lift as many barriers to voting as they could. “Once we pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, we should keep marching to make it even better,” he said, listing automatic voter registration, felon re-enfranchisement, a national voting holiday, D.C. statehood and curbs on partisan gerrymandering as reforms that would do justice to Lewis’s memory. “And if all this takes eliminating the filibuster,” Obama concluded, “then that’s what we should do.”

Although he probably expected them to win in November, Obama said this not knowing whether Democrats would have a majority in the Senate come the start of the next Congress. Well, Democrats have that majority. And thanks in large part to the work of John Lewis and those who followed in his footsteps, it rests on two senators from Georgia, whose political futures rest in turn on whether every voter in the state has equal access to the ballot.

The same is true in Arizona, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, where slim margins made the difference between Democratic victory and Republican defeat in the last election, and where Republican legislative majorities are determined to keep Democrats as far from power as possible — and not to lose the next presidential election the way they lost the last one. To that end, they have introduced bills to restrict the vote, to make the race for the Electoral College — as well as any race for statewide office — as noncompetitive as possible, by taking as many Democratic voters off the board as they can.

Obama asked Democrats to kill the filibuster and pass a voting rights bill because it was the right thing to do. But there's a stronger argument: that if Democrats don't do this, they'll be at the mercy of a Trumpified Republican Party that has radicalized against democracy itself.

Democrats have already written the kind of voting rights bill Obama spoke about. It's the For the People Act, designated as H.R. 1 in the House and S. 1 in the Senate. If passed and signed into law, it would establish automatic, same-day and online voter registration, protect eligible voters from overly broad purges that remove them from the rolls, restore the Voting Rights Act with a new formula for federal preclearance (which would require select cities and localities to submit new voting rules to the Justice Department for clearance), re-enfranchise the formerly incarcerated, strengthen mail-in voting systems, institute nationwide early voting and increase criminal penalties for voter intimidation.

House Democrats introduced H.R. 1 in 2019 at the start of the 116th Congress. Mitch McConnell, then the majority leader of the Senate, denounced the bill as a "naked attempt to change the rules of American politics to benefit one party" and told reporters it was dead on arrival. "This is a terrible proposal," he said that March, "it will not get any floor time in the Senate."

McConnell no longer controls the floor, but with a de facto supermajority requirement in the Senate, the For the People Act is still dead on arrival. That is,

unless Democrats kill the legislative filibuster and restore majority rule to the chamber. Right now, Senators Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia are the most vocal Democratic opponents of ending the filibuster. “I want to restore the 60-vote threshold for all elements of the Senate’s work,” Sinema said earlier this month, seemingly mistaking McConnell’s Obama-era innovation for an age-old tradition. Manchin has also been emphatic about keeping the supermajority requirement, telling Politico that he will “not vote in this Congress” to change the filibuster.

Manchin, who has been winning elections in West Virginia for the last 20 years, is safe in his seat for as long as he wants it. Sinema, on the other hand, is much more vulnerable. Not the least because Arizona’s Republican state Legislature, to say nothing of its Republican Party, is all-in on “stop the steal” and Donald Trump’s war on mail-in voting. Arizona Republicans have already introduced bills to limit voter registration drives, require notarized signatures for mailed ballots and forbid voters from actually mailing-in completed ballots.

Arizona Republicans are not alone. To date, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at N.Y.U.’s law school, Republicans in 33 states have introduced more than 165 bills to restrict voting, part of the national conservative backlash to the results of the 2020 presidential election. A bill in Georgia would put new restrictions on absentee and in-person early voting; four different bills in Pennsylvania would eliminate no-excuse absentee voting less than two years after Republican lawmakers voted it into law.

Representative Steve Scalise of Louisiana, the No. 2 Republican in the House, captured the mood of the party when, on Sunday, he refused to say that the election wasn’t stolen from Trump. “Once the electors are counted, yes, he’s the legitimate president,” Scalise said in an interview with Jonathan Karl of ABC News, speaking of Joe Biden. “But if you’re going to ignore the fact that there were states that did not follow their own state legislatively set laws. That’s the

issue at heart, that millions of people still are not happy with and don't want to see happen again."

This is euphemism. There was no issue with the election. State legislatures passed laws, courts interpreted them, and officials put them into action. This was true in states Trump won, like Texas and North Carolina, as much as it was in states he lost. It almost goes without saying that the real issue, the reason Republicans are actually unhappy, is that Biden is president and Democrats control Congress.

Devoted to Trump, and committed to his fictions about the election, Republicans are doing everything they can to keep voters from holding them and their leaders accountable. They will restrict the vote. They will continue to gerrymander themselves into near-permanent majorities. A Republican in Arizona has even proposed a legislative veto over the popular vote in presidential elections, under the dubious theory that state legislatures have unconditional, unlimited and unrestricted power to allocate electoral votes.

The good news is that Democrats in Congress have it in their power to stop a lot of this nonsense, to pre-emptively weaken the rising tide of voter suppression. All it takes is a simple vote to make the Senate work according to majority rule, as the founding fathers intended.

The alternative is to allow the supermajority requirement to stand, to allow endless stagnation, to abdicate the authority of Congress to govern the country and tackle its problems, to deny the party of collective action the ability to act for the public good and to give the party of plutocrats and demagogues free rein to twist the institutions of the American republic against its values.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

The Right to Vote Is Under Siege

BY JESSE JACKSON (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 22, 2021

The fundamental right in a democracy — the right to vote — is once more under siege. In state after state, Republican legislators have introduced literally hundreds of bills designed to suppress voting.

Their passion is fueled by Donald Trump's big lie that the presidential election was "stolen" from him. Their targets are minorities — African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans, and the young. They call themselves Republicans, but their lineage comes not from Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican president, but from Jefferson Davis, the southern Democrat who led the Confederacy in its battle to keep Blacks enslaved.

The current debates have a haunting history. After the South was defeated in the Civil War, Congress passed the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments. Often termed the "second founding," these amendments ended slavery (13th), guaranteed equal protection under the laws (14th) and prohibited discrimination in the right to vote (15th).

The defeated south then began what was called Reconstruction. To be readmitted to the Union, they had to create new constitutions that rendered equal rights to all. In some states, newly freed Blacks constituted the majority. In many states, a new fusion politics began, often bringing the newly freed Black citizens together with small farmers and merchants against the old plantation aristocracy. In states like North Carolina, the new majorities passed remarkable progressive reforms in public education, public works, progressive taxation, land redistribution and more.

The white plantation aristocracy could not abide the new order. They organized a systematic effort to suppress the new coalitions. America's first domestic terrorist organization, the Ku Klux Klan, unleashed a wave of violence against newly freed Blacks and the whites who joined them. An estimated 5,000 Blacks were lynched. The violence that included setting fire to Black stores and neighborhoods was designed to drive Blacks and their allies out of polling booths and the South.

The plantation aristocracy successfully took back power, then imposed Jim Crow laws that made it virtually impossible for Blacks to vote. The federal government failed to check the violence, and in 1876, in a corrupt deal, Republicans agreed to end Reconstruction and remove the remaining federal troops. In 1896, to its lasting shame, the Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson ratified the surrender, declaring separate but equal laws constitutional. It took more than 50 years before the civil rights movement and the Voting Rights Act restored the right to vote to African Americans.

Today's Republican Party is founded on the reaction to the civil rights movement. From the 1964 Goldwater presidential campaign on, Republicans traded hats with southern Democrats to become the party of state's rights, white sanctuary and opposition to racial equality.

Today's Jefferson Davis Republicans know that they are increasingly a minority party. In Georgia, Arizona, Texas, North Carolina and other states, Republicans fear they will lose control. Once more, intimidation, mass incarceration and violence are used to intimidate.

After the last election, Trump rallied his supporters with the big lie that the election was stolen, inciting them to sack the Capitol and to march on state legislatures. Worse, even after the riot, 147 Republicans in the House and Senate voted to overturn the election.

The violence, just as in Reconstruction, is combined with a systemic campaign to suppress the right to vote. In 33 states, legislators have introduced 165 bills to restrict voting, the Brennan Center on Justice reports. In nine states, Republicans have introduced legislation to limit mail-in voting (nearly half of votes in the 2020 election were cast by mail due to the pandemic). In 10 states, Republicans are pushing more stringent voter ID requirements, knowing that these discriminate against minorities (25% of African Americans but only 8% of whites have no government-issued photo IDs). Other states are pushing to prohibit the use of student IDs to make it harder for the young to vote, roll back automatic voter registration laws, end Election Day registration or reduce the number of days for early voting.

In Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Texas, Republicans control all branches of government, giving them power to gerrymander districts in the redistricting after the 2020 census.

Once more the Supreme Court has aided and abetted these anti-democratic actions. The right-wing majority gutted the Voting Rights Act in Shelby County v. Holder. For the first time, there will be no prior review by the Justice Department to limit racially discriminatory gerrymandering. Then in Rucho v. Common Cause, the “gang of five” ruled that the courts would no longer review challenges to partisan gerrymandering. No federal court will stand in the way of discriminatory outrages.

It took decades to overcome the Jim Crow laws imposed at the end of Reconstruction. It required mass demonstrations, immense courage on the part of ordinary heroes, and finally the leadership of Lyndon Johnson and Martin Luther King Jr., among others, to begin to correct the injustice.

We can’t wait decades this time. Jefferson Davis Republicans are once more intent on imposing minority rule, and using the law and a partisan majority on the Supreme Court to enforce it. They’re using both terrorist threat and legal

measures to intimidate and impede voters. Once more it will take popular opposition — demonstrations, voter registration and mobilization drives, popular education and engagement — to protect the right to vote. The House of Representatives has passed a law, H.R. 1, to expand and protect the right to vote. The bill is likely to face universal opposition from Republican senators, unless popular mobilization forces some to stand up.

It is time for ordinary heroes once more.

HUFFPOST

Democrats' Top Priority Is to Reform Elections. Will It Be the Bill to Break the Filibuster?

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | FEBRUARY 22, 2021

Democrats have control of the House and Senate, and they want to use it to reform elections and make it easier to vote. But first, they'll have to get past Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.).

Congressional Democrats are pushing a sweeping package of voting rights, gerrymandering, election, campaign finance and ethics reforms, called the For the People Act. It's listed as H.R. 1 in the House and S. 1 in the Senate, signifying that it is Democrats' top legislative priority. For the past two decades, every bill labeled both H.R. 1 and S. 1 has become law.

If the For the People Act is to pass, though, Democrats will need to surmount the one obstacle clogging up almost all legislation that doesn't directly affect the federal budget: the filibuster. Democrats hold only 50 votes — plus Vice President Kamala Harris' to break ties — and Republicans could easily use the filibuster to prevent voting reform. McConnell, who previously called the legislation "socialism" and a "power grab," blocked it from a Senate vote in 2019.

Debate over the filibuster — that it is an archaic tool used mostly throughout history to block civil rights laws and is now preventing the government from operating as voters want it to — is already at a boiling point. If the filibuster winds up killing democracy reform, it may be what finally drives Democrats to turn around and kill the filibuster.

Former President Barack Obama, Democratic lawmakers and activists are already paving the way to make that argument. At the funeral for civil rights hero and Democratic Rep. John Lewis last summer, Obama called the filibuster a “Jim Crow relic” and said that if Republicans dared to filibuster legislation to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act (a bill that is now named for Lewis), Democrats should not hesitate to eliminate the filibuster to pass the bill.

The same could be argued of the For the People Act: Lewis and his staff wrote the entire first section, which greatly expands voting rights and limits voter suppression tactics.

These reforms are all the more vital now, Democrats argue, as Republicans seek to pass new voter restrictions at the state level, spurred on by former President Donald Trump’s voter fraud lies. If Democrats don’t pull off these reforms now, they could be too late.

They intend that the For the People Act become law. Whatever it takes.

“It’s all systems go to try to make that happen,” said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the bill’s chief sponsor in the House.

The Fight to Fix Democracy

Democrats didn’t expect to gain unified control of Congress after the voting ended on Nov. 3. Though Joe Biden had won the White House, they were two seats short of a 50-seat majority in the Senate with two runoff races in Georgia to be decided on Jan. 5. Then they won both runoff races, putting them in control of the White House and both chambers of Congress.

Now, they’re trying to figure out how they’re going to enact their agenda. Just as when Obama came into office in 2009, the main obstacle is McConnell’s use of the filibuster to block any and all legislation that he can.

There was intense discussion around eliminating or reforming the filibuster back then, but that nascent effort could not overcome the hesitancy from old-line Democratic senators who did not understand that the Senate they had served in for decades had changed since the 1970s era of consensus.

A coalition did emerge around filibuster reform in 2010, which ultimately led then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) to kill the filibuster for lower-court judicial nominees in order to overcome a Republican-led blockage in 2013. After Trump became president in 2017, McConnell ended the filibuster for Supreme Court nominees in order to fill the seat he'd held open for more than a year after Justice Antonin Scalia died.

The groundwork laid down a decade ago gives today's filibuster reform advocates a running start. The anti-filibuster coalition Fix Our Senate launched in 2019 with backing from some groups involved in the 2010 effort, including the Communications Workers of America, Common Cause and Public Citizen, as well as many new progressive and issue-oriented partners like Sunrise Movement and Data for Progress.

Fix Our Senate and the Declaration for American Democracy, a coalition of good government and progressive groups whose membership overlaps with that of Fix Our Senate, are now pressuring Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and other key Democrats to pass the For the People Act no matter what.

Fix Our Senate has already run a full-page ad in The New York Times calling on Schumer to end the filibuster. More ads are planned in states represented by Democratic senators who are not currently on board with ending the filibuster, like Sens. Joe Manchin (W.Va.) and Kyrsten Sinema (Ariz.).

The Declaration for American Democracy intends to target its messaging in seven states: Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Maine, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. These states fall into four different but sometimes overlapping

categories. There are the states with Democratic senators who are currently opposed to ending the filibuster (Arizona and West Virginia), states with potentially swayable Republican senators (Alaska and Maine), states whose election systems were attacked by Trump as part of his campaign to overturn the election (Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania), and states with moderate House Democrats who backed the For the People Act (Arizona, Georgia, Maine, Pennsylvania and Virginia).

The For the People Act "is shaping up to be a big flashpoint in the fight to eliminate the filibuster because it is both critically important and also absolutely clear that it will be filibustered," said Eli Zupnick, spokesman for Fix Our Senate. He added, "If Democrats go two years without taking any steps to fix our democracy and tackle corruption and protect voting rights, this will be a failure. This will be a failure of two years."

The fight in Congress over the For the People Act will begin in earnest in the coming weeks. The House plans to pass the legislation the week of March 1. After that, the Senate will hold hearings on the bill and likely bring it to the floor for a vote.

And that is where the bill is expected to be blocked by a Republican filibuster and become a flashpoint in the fight to change Senate rules.

The Democrats' Plan for Passage

Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) is the lead co-sponsor of the For the People Act in the Senate, alongside Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), and also the leading proponent of eliminating the filibuster. He is insistent that the bill become law. To do so, it must either gain support from 10 Republican senators, an unlikely feat, or overcome the opposition to eliminating the filibuster expressed by Manchin and Sinema.

“It has to pass in some way,” Merkley said, “but it could pass in multiple ways.”

One way to try to gain Republican support, Merkley suggested, is to put the bill on the Senate floor open to all germane amendments. Most bills hit the floor with a rule drafted by the majority party limiting amendments and debate. Showing openness to the other party’s amendments and debate is rare these days and might earn buy-in from the other side.

If that doesn’t work, then Merkley thinks Democrats need to immediately examine any and all ways to change the filibuster rule. This could include lowering the threshold for overcoming the filibuster from 60 to 55 votes, eliminating the 60-vote threshold but providing for a talking filibuster, or entirely ending the filibuster.

A majority party changing the rules to pass its top-priority legislation wouldn’t be out of the ordinary, Merkley noted. In fact, Republicans altered the rules for budget reconciliation in 2015 after winning control of the Senate. This change allowed them to pass their own H.R. 1 and S. 1 in 2017, a package of tax reforms and upper-income and corporate tax cuts.

Failure to pass the For the People Act wouldn’t just mean that Democrats failed to enact the centerpiece of their agenda; it would also clear the way for a new wave of state voter suppression measures driven by Trump’s election fraud lies.

Right now, Republican-controlled state legislatures are pushing bills to limit early and absentee voting, purge voters from the rolls, and toughen voter ID requirements. The For the People Act would ban almost all of these schemes to make it harder for certain communities to vote.

“Here we are with a very, very slim majority, a majority that we’ll probably lose if voter suppression goes on steroids as seems to be the path that so many state legislatures are on right now,” Merkley said. “And so this is the critical moment to pass this bill.”

Furthermore, the bill would ban partisan gerrymandering by requiring states to use independent, nonpartisan redistricting panels to draw House district lines. Given the extent of current Republican control of state legislatures, which exists thanks to district lines gerrymandered back in 2011, the Democratic House majority could theoretically be gerrymandered out of existence ahead of the 2022 midterm elections. Passing the For the People Act quickly could potentially prevent this as well as blocking new voter suppression laws.

What remains to be seen is how many filibusters it will take to create the necessary pressure to tackle the filibuster. The For the People Act may be the first bill to be blocked in this Congress, but as long as there's a filibuster, it won't be the last.

House Democrats expect to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act this spring as well. If Republicans block that, too, they'll be sending a clear symbolic message: that the GOP, fresh off trying to overturn an election by disenfranchising Black voters, is ready to stomp on Lewis' legacy.

Democrats will have to decide whether to let Republicans block these bills, which will allow further disenfranchisement of Black voters, or to pass the legislation they ran on.

Richmond Times-Dispatch

For Virginia, Black History Month Is the Right Time to Support the For the People Act

BY BEN JEALOUS AND GREGORY KING | FEBRUARY 21, 2021

Across the country, the voting rights that Black and brown people fought and died for are under fresh assault. In state after state, the right's horror at its losses in the 2020 elections is morphing into a sinister effort to make it harder for more people to vote. Trackers at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School say legislators in 33 states have introduced more than 165 bills aimed at restricting voting.

Some of those bills were proposed right here in Virginia; thankfully, they were defeated. The commonwealth instead is moving to enshrine voting rights protections in a way that combats voter suppression primarily targeted at people of color. We wholeheartedly support this action and wish for its success.

And we also believe Virginia's congressional members have a moral responsibility to do the same for Virginians and all Americans at the national level, by co-sponsoring and voting for House Resolution 1, the For the People Act.

This is a bill that would outlaw partisan, racial gerrymandering — the process of creating voting districts unfairly skewed toward one party or group. It would put a stop to voter suppression tactics like drastic purges of voter rolls and discriminatory voter ID laws. Efforts to ensure racial equity pervade this bill; the redistricting commissions that it calls for to combat gerrymandering must respect and preserve communities of interest, and must be inclusive and representative.

There are other provisions, too, that would have the effect of making our democracy more inclusive. One of these is small-donor matching funds for candidates to help slash the outsize political influence of moneyed special interests. Some critics have taken aim at the bill by claiming that this means taxpayers would be forced to shoulder the cost of campaigns.

That is not true. The matching funds would come from fines and penalties paid by lawbreaking corporations.

The For the People Act first passed the House back in 2019 with unanimous support and co-sponsorship of House Democrats. It went on to die in Kentucky Republican Mitch McConnell's U.S. Senate graveyard, but this is a new day. The act has more than a fighting chance of passing and being signed into law this year. Its success would be a dramatic step forward toward a government in which all of our communities are represented and given a chance to thrive, and elected representatives truly do the will of their constituents.

But we need action now, because in politics, we never know when a window of opportunity will open and when it will close. We know there are forces in our country that violently are opposed to a more inclusive democracy. Yes, they include rioters we saw at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. But they also include those who quietly are ensconced in local legislatures, working to codify a status quo that privileges the few over the many. Now is our opportunity to turn back that tide.

This legislation is critical to Virginia's future, and we urge our leaders to champion its passage. We welcome with joy all fresh evidence that King was right about our steady progress toward a more just world. But we also know that King himself never meant to imply that progress was preordained or inevitable; his life's work shows it. We owe it to ourselves and our children to bend that moral arc a little further every day, just as he did.

The Next GOP Assault on Democracy

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | FEBRUARY 18, 2021

New Jersey is not untouched by the Trump detritus. Our lawmakers have introduced eight bills that restrict voting rights, according to the Brennan Center, though most lack the necessary juice in a Democratic-dominant Legislature. One bill requires mail-in voters to reapply for ballots every year. Another repeals our Motor Voter Law. Another mandates voter ID. Because fraud.

Just to recap: In response to historic voter turnout in the 2020 election — "the most secure in American history," according to the US Department of Homeland Security — the party that is being rejected in growing numbers by minorities, women, and suburbanites have decided again to make it as hard as possible for Americans to vote. Americans of color, in particular.

"We are seeing a backlash," the Brennan study author, Eliza Sweren-Becker, told Vox. "Rather than going out and trying to persuade voters, we're seeing legislators trying to shrink the electorate in order to ensure job security for themselves."

And to think, it's all based on a lie.

This is Trump's favorite ploy, a misinformation tactic that Jonathan Rauch of the Atlantic calls conspiracy bootstrapping: Generally, if you lie repeatedly — and then spread it on your TV network, your social media feed, and from the lips of your congressional allies — you cite the prevalence of that lie as evidence that it must be true. Ultimately, it is used as justification for fixing the phantom threat.

It is a reminder that we must never take free and fair elections for granted, and that much is riding on getting two bills through Congress this term. One is the For The People Act (HR-1), which would enhance and guarantee voter access. Another is the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which restores protections against discrimination that were gutted by the Roberts Court.

Even as some elected officials believe they should be able to retain office by inciting riots, most Americans still believe that encouraging more people to participate in elections is a better idea.

The Feckless 43 who voted to acquit Trump may disagree, and they have chosen to promote the lie that will be used in dozens of statehouses to suppress our most cherished right. It is a sad turn of history: Given the chance to drive a stake through Trump's lie, they chose democracy as their victim. It must fail.

INDEPENDENT

Republicans Are Working 'To Rig Every Election from 2022 Onwards'. If Democrats Don't Pay Attention, It'll Happen

BY ANDREW FEINBERG (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 17, 2021

With Donald Trump's second impeachment trial in the rearview mirror, the Biden administration is moving forward with an aggressive legislative agenda. That starts with relief from the coronavirus pandemic. But with the House poised to take action on a sweeping ethics and election reform package next month, current and former Congressional staffers and experts are warning that legislation to strengthen democracy needs to be pursued with the same vigor as any infrastructure or stimulus package.

In a letter to House members on Tuesday, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said the House will take up H.R. 1, the For the People Act, during the week of March 1, after spending the last week of February on passage of the Biden-backed American Rescue Plan, a massive wilderness protection bill, and the Equality Act, which bans discrimination against LGBT Americans.

"This legislation, which the House passed in 2019, is the centerpiece of Democrats' agenda to make government more transparent and accountable to the people it serves," Hoyer wrote. "From protecting voting rights to reforming campaign finance, from requiring higher ethical standards for public officials to engaging in nonpartisan redistricting reform, H.R. 1 aims to renew Americans' faith that their government will always work for the people."

Sponsored by Maryland Representative John Sarbanes along with all but four members of the House Democratic Caucus, the For the People Act was House Democrats' signature piece of legislation during the 116th Congress. The

sweeping 791-page bill aims to “expand Americans’ access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, strengthen ethics rules for public servants, and implement other anti-corruption measures for the purpose of fortifying our democracy.”

Although the House passed the measure early on during the 116th Congress, it became one of nearly 300 House bills which received neither a hearing nor a floor vote in the then-Republican controlled Senate. In a January 2019 op-ed in The Washington Post, then-Majority Leader Mitch McConnell — a longtime opponent of campaign finance restrictions — called the bill the “Democrat Politician Protection Act” and derided it as an attempt to “grow the federal government’s power over Americans’ political speech and elections.”

But with Democrats now in control of the Senate and Senators Amy Klobuchar and Jeff Merkley promising to introduce a version of the bill — to be dubbed S.1 — in the upper chamber, Congressional Democrats and the Biden administration have a chance to enact what would be the most significant expansion of voting rights since the 1965 Voting Rights Act. That would include bringing in uniform standards for early voting, absentee voting, and automatic voter registration across all 50 states, and ensuring competitive House elections by requiring states to use nonpartisan commissions to draw congressional districts.

Voting rights advocates say such reforms are needed now more than ever. Enraged by Biden’s victory over Trump — a victory made possible by record voter turnout and by Democrats’ use of early and absentee voting in battleground states — Republicans in state legislatures are preparing for the 2022 cycle by building on Trump’s “big lie” of a stolen election with a push to shrink the electorate as much as possible.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, there are currently 165 separate pieces of legislation pending in 33 states to restrict access to the ballot with stricter identification rules, limit the use of postal ballots, shorten voter

registration and early voting windows, and make it easier for election officials to purge voter rolls in between elections. The three states with the most proposals on the legislative docket — Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Georgia — were carried by Biden in 2020, but have Republican-controlled legislatures.

…

The lack of attention to pro-democracy reforms, experts say, could prove a costly mistake come 2022. Because of the all-encompassing, zero-sum nature of 21st century politics — not to mention the upcoming decennial redistricting process — Democrats have a limited window to enact meaningful pro-democracy legislation before GOP-led state legislatures can successfully rig the game. That could mean Republicans locking Democrats out of any meaningful chance of controlling Congress for the next decade.

“After January 6, this needs to be job one,” said one irate Democratic Hill staffer. “2022 is coming, and Republicans are already doing their best to rig things to take back Congress and entrench themselves so they can be in a position to throw out Democratic electoral votes in 2024.”

Norm Ornstein — an emeritus scholar at the American Enterprise Institute who has spent years documenting the GOP’s descent into being what he and Brookings Institution political scientist Thomas Mann once called “an insurgent outlier” — said that unless Democrats use the power of their majority to enact meaningful reforms and solidify voting rights, the 2022 election could be America’s last chance for democracy.

“The single most significant element of keeping from having voter suppression become the norm is to get reforms for federal elections that guarantee the right to vote,” he said. Democrats need to summon the political will to either eliminate or reform the 60-vote threshold for ending a legislative filibuster unless they want to see the Senate end up as much a legislative graveyard under Democratic control as it was under the GOP, he added.

Eliminating the filibuster would, in theory, require all 50 Democratic Senators to vote to sustain a procedural ruling by the Vice President that only a majority vote would be required to pass legislation, and for her to cast a tie-breaking vote as well. But several Democrats, most notably West Virginia's Joe Manchin and Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema, have expressed opposition to ditching the filibuster, since Democrats have also used it to block GOP proposals when they've been in the minority.

Ornstein said such reservations only play into Republican hands, and stressed that McConnell — who eliminated filibuster requirements to push Trump's Supreme Court picks through the Senate — would have already killed the legislative filibuster if he saw a need over the past few years.

"People have an emotional reaction to things like this, and don't listen to the reasons, but the emotion doesn't reflect reality anymore," he said. "There's just an unwillingness to understand the implications here."

According to Common Cause Senior Counsel Stephen Spaulding, the implications of not getting H.R. 1 passed could be extremely serious.

Spaulding, who helped write H.R. 1 while serving as Senior Elections Counsel to the Committee on House Administration, warned that the damage Republicans could inflict on democracy in the absence of federal action could be irreparable.

"For democracy in general, the danger of not taking action is potentially catastrophic, given the precision and targeting and manipulation of the rules that some state legislators are doing to make it harder to vote," he said.

Spaulding explained that Republican efforts to restrict voting took off after the Supreme Court's decision in Shelby County v. Holder, which invalidated the 1965 Voting Rights Act's requirement for states with a history of racial discrimination to

submit changes in voting rules to the Justice Department for pre-clearance. But he added that establishing uniform standards for voting across all 50 states would not have a partisan tilt one way or another. Until Trump started attacking the validity of postal ballots, Republicans had made use of them in greater numbers than Democrats in many key states.

“Ever since then, we know that there are elected officials at the state level who have been working tooth and nail to make it harder to vote, so this is an opportunity to really level the playing field,” he said. “I think these are basic, common-sense solutions to make voting more convenient no matter what party you’re in…. We just had the most the highest turnout election… in the middle of a global pandemic, and that’s because people took steps across the country to make voting more convenient. Now we need to lock those in.”.

NEW YORK

How to Coup-Proof America

BY ANDREW COHEN (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 16, 2021

In at least one way, the men and women who voted to acquit Trump — among the most craven political cowards in American history — gave Biden and the Democrats a gift. By refusing to hold Trump accountable for his "big lie" about election fraud, for downplaying the threat of anti-democratic forces, for gaslighting the nation about January 6, they've made it easier for those still tethered to reality, who do not wish to live under authoritarian rule, to support the prompt passage of two major democracy bills. The For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Amendment Act, imperfect though they may be, are still both worthy of ending the filibuster's reign over the Senate. In fact, both of those laws would help end the need for filibusters in the first place, by fixing much of what is so horribly wrong about the Senate itself.

The For the People Act would make it easier for citizens to register to vote and guarantee early-voting days. It would ban partisan gerrymandering for congressional seats, a step toward eliminating the election of insurrectionists to Congress. The well-named John Lewis Act responds at last to the Supreme Court's gutting of the Voting Rights Act in 2013. The new bill would make it harder for local officials to suppress votes. These measures are popular. They are lawful. They would benefit Republican and Democratic voters alike. And they strengthen democracy at a time when its domestic enemies are powerful and prevalent.

The impeachment trial is indeed a reminder that the Senate GOP stands for little today but the exercise of power for power's sake. So maybe Senate Democrats should rawly exercise their own power for the sake of the Republic? Partisanship

to abide a failed president or to manipulate the makeup of a Supreme Court is one thing; partisanship to enact popular, pro-democracy measures is quite another. It's time for Democrats to stop pretending Congress is what it was a generation ago, time to stop ignoring the nihilism at the heart of the Republican caucus. Besides, the American people consistently support election reform and voting rights.

Broad pro-democracy reforms are necessary — now, today, this week — not just because they will help insulate the nation from the sort of shady tactics that marked the run-up to the November election or the baseless conspiracy theories that emerged in the wake of the vote. We need to fix voting rights and election systems in 2021, because things will likely only get worse in 2022. My colleagues at the Brennan Center for Justice have identified at least 106 measures in 28 states introduced by Republican lawmakers since the last election, four times more than last year, designed to suppress votes by restricting voter access to ballot boxes.

In some cases, lawmakers want to restrict the sort of mail-in voting that was so popular (and secure) in 2020. In other instances, legislators want to reduce the number of polling stations. In Arizona, which Trump lost, there is a proposed bill to give legislators the power to overrule state election officials and the popular vote. In Pennsylvania, another state which Trump lost, Republican lawmakers introduced no fewer than 14 voter-suppression measures. You get the idea: Republicans are unwilling to compete on policy and unwilling to lose again, so they are going to try to disenfranchise the people they know will vote against them. Some measures will sink, but others will become law.

Sink or swim, the measures send the same signal local GOP officials send when they censure or otherwise punish the few Republican members of Congress who were brave enough to stand up to the Trumpists in the end. If anything, state and local GOP officials are even more in the thrall of the Trumpists' authoritarian agenda than most Republican senators, and they are more committed to

suppressing votes and undermining nonpartisan election rules. Given this harsh reality, there is simply no way that Biden will find ten votes among the GOP caucus in the Senate to pass the For the People Act or the John Lewis Act over a Republican filibuster.

And the president should say so. If a divided nation can unify around one thing, he should say that our elections need to be safer and more secure. If the 2020 election taught us anything, he should say, it is that every person who has a right to vote should be able to do so and have confidence that vote will be counted accurately. If the failed insurrection and the response to it by congressional Republicans has taught us anything, he should add, it is that we must restore and re-nourish democracy so that it is ready for the existential fight ahead. We shouldn't be afraid to say such scary words. Sadly, the moment matches them.

The White House and congressional Democrats should move forward knowing that the potent political forces arrayed against reform will dredge up all the tired (often racist) lies about voter fraud. They should move forward knowing that the constitutionality of the reform measures ultimately may be decided by the most radically conservative Supreme Court in a century. These are risks and realities that cannot be avoided. The biggest risk is doing nothing with Democratic majorities that may be swept away in 2022 because of voter suppression. The biggest risk is failing to guarantee that the 2020 election was not our last free and fair election.

Abolish the filibuster. Convince reluctant Democrats like Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema that the path to their own political salvation, and those of their constituents, lies in protecting voting rights and election systems right now. Convince Mitt Romney that he can do still more to save the Republican Party he remembers, by forcing it to confront the political consequences of its dangerous extremism. One of the first things the new gerrymandering rules will do is push more moderates, of both parties, into the halls of Congress. I suspect that is a wildly popular concept among the American people.

Pass these two landmark bills, even if it means the deciding votes are cast by Vice-President Kamala Harris. Don’t wait. Do it now. Let that be the response to Trump and his enablers on Capitol Hill. Let that be the answer to sedition and insurrection. When they went low, most of the rest of the nation went high. When they turned to political violence and threats, others turned to the ballot box. When they turned to conspiracy theories, others turned to civil rights. When they moved to overthrow an election and the Constitution, others moved to protect the vote and give more citizens the opportunity to choose who would govern them.

The Intercept_

The For the People Act Would Make the U.S. A Democracy

BY JON SCHWARZ (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 14, 2021

Since the 117th Congress was convened on January 3, over 2,000 bills have been introduced in the House and Senate. But the very first legislation proposed by the Democratic Party majorities in both chambers — making it both H.R.1 and S.1 — is the "For the People Act" of 2021.

This is appropriate, because the For the People Act is plausibly the most important legislation considered by Congress in decades. It would change the basic structure of U.S. politics, making it far more small-d democratic. The bill makes illegal essentially all of the anti-enfranchisement tactics perfected by the right over the past decades. It then creates a new infrastructure to permanently bolster the influence of regular people.

The bill's provisions largely fall into three categories: First, it makes it far easier to vote, both by eliminating barriers and enhancing basic outreach to citizens. Second, it makes everyone's vote count more equally, especially by reducing gerrymandering. Third, it hugely amplifies the power of small political donors, allowing them to match and possibly swamp the power of big money.

Make Voting Simple

There's a popular, weary American aphorism (often attributed to the anarchist Emma Goldman, although she apparently did not say it): "If voting could change anything, it would be made illegal." The meaning is always taken to be that voting is pointless.

However, the past decades of U.S. politics demonstrate that this saying is accurate — but in fact its meaning is exactly the opposite. We can gauge how much voting can change important things by the lengths to which America's conservatives have gone to make voting difficult for the wrong people.

The For the People Act would require states with voter ID requirements to allow people to vote without identification if they complete a sworn statement attesting that they are who they say they are. It would make it impossible for states to engage in bogus purging of voter rolls. States could no longer stop people with felony convictions from voting after they've served their time — and would be required to inform them in writing that they now can vote again.

The act would then create what the U.S. has never had: a functioning, modern voting infrastructure. America is almost alone in its bizarre, two-step process in which citizens must register to vote, and then vote. And only two-thirds of the U.S. voting age population is in fact registered. In comparable countries, voting registration is automatic: You don't have to do anything first, you just show up and vote. The For the People Act would make voter registration near-automatic here too, and anyone who fell through the cracks would be able to register and vote on Election Day.

The bill would also require states to allow a minimum of two weeks of early voting, for a minimum of 10 hours a day. All eligible voters could vote by mail for any reason. And to ensure voters can be confident that elections are secure and that their votes will count, all states would be required to conduct elections via paper ballot.

Thanks to Republican success at creating gerrymandered congressional districts, Democrats can win the majority of the popular congressional vote in many states while only garnering a minority of the state's seats in the House of Representatives. With the once-every-10-years redistricting coming, and the GOP's 2020 success in state legislatures that control redistricting, the situation is

set to become even more lopsided and fundamentally unfair. If nothing changes, it's almost certain that Democrats will lose the House majority in the 2022 midterms, even if they get the most votes.

The For the People Act would head this off at the pass, requiring states to create independent commissions to conduct redistricting.

A New Strategy to Beat Big Money

While it's forgotten now, Watergate was, among other things, a campaign finance scandal. The bill of particulars supporting President Richard Nixon's articles of impeachment mentioned the chair of the board of McDonald's bribing his reelection campaign with $200,000, in return for permission to raise the price of the company's Quarter Pounder cheeseburger.

Shortly after Nixon's resignation, Congress passed extensive campaign finance reforms, which placed limits on contributions to campaigns as well as campaign expenditures. The Supreme Court struck down the limits on campaign expenditures in 1976. Then the Citizens United case in 2010 and related decisions made unlimited contributions possible to super PACs, as long as everyone pretended the super PACs and formal campaigns were separate and uncoordinated.

The For the People Act accepts that it will be difficult to reverse these decisions for the immediate future and addresses the problem from the opposite direction. Instead of placing limits on big money, it multiplies the power of small money.

Under the bill, candidates for congressional office could opt into a system that would provide matching funds for small donations. To qualify, the candidate would need to raise $50,000 from at least 1,000 individuals; take no more than $1,000 from any contributor; and spend no more than $50,000 of their own money.

In return, all donations to the candidate up to $200 would be matched with public funds at a 6 to 1 ratio. Thus if you gave $10 to someone running for Congress, they would receive that plus another $60, totaling $70.

Maryland Democratic Rep. John Sarbanes, the House sponsor of the For the People Act, has explained — based on his own experience and what he's witnessed of his colleagues' behavior — how this would change the core incentives for politicians. Right now, says Sarbanes, it is only worth a candidate's time to attend a fundraising event if they will receive at least $10,000 in contributions. There's therefore no point in going to a house party with 30 constituents each ponying up $50 for a total of $1,500. Instead, they'll head to events organized by D.C. lobbyists, who will each write big checks.

But with 6 to 1 matching funds, the same constituent house party would generate $10,500 — $1,500 from individuals, $9,000 from the government (also known as "the people") — suddenly making it worth a politician's while. That's not all, however: Sarbanes points out that from a candidate's perspective, such an event would actually be more valuable than a K Street fundraiser, because attendees "can vote, they can donate, they can volunteer, they can rope their friends in. You're creating an active, engaged group of people around your campaign. That can be worth 2 to 3 points, that's the difference in a close election."

So this would make it possible for candidates to spend their time with actual voters and listen to their concerns and needs to a far greater degree than they do now. But it should also have a significant effect on voters themselves. Right now, non-billionaires are well aware that their vote or $25 contribution has little impact on politicians. Why bother participating at all? But if you and each of your friends can turn $25 into a $175 contribution, political participation is suddenly much more rational.

This is especially true because the bill's matching funds would also be available for primary campaigns. This would greatly erode the safety of incumbents and

give normal people many more opportunities to participate in genuinely competitive elections.

The Stakes

The For the People Act also includes a huge number of other positive measures. It would reform the Federal Election Commission, which is now all but toothless, letting campaigns commit obvious violations of the law. It would lessen the power of super PACs. It would create a code of ethics for the nine Supreme Court justices, something which, incredibly enough, has never existed in U.S. history.

If the bill passes with its main provisions intact, a new era could dawn with a creative, lively, nationwide progressive movement. (Conversely, those provisions would also empower authentic grassroots conservative movements, if any truly exist.) Policies supported by the majority of Americans — on health care, the climate crisis, taxes, unionization — could finally become law. Millions of new people could be permanently drawn into public life, because they would see in concrete ways that their involvement could change the country.

Without such a law empowering democracy, it's unlikely any of that will ever happen. And the Democratic majority in the House will almost certainly be extinguished in the 2022 midterms, blocking the bill for the foreseeable future.

It's difficult to believe, based on its lamentable history of squabbling and in-fighting, that the Democratic Party will manage to hang together and pass a significant bill that's both in their own obvious self-interest and in that of the country. But stranger things have happened, such as the fact that the For the People Act has gotten this far in the first place.

The Washington Post

The Massive GOP Betrayal of Our Democracy Requires A Forceful Democratic Response

BY GREG SARGENT (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 13, 2021

Now that the vast majority of Senate Republicans voted to acquit former president Donald Trump of inciting violent insurrection, as we all knew they would, Democrats should immediately respond as follows:

1) Pass H.R.1 and S.1 with all deliberate speed.

2) Be prepared to nuke the legislative filibuster if and when Republicans obstruct it in the Senate.

3) Get the package into law as quickly as possible.

Those are the House and Senate bills that would expand voting rights, make voting easier in numerous ways and place limits on counter-majoritarian tactics such as voter suppression and gerrymandering, which Republicans are cheerfully escalating in numerous states.

Here's what the moment requires, above all: Democrats must accept the full implications of the GOP's ongoing and intensifying radicalization. And they must be prepared to act upon them.

We just saw all but seven Senate Republicans acquit Trump after he waged an unprecedented effort to overturn U.S. democracy that included incitement of mob violence to disrupt the constitutional processes governing how we conclude our

elections. That's more Republicans voting to convict than expected, but it's still a dark outcome — and an ominous one.

What's more, that came after Trump spent months trying to subvert the results through all manner of corrupt means, including egging on the terrorizing of vote counters and bullying election officials to manufacture votes to overturn certified results.

Much of the GOP went all in with many of those efforts. Large swaths of the party supported an effort to cancel millions of votes in four states based on fictions, and even voted to invalidate President Biden's electors in Congress — after the assault on the Capitol.

Even relatively "responsible" Republicans displayed this ongoing radicalization. GOP congressional leaders — such as Sen. Mitch McConnell (Ky.) and Rep. Kevin McCarthy (Calif.) — refused to recognize Biden's win for weeks. Then, after mouthing noises of disapproval about Trump's election lies, they meekly backed off, all to keep Trump voters in the GOP coalition.

Trump's acquittal only confirms what many observers had long pointed out: In some fundamental sense, much of the GOP is no longer functioning as an actor in a democracy.

Norm Ornstein and Thomas Mann called this way back in 2012:

The GOP has become an insurgent outlier in American politics. It is ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition.

Ornstein and Mann couldn't possibly have realized how prescient this would prove. Consider the larger story arc of the past year: A spectacularly malevolent botching of a pandemic; a horrific economic collapse; and, now, a months-long effort to subvert the verdict of the majority of Americans who chose a new direction of robust government action to deal with these challenges, which Trump, backed by Republicans, did so much to inflict upon us.

We're now looking at a GOP that is simply not part of the conversation about how to address two of our country's biggest crises of the modern era. And, even as the party will opt for this path, Republicans are in a position to recapture the House in two years largely via extreme gerrymanders, as they themselves have boasted.

In short, the Republican Party will do all it can to grind the Biden agenda to a halt, crippling our ability to act in the face of these major crises, not to mention other longer-term ones, such as stagnant wages, skyrocketing inequality and our warming planet.

And then, to remain competitive in national elections, Republicans will redouble their commitment to making it harder to vote and to rigging electoral maps to maximize their share of power relative to the proportion of actual votes they win.

This means being willing to exercise power while they have it to go big on covid relief and the economy — and mercifully, Democrats don't appear to be chasing bipartisan support for its own sake. But it also means being willing to deploy power to prevent a quick return to national power for Republicans via minority rule, and the dysfunction, disillusionment and resurgence of authoritarianism that this would bring.

Democrats have a responsibility to do all they can to avoid consigning the country to that fate.

One might think this means a future in which each party goes all out to do what it can on its own while in power, followed by sinking back into brutal guerrilla resistance when they lose it.

But that future is already upon us. That was made clear by the GOP's 2017 headlong rush into a purely partisan effort to throw 20 million people off health insurance and pass massively regressive tax cuts for the rich, busting the deficit and constraining possibilities for future government action.

For Democrats to act boldly out of a forthright appreciation of these circumstances does not rule out all bipartisan cooperation. One can see Democrats working with a handful of GOP senators on things such as an expanded child tax credit or infrastructure repair. But it does mean accepting the need to act forcefully to neutralize the GOP's reliance on anti-democratic tactics, which will only get worse.

As dark as Trump's acquittal might feel, this moment still offers real prospects for civic renewal. The decisive majority defeat of Trump and his movement in an extraordinarily high turnout election was a real success, particularly in that it was so heavily driven by intense civic engagement.

It's also inspiring that the election went relatively smoothly, due to the heroic diligence of countless election workers across the country — including many Republicans who bucked their party's lurch into authoritarianism — amid brutal and unpredictable pandemic conditions and a hyper-charged atmosphere of violent civil conflict.

But Trump's acquittal by so many Republicans after an unprecedented effort to overthrow U.S. democracy also hints at the fragility of those gains. Fully realizing the potential of civic renewal embedded in this moment will require Democrats to accept the full implications of this ongoing radicalization — and to act upon them.

The Atlantic

The How Republicans Could Rig the Battle for Control of Congress

BY RON BROWNSTEIN (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 11, 2021

Democrats face a daunting future of severe Republican gerrymandering that could flip control of the House in 2022 and suppress diverse younger generations' political influence for years to come, according to a new study released today. Those findings underscore the stakes in Democrats' efforts to pass national legislation combatting such electoral manipulation.

The four big states to watch are Texas, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina, where the GOP enjoys complete control over the redistricting process, says Michael Li, a senior counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice and the author of the new report on how congressional redistricting could unfold following the 2020 census. "Those four states, which are seat-rich and where Republicans control the process, could decide who controls the next Congress," he told me.

Over the longer term, Republican states could impose gerrymanders that prevent the nation's growing nonwhite population from building political power commensurate with its numbers—even though voters of color accounted for about four in five newly eligible voters in the past decade, the study found.

The report, which was provided exclusively to The Atlantic, comes as Democrats prepare to advance two bills to guarantee voting rights and reshape the rules regarding federal elections: a new Voting Rights Act and the omnibus legislation called H.R. 1. Both bills, which the Democratic-controlled House approved in the previous session, are likely to pass the chamber again this year—with H.R. 1 potentially winning approval as soon as early next month, House aides say. But

both are virtually certain to be blocked in the Senate by a Republican filibuster—unless Democrats change the upper chamber's rules to allow them to pass with a simple-majority vote.

The gerrymandering report bookends other analyses, by the Brennan Center and others, documenting how state-level Republicans have introduced some 165 proposals in 33 states this year that would make voting more difficult. These include imposing new voter-identification laws, rolling back access to mail balloting and early-voting periods, and adding new hurdles to the voter-registration process. H.R. 1 and a new VRA, if they become law and survive legal challenges, would preempt almost all of those moves as well.

Given the likelihood that, absent federal intervention, red states will enact severe gerrymanders and new obstacles to voting, the decision about whether to end the Senate filibuster to pass these two bills could shape the future of American politics more than anything else Democrats do in the next two years. "If the filibuster remains in place, [H.R. 1] dies in the Senate," Dan Pfeiffer, the former White House communications director for Barack Obama, wrote this week. If that happens, "the Republicans—who represent a shrinking minority of Americans—will likely return to power and control politics for the next decade or more."

"When Senate Democrats like Joe Manchin, Kyrsten Sinema, and [Dianne] Feinstein oppose getting rid of the filibuster," Pfeiffer added, "they are deciding to make it more likely that their time in the majority is ever so brief."

…

This time, Republicans hold complete control in states that will draw up to 188 districts. (Democrats, by contrast, completely control the maps in states with up to 74 seats.) The number of seats Republicans will oversee has diminished because they lost unified control of government in some states—including Wisconsin and Pennsylvania—and because Michigan transferred control of

redistricting from the state legislature to an independent commission. Additionally, in GOP-controlled Ohio, voters approved an initiative that created redistricting standards that could impede, though not eliminate, gerrymandering.

Taken together, Li said, these shifts have produced “a tale of two countries.” While midwestern states seem more likely to avoid severe partisan gerrymanders, “the South is at high risk for worse outcomes than [it saw] last decade,” Li told me.

The reason is that Republicans in the South will face far fewer legal constraints than they did in the post-2010 redistricting. In the landmark Shelby County v. Holder decision in 2013, the Supreme Court’s conservative majority voted to invalidate the cornerstone provision of the original VRA: its requirement that states with a history of racial discrimination receive “preclearance” from the Justice Department for changes in their election laws, including their congressional and state legislative-district maps. Then, in the Rucho v. Common Cause decision in 2019, five Republican-appointed justices again outvoted the Democratic appointees to rule that federal courts could not overturn partisan gerrymanders.

The loss of the VRA’s preclearance provision—Section 5 of the law—is an especially profound change. After the 2010 redistricting, 16 states, mostly in the South, were required to submit their maps to the Obama administration’s Justice Department under the preclearance process, as Li notes in his report. Now this will mark the first time since the law’s passage in 1965 that “communities of color will … lack the protection of Section 5” during redistricting.

Even if the Justice Department did not reject a state’s map, the preclearance requirement at least somewhat constrained partisan excesses, “because everyone knew there was going to be a review,” says Justin Levitt, a law professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles who specializes in redistricting. He worries that the lawmakers’ incentives have now flipped: Since legislatures no

longer need prior approval to proceed, they will feel emboldened to pursue aggressive racial and partisan gerrymanders because even a successful legal challenge against those maps could take years.

“There is very little incentive for a state legislature to refrain from discrimination at this point, because they are playing with house money, essentially,” he told me. “The taxpayers pick up the legal defense, that legal defense takes time and is burdensome, and all the while elections are happening” under the disputed maps.

To election reformers, one positive trend over the past decade was the willingness of some state courts to strike down severe partisan gerrymanders as a violation of state law. The 2019 Supreme Court ruling closing off federal judicial review of gerrymanders might encourage more state courts to intervene, Levitt believes. “Federal courts may be out of the picture but … now that it is abundantly clear that no superhero is arriving on the doorstep, state courts are starting to step in,” he said.

Still, in many of the Southern states where Republicans are likely to push for the most gratuitous lines—such as Texas, Georgia, and Florida—conservative-leaning state courts are unlikely to put up much resistance, most legal analysts I spoke with agree. That deference could have enormous racial, as well as partisan, consequences. Li notes in his report that voters of color accounted for fully 78 percent of the total increase in the nation’s eligible voting population since 2010. They also accounted for 70 to 80 percent of the total in almost all of the southern states at greatest risk for severe gerrymanders, including Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas.

With the Shelby County decision eliminating preclearance protection, Li says those diverse communities face elevated risk that GOP legislatures will attempt to maximize seats for white Republicans. They could do this either by concentrating minority voters into a few districts or dispersing them too widely to

have much influence—what's known as "packing and cracking." "To win back the House," he told me, "Republicans have to target communities of color." The Biden Justice Department and civil-rights groups can challenge such maps under another surviving provision of the original VRA. But those cases are difficult to win and can take years.

All of this shows how another round of severe gerrymandering could dilute the political impact of demographic change. One of the next decade's defining demographic stories will be the steady march of diversity up the age ladder. In the 2020 census, nonwhites for the first time are expected to become a majority of the nation's under-18 population, notes William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program. By 2030, people of color, also for the first time, will comprise a majority of the population younger than 30, he forecasts.

But Republican-controlled legislatures in the Sun Belt states that are at the epicenter of that transition can dull its political impact by drawing district lines that favor older white voters, Li notes. "These gerrymanders could delay the American future," he told me. "Our future is coalitional, our future is multiracial, and these gerrymanders could mean that Congress and state Houses continue to look much whiter than states as a whole—and older. It will be older voters who determine the future."

The long odds that Democrats can stop the approaching red-state gerrymanders—either in state legislatures or in the courts—means their only real point of leverage to avoid this fate is through their federal election-reform agenda. While Democrats are in a race against the clock, Li and Levitt both agree that if the party can pass those proposals fast enough, they could influence the current redistricting process (especially because delays in completing the census will delay redistricting as well).

H.R. 1 “would matter in a big way” to shape the current redistricting through its provisions establishing clear national standards to govern the line-drawing process, Levitt said. House aides told me that those provisions—including prohibitions on any map that discriminates against minorities or “unduly favors or disfavors a political party”—will be written to take effect immediately. That provides Democrats with a fallback if another key provision of H.R. 1—a requirement that states use independent commissions to draw congressional lines—can’t be put into effect quickly enough to affect the current redistricting, as seems likely. “We are going to address partisan gerrymandering and we are going to prevent Republicans from putting forth extreme district lines, but the method and what that looks like is going to be shaped by how quickly we move,” said one House Democratic aide involved in the planning, who spoke with me on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal plans.

Likewise, while experts say that it would be difficult to fully restore the federal preclearance process in time, the new VRA could still shape the redistricting outcomes through its provisions that give judges more leeway to issue injunctions blocking racially biased maps.

The magnitude and speed of the GOP efforts since their 2020 losses to impose new state-level voter-suppression laws, even as they gear up for aggressive gerrymanders, has exceeded even the most alarmist predictions from Democrats and voting-rights advocates. If nothing else, the sudden and sweeping Republican efforts to tilt the rules of the game should leave Democrats with no illusions about the fate they can expect if they allow the filibuster to block new federal standards for redistricting, election reform, and voting rights. H.R. 1 and a new VRA represent the Democrats’ best, and perhaps only, chance to preempt the multipronged offensive Republicans are mounting to tilt the balance of national power back in their direction—and potentially keep it there for years.

THE BULWARK
WE WILL GET THROUGH THIS TOGETHER

The Reforms We Need to Reinvigorate American Democracy

BY RICHARD NORTH PATTERSON | FEBRUARY 9, 2021

Why do so many Americans view our democracy with cynicism, despair, indifference, and contempt?

Among other reasons, because one of our major political parties makes voting harder, charges that our elections are riddled with fraud, and rigs our electoral processes to subvert the popular will.

Start with the GOP's traditional means: strict voter ID laws designed to disenfranchise minorities and the poor.

…

Despite its considerable successes in disenfranchising minorities, in 2020 the GOP was overwhelmed by the largest turnout in 120 years—delivering Democrats the presidency and, albeit narrowly, both houses of Congress.

The engine was widespread voting by mail to protect public health, particularly among Democrats and independents more inclined than Republicans to worry about COVID-19. Many voters used dropboxes; others voted early.

Republicans found all this democracy upsetting. Accordingly, they have redoubled their efforts at voter suppression by weaponizing Trump's "big lie" about massive voter fraud—which already had inspired his more enthusiastic followers to storm the Capitol and murder a policeman, and led Republican legislators to attack their erstwhile favorite, the Electoral College.

The GOP has already introduced 106 bills in 28 states to restrict voting—emphasizing battleground states like Georgia, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Wisconsin. These laws have four main goals: limit voting by mail, pass tighter ID restrictions, hamstring voter registration, and accelerate voter purges.

RNC chairwoman Ronna McDaniel calls rolling back mail-in voting “absolutely an important effort.” This includes bills eliminating “no excuse” voting by mail; making it harder to obtain ballots; stiffening witness and signature-matching requirements; invalidating timely mail-in ballots received after election day; and abolishing dropboxes.

But the GOP is leaving nothing to chance. To retake the House, it plans to build on previous successes in rigging congressional districts by perverting the decennial redistricting process.

…

In the Democrats’ banner year of 2018, the AP estimates that Republicans won 16 more seats than indicated by their average share of the vote in districts nationwide. In 2020, Democrats won roughly 4.67 million more votes—and barely held their majority.

Republicans are now free to intensify these abuses. In 2019, the Supreme Court examined North Carolina’s congressional map which, in 2018, had awarded the GOP 10 of the state’s 13 congressional districts based on roughly half the vote. Nonetheless, a 5-4 Republican-appointed majority ruled that restricting gerrymandering was beyond the Court’s capacity. Having won exclusive control last November over redistricting in 18 states—including fast-growing Florida, North Carolina, and Texas—GOP cartographers can redeliver control of the House.

They won’t lack for resources. By gutting longstanding prohibitions on corporate giving, the 5-4 Republican-appointed Supreme Court majority in Citizens United

enabled wealthy donors to spend an estimated $5 billion to influence elections—including “dark money” from undisclosed sources.

…

True democracy does not disproportionately empower the wealthy; or prevent voting by groups targeted for partisan advantage; or undermine the popular vote by rigging electoral districts; or limit participation by deliberately making voting harder. Fortunately, there is a comprehensive answer to much of this: H.R. 1, the For the People Act.

H.R. 1 proposes to reinvigorate American democracy. It helps restore the Voting Rights Act. It provides automatic voter registration for anyone who interacts with designated government agencies, a move that could add as many as 50 million people to the voting rolls.

It protects mail-in voting by extending it to every eligible voter; allowing voters to request mail-in ballots online or by phone; requiring states to send mail-in ballots five business days prior to the election to any voter who requests one; directing states to count any ballot postmarked by election day if received within 10 days thereafter; and mandating states to accept ballots at designated drop-off locations, or at polling places during early voting or on election day.

Further, it establishes same-day and online registration, and nationwide early voting. It curbs indiscriminate voting purges. Critically, it reinforces integrity in vote-counting by requiring a paper record of any vote cast—an answer to Trump’s baseless claims that voting machines were rigged.

It ends partisan gerrymandering by requiring states to use independent redistricting commissions in drawing up congressional maps. It combats the undue influence of big money in politics through a robust public-financing system that matches donations up to $200 at a 6 to 1 ratio—enabling candidates to fund

their campaign exclusively from small donors. Finally, it requires disclosure of all groups which have provided major campaign funding.

While it does not solve every problem, H.R. 1 could reinvigorate our democracy and help restore the public's flagging faith. We're close: In 2019 House Democrats passed it before Mitch McConnell kept the bill from coming to the Senate floor.

In 2021 all that can prevent reform from becoming reality is a Republican filibuster—and two Democratic senators. To date Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema refuse to join the bare majority required to abolish a hoary instrument of obstruction which McConnell uses to suffocate any legislation that Republicans or their donor class dislike.

The case of H.R. 1 exposes that the time is swiftly coming for these senators to reconsider. By requiring both parties to compete in an equitable and representative system, under a common set of rules, the bill would compel them to address the entire electorate instead of catering to extremes. And extinguishing the filibuster would impel senators to actually pass legislation, as opposed to showboating, catering to donors, and making absurd proposals that will never become law. That's how democracy is supposed to work.

Eulogizing John Lewis by calling for the renewal of voting rights, Barack Obama said "if all this takes is eliminating the filibuster—another Jim Crow relic—in order to secure the God-given rights of every American, then that's what we should do."

Indeed.

The Senate's Coming Crisis Over Majority Rule

BY RONALD BROWNSTEIN (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 9, 2021

The early lines of division between the parties during Joe Biden's presidency point toward rising confrontation, sooner rather than later, over rules and traditions in the Senate that empower the minority party to block the majority.

The quick turn by Biden and congressional Democrats toward reliance on the special "reconciliation" procedure for passing their Covid-19 "rescue" package with only 51 Senate votes underscores their conviction that in today's highly polarized environment, they are unlikely to secure support for anything close to their plan from 10 Senate Republicans, the number they would need to break a GOP filibuster.

Yet by relying on the reconciliation process to pass that priority, Democrats may only raise more questions about whether they should sustain other venerable Senate procedures – including the filibuster and deference to home state senators on judicial nominations – that impede majority rule and provide the minority a virtual veto on many fronts.

Though the Senate has trimmed back rules that empower the minority party to block the majority, it has not completely eliminated procedures such as the filibuster, which requires 60 votes to pass most legislation, or the "blue slip" system that has allowed senators from the opposite party to veto judicial nominations in their home states.

Over the next two years those Senate procedures enabling minority rule are likely to face more pressure than ever, as Democrats and their allied interest groups face the prospect of Republicans using them to slow or derail any of their plans that can't be shoehorned into the complex reconciliation process, from a new Voting Rights Act to citizenship for the "Dreamers" brought to the country illegally by their parents to a $15 federal minimum wage, which Biden acknowledged to CBS this weekend probably won't pass muster under the reconciliation process.

As the parties joust over those ideas in the coming months, the Senate procedures frustrating majority rule may become even more controversial because the chamber's basic structure, which provides each state two senators regardless of population, now creates such dramatic partisan distortions: Though each party holds 50 Senate seats, the GOP's reliance on smaller, preponderantly White and heavily rural interior states means that if you assign half of each state's population to each senator, Democrats represent nearly 42 million more Americans than Senate Republicans.

History of Congress' majority-minority power

The filibuster, in fact, more and more resembles a vestige of an earlier era, as Congress transforms into something like the kind of parliamentary system used abroad in such nations as the United Kingdom or Germany, in which the majority party controls the agenda, the minority party opposes it and both dissension within the parties and cooperation between them are rare. The filibuster, and other Senate rules favoring the minority, creates a contradictory dynamic, a parliamentary system where the majority cannot rule.

"If you have a minority party that will not cooperate, and if you have a Senate that has the rules that it does, then you are going to end up with the inability to focus on the major issues that face the society," says Norm Ornstein, a resident

scholar at the American Enterprise Institute who's a co-author of "It's Even Worse Than It Looks," a 2012 book about congressional dysfunction.

Concern about the congressional rules that allow minorities to block action – what political scientists call the system's "anti-majoritarian" tendencies – was common in the first decades after World War II. In those years, both parties were riven by ideological divides that separated liberal Northern Democrats from deeply conservative Southern Democrats and moderate-to-liberal coastal Republicans from staunchly conservative Midwestern ones.

In that era of "four-party politics," as it was known, the informal alliance of Southern Democrats and Midwestern Republicans -- a "conservative coalition" symbolized by segregationist Democratic Sen. Richard Russell of Georgia and isolationist Republican Sen. Robert Taft of Ohio -- often held a veto over legislative action, no matter which party controlled the White House or Senate majority.

In a landmark 1950 report, the American Political Science Association called for restructuring congressional rules to allow the majority party more leverage to implement its agenda. That process began in the 1960s. In a key early step, House Democrats enlarged membership in the chamber's Rules Committee to ease the hammerlock that the conservative coalition, led by longtime Chairman "Judge" Howard W. Smith, a Virginia Democrat, exercised there over President John F. Kennedy's agenda. In the 1970s, liberal Democratic reformers led by the late Rep. Richard Bolling of Missouri finally overthrew the seniority system that allowed conservative Southerners to control key committees while opposing most of the party's agenda and instead empowered the party caucus to elect committee chairs, which incentivized more party loyalty.

When Republicans gained the House majority after 1994, they employed these powers more aggressively than Democrats ever did and took other steps to centralize power over legislative action in each chamber's leadership. Georgia's

Newt Gingrich, the House GOP speaker in the 1990s, probably more than any other individual envisioned Congress' transition to a more parliamentary-like system defined by greater unity within the parties and relentless conflict between them. But when Democrats regained the House majority after 2006 and again after 2018, they largely maintained the Gingrich changes that centralized control and encouraged majority rule.

"The march has been pretty steady toward more polarized parties, which is to say homogenous within and distanced from each other, and a more centralized institution," says Price.

The Senate's trajectory, though, has been more uneven. During the 1970s, the parties also ended reliance on seniority for naming Senate committee chairs -- though they have exercised that power more rarely than in the House. And during the 1970s, senators lowered the threshold for breaking a filibuster from 67 votes to 60, theoretically a step toward majority rule. The offsetting factor was that after the 1970s the use of the filibuster steadily became more routine – with Republicans in particular creating a 60-vote threshold for almost anything Democratic Presidents Bill Clinton and especially Barack Obama sought to pass.

In response to systematic GOP filibusters of Obama's choices for the federal appellate courts, Senate Democrats in 2013 ended the filibuster for judicial nominees below the Supreme Court and executive branch appointments; Senate Republicans, after Donald Trump became President, then ended the filibuster for Supreme Court nominees. But it remains in place for general legislation, which has encouraged both parties since President Ronald Reagan's day to use the budget "reconciliation" process as a means of passing key elements of their agendas through a simple majority vote.

The 'blue slip' system for judges

With much less attention, the tradition of deference to home state senators on judicial appointments has also empowered the minority. Under the so-called blue slip system, presidents historically have consulted with senators on federal district and appellate court nominees in their geographic areas. Chris Kang, a former Senate aide and deputy White House counsel for Obama who handled judicial appointments, notes that the blue slip system dates back to 1917 but assumed its present character during the civil rights era.

At that point, he says, segregationist Southerners like Mississippi's fearsome Democratic Sen. James Eastland used the system to veto the appointments of judges they considered too liberal on civil rights. "He changed the principle from consultation to an outright veto," says Kang, co-founder of the advocacy group Demand Justice, which argues for judicial revisions. "That's what changed the complexion of how blue slips were actually used. "

Under President George W. Bush, Senate Republicans eliminated the blue slip tradition for the more powerful appellate court nominations, stripping the minority Democrats of their ability to block choices on those grounds. (Republicans maintained the system for lower-level district nominees). When Democrats regained the majority after 2008, they restored the blue slip system, only to see Senate Republicans aggressively employ it to impede Obama's nominations.

"In the Obama administration, notwithstanding the history, we sought to find consensus," says Kang. "And you see a number of Obama nominees were blocked because Republicans could wield that veto. All but one [blocked] were women or people of color."

Predictably, Senate Republicans once again eliminated the blue slip system for appellate court nominees after Trump won -- and, in their drive to fill the courts with conservative appointees, repeatedly nominated and confirmed judges

opposed by their home state Democrats. Now it's unclear whether Democrats will again restore the blue slip veto for appellate judges or maintain it for district judges. Fear that Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California would do so out of respect for Senate traditions was one reason for the intense liberal opposition to her becoming chair of the Judiciary Committee; Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, who eventually won the post, has hinted he will not restore the system at least for appellate court nominees, but has not firmly committed.

Kang, like many activists, says the time has come to eliminate the tradition for all judicial nominees, especially after so many Senate Republicans joined in Trump's efforts to overthrow the 2020 election. "Why should Ted Cruz get to choose the district court [nominees] in Texas: Why should he have a veto?" Kang asks pointedly. "Why should Josh Hawley have a veto [in Missouri]? There is no question about their intentions now, following January 6: Why should they have a veto? Why should we leave these seats open? There is just no reason."

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After African American voters played such a central role in delivering Democrats control of Congress and the White House, many observers think it will be nearly impossible for Democratic leaders, in effect, to tell the Black community that it was more important to preserve the filibuster than to pass these bills safeguarding their voting rights.

In a typical comment, Nsé Ufot, executive director of the New Georgia Project, a Stacey Abrams-affiliated group critical to the party's Senate wins in the state, told me recently that it would be "catastrophic" if Democrats "can't make progress" on the agenda they promised voters, "because of existing rules that they have the ability to change."

Daschle agrees that a Republican filibuster of a new Voting Rights Act – which is designed to reverse the 2013 Shelby County decision by five GOP-appointed Supreme Court justices to severely weaken the law – might be the trigger that forces Democrats to act, especially after Obama recently described the filibuster as a "Jim Crow relic."

"By far it carries the greatest emotion, the greatest history," Daschle says. "Even Barack Obama mentioned that was used effectively by those opposed to the civil rights legislation in the '50s and '60s. This is just an extension of that historical fact. These days, it would be incredible if we weren't able to address that legislation. It is essential that it get done. And it may be [ending the filibuster] is the only way that you get it done."

Oregon's Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley, the chief sponsor of the Senate equivalent to H.R. 1, has suggested that even if all 50 Democrats are unwilling to end the filibuster for all legislation, they might agree to revise it just for bills setting the rules for elections.

The irony is that voters appear far ahead of the legislators in treating Congress as a parliamentary institution. More and more of them appear to be casting their ballots based on judgments about which party they want to control Congress rather than personal comparisons of the candidates. Split-ticket voting, in which voters support presidential candidates of one party and congressional candidates from the other, has virtually disappeared.

As recently as the 1970s and 1980s, Democratic senators still held about half the seats in the states that twice voted for Republican Presidents Richard Nixon (32 states) and Ronald Reagan (44 states); now each party holds just three of the 50 Senate seats in the 25 states that supported the other party's presidential candidate in November. (When Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine triumphed last November, she became the only senator in either 2016 or 2020 who won in a state that supported the other party's presidential candidate.)

Likewise, just nine House Republicans and seven House Democrats hold districts that supported the other party's presidential candidate, according to recent calculations by political analyst J. Miles Coleman; during the three presidential elections of the 1980s, there was an average of 160 such split-ticket districts, 10 times as many.

In this increasingly parliamentary political system centered on majority rule, the Senate now stands out even more conspicuously as the choke point that allows a minority to shape, and even control, the national agenda. The fact that the Republican Senate minority also represents such a distinct minority of the population (only about 44%) only adds to the pressure for change. So do the

torrent of at least 165 laws that Republicans, citing Trump's discredited claims of voter fraud, are proposing to make it tougher to vote in states from Arizona to Georgia and the prospect of severe partisan gerrymanders to benefit the GOP in many of those same states.

Such gerrymanders and obstacles to voting would make it easier for Republicans to maintain power in Washington even if Democrats win support from more voters, as they have in seven of the past eight presidential elections, an unprecedented streak. Democrats face an uphill legislative battle in stopping either gerrymanders or new voting barriers in red states now dominated by Republicans, and the six GOP-appointed Supreme Court justices are unlikely to constrain such actions either, most legal experts agree.

Passing national election standards through H.R. 1 and a new Voting Rights Act represents the Democrats' best chance to preempt these Republican efforts to entrench their political power, but Democrats can pass those measures only if they roll back or eliminate the filibuster. In other words, restoring majority rule to the Senate may be the key to protecting majority rule in the country overall.

"If Democrats don't get an H.R. 1 or some variation of it through," says Ornstein, "we are going to end up with more and more crises of legitimacy and more and more [cases of] extreme minority rule."

The Washington Post

We Why Democracy Reform Is Good for Republicans, Too

BY LEE DRUTMAN (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 8, 2021

In the aftermath of the horrific events of Jan. 6, some Republicans denounced the mob violence as “unacceptable and un-American.” They have urged their party to reject the fringe conspiracism, understanding the long-term danger to the GOP and to democracy itself. Some are fearing for their personal safety. But they are fighting an uphill battle. They need a lifeline.

So it is good news that Democrats have introduced major democracy reform legislation as their first bill (H.R. 1/S. 1). The For the People Act would standardize rules around voting and elections, removing obstacles to voting; put in place independent redistricting commissions; and make campaign financing more transparent, among many other basic democracy fairness provisions.

It should be especially good news for moderate Republicans, though they might not appreciate it at first. Seen through the lens of short-term partisan control of Congress, the bill might appear to help Democrats. But Republicans, especially those who worry most about the party’s trajectory, should understand that the legislation actually offers them the long-term rescue package they desperately need.

To understand the urgency of democracy reform for both the Republicans and American democracy itself, we need to unravel the close connection between the rules of democracy, the growing extremism of the Republican Party over the past two decades and President Donald Trump’s “Stop the Steal” crusade.

Starting in the early 2000s, Republicans began a coordinated effort to raise concerns about voter fraud, and then used these concerns to justify increasingly

onerous state-level voter ID laws targeting Democratic constituencies, especially those of color. Despite never turning up any actual evidence of fraud, GOP leaders churned up a frightening narrative of rampant cheating — especially in the cities. Republican faith in the fairness of elections plummeted.

So, when Trump planted his outlandish claims around the 2020 election, the soil was fertile and well aerated. Republican voters, told for decades that Democrats were perpetuating massive fraud, were ready to believe it — and even storm the U.S. Capitol based on it.

But two other aspects of American politics also contributed to this anti-system extremism. The first is the ever-changing patchwork of state laws around federal elections, whose dynamic uncertainties feed suspicion and distrust. It's like a football game where scoring a touchdown entitles you to pick new referees until the other team scores. No wonder cynicism flourishes.

The second factor is a steady realignment of the Republicans' geographical strongholds out of professional suburbia and into small-town, postindustrial and very culturally conservative America, where the declining social status of non-college-educated White men and shrinking numbers of White evangelicals made the party ripe for a demagogic politics of grievance. It also worked with a U.S. electoral system that overweights rural votes (not only through the Senate and the electoral college, but also through gerrymandering in the House), thus allotting disproportionate political power to such voters.

In the short term, Republicans' best chance of winning back power in Washington obviously involves more of the same: aggressive gerrymandering in the states they control, making it harder for Democratic constituencies to vote and justifying it all by perpetuating increasingly outlandish myths about Democrats stealing the elections through fraud. To describe the redistricting fights of 2021 as ugly and brutal will be an understatement. Even Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a supposed hero for his willingness to

stand up to Trump's lies, is still perpetuating myths about "illegal voting," hoping to flip Georgia back to red.

But over the long term, Republicans are chasing a shrinking constituency that is mobilized through increasingly extreme threat rhetoric that also doubles as a justification for restricting the franchise under the guise of "security." By turning the election-rules knobs to their most extreme settings, Republicans might squeeze another decade of power out of the current system (especially since they still control many state legislatures), but will eventually find themselves crushed. Even more significant, democracy depends on a shared sense of fairness over basic rules of elections. If Republicans continue to turn the knobs, the system entire system will short out.

H.R. 1 changes this calculus. By tossing these anti-democratic opportunities out of the playbook, H.R. 1 would force Republicans to realize that crying "fraud" will only undermine their supporters' confidence in even casting a ballot, and that pointlessly driving even deeper conspiracism only further undermines their electoral chances. Instead, more moderate Republicans will be on firmer ground arguing the only path forward for the party is to broaden its appeal beyond grievance politics. Additionally, independent redistricting commissions are likely to create more competitive districts where Republicans will have to nominate moderates to win, thus increasing the number of moderates in the ranks of the congressional GOP making these arguments.

The For the People Act is but a first step in stabilizing and reinvigorating our democracy. Ultimately, though, our democracy will likely need even bolder reforms that make elections more proportional and create space for more than two parties, so that the center-right can break more fully from the extremist far right. But putting in place fair standards on the existing electoral rules is the most immediate task right now. If American democracy were a patient, it would be on life support right now. H.R. 1 is the first, essential treatment in a long road to recovery.

POLITICO

We Sued Trump for Emoluments Violations. That Fight's Just Getting Started.

BY KARL RACINE, BRIAN FROSH AND NORMAN EISEN (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 8, 2021

The struggle to defend the Constitution during the Trump era yielded the bitter realization that too many of the guardrails upholding our democracy are untested or unenforceable. As three participants in that effort, we believe it would be irresponsible for the country to move past this period without action to address these vulnerabilities. Congress and the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris Administration must work together to reinforce the checks on a rogue president and build stronger controls into the system.

Fortunately, Congress is reportedly set to consider legislation in the weeks ahead—the landmark HR1-SB1 package, sponsored by Congressman John Sarbanes and Senator Jeff Merkley—that offers several badly-needed reforms to protect the public from a corrupt president.

Known as the "For the People Act of 2021," the legislation applies the same sort of tough ethics rules that apply to executive branch appointees to the president. Our litigation made it abundantly clear that a president can slip through many current loopholes to evade accountability. Chief among them: The president is not bound by the same ethics rules and conflicts rules that other public officials must follow and is not subject to any real requirements regarding transparency. Sarbanes' and Merkley's bill heightens disclosure requirements around financial entanglements and requires the president and vice president to divest from ties that pose a potential conflict.

This one-two punch offers a model approach to preventing presidential corruption, combining tough, enforceable rules on divestiture with greater transparency. In the Trump years, the American people were often left wondering whether the president was acting to benefit his own bottom line rather than their well-being. These proposals would fix that, making it easier for the public and the courts to hold a corrupt president accountable.

The legislation also builds additional, automatic anti-corruption safeguards into the White House. For example, it would mandate that a political appointee of the president must recuse themselves on any matter that may affect the financial interests of the president or the president's spouse. This would remove all pressure from the appointee—no matter how well-intentioned they may be. Instead, these matters would fall to career officials who, thanks to civil service protections, would be free to make a decision without having to worry about even the appearance of impropriety.

Finally, the legislation would make it a legal requirement that all candidates for president and vice president must disclose their tax returns for the 10 years preceding their run for office. The public should not have to rely on presidential goodwill or leaks to the press to understand how candidates made their money—or, for that matter, how much they've paid in taxes. With this law, all candidates would understand they must trade some degree of financial privacy for the privilege of campaigning for the people's trust.

To ensure that no future president can profit from the office as Trump did, Congress should also pass a law enforcing the emoluments prohibition. To avoid any doubt about how to deal with a rogue president like Trump, the law should codify Judge Messitte's ruling—specifically that the Emoluments Clauses refer to anything of value. Turning that strong template into a statute—limiting the receipt of foreign or domestic emoluments—would shut off any spigot of money flowing from foreign or domestic governments into the president's coffers.

…

The American people delivered the final judgment on President Trump's corruption. While that rendered our emoluments case moot in the Supreme Court, the court's decision not to hear the case preserved a legal standard that we can hold future presidents to going forward. That's an important success—but unless it's paired with new laws to constrain a corrupt president, it will only be a partial one.

It's now up to Congress to ensure the rule of law does not bend so easily next time.

Newsweek

Congress Must Defeat the Continued Insurrection Against American Democracy

BY REP. JIM MCGOVERN AND ELLEN KURZ (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 8, 2021

If the 2020 election taught us anything, it's that our democratic system is more fragile and more in need of reform than we thought. That work must begin urgently and it must begin at the national level. Congress must act to ensure the cancerous tumor we found on January 6th does not metastasize across the country, state by state.

Congress must pass comprehensive protections of our electoral system, addressing the oldest and newest methods of corruption alike. We must limit the undue influence of super PACs and corporations with stricter campaign contribution caps, and introduce small-donor matching with public funds. We must criminalize voter misinformation efforts. We must require heavily trafficked websites, like Facebook, to publicize names of advertisers who pay them more than $500 a year. And we must ban indiscriminate voter roll purges that are used to disproportionately disenfranchise Black, Latino and low-income voters.

Most importantly, we need to help more people participate in our elections. Any legislation must enable automatic voter registration (AVR) and make vote-by-mail (VBM) systems permanent and universal—not just when there's a global pandemic. AVR has been responsible for the greatest increase in voter registration in history, and states where it's been implemented have increased voter registration by up to 90 percent, particularly among vulnerable populations like the elderly and working Americans.

H.R. 1, the For the People Act, includes all these critical reforms and more.

The GOP has long decried voter expansion efforts—first by dismissing them as a partisan ploy to boost the Democratic vote, and more recently by raising the red herring of voter fraud. Their opposition to higher participation has a specific, craven goal: To make voting harder for eligible citizens they don't think will vote red.

…

In her moving poem on Inauguration Day, Amanda Gorman captured the meaning of the attempted insurrection on January 6, saying, "We've seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it." As we're seeing, those forces are alive and active in Republican-controlled legislatures. If we are to live up to her prognostication that “while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated,” we must pass H.R. 1 now and stop those who would shatter our democracy not just in the halls of our Capitol but in the laws of our land.

TULSA WORLD

Voter Suppression Has Partisan Motives and Racist Impact — in Oklahoma and Around the Nation

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | FEBRUARY 8, 2021

Legislators in 28 states — including Oklahoma — have introduced proposals (some 106 and rising, according to the Brennan Center for Justice) to restrict voter access.

Let's be clear about what this is — a bald-faced effort to prevent citizens from voting with partisan motives and a clearly racist impact. Unhappy with the results of the 2020 election, Republicans want to change the rules to exclude or dilute voters they don't like, especially Democrats, minorities and people living in poverty.

One Oklahoma proposal would take the right of choosing Electoral College delegates away from the voters (and give it to the Legislature) unless Congress agrees to the partisan version of election reform, including nationwide voter ID requirements.

Another would wipe out all Oklahoma voter registrations and require voters to reregister.

Another would mandate hand counts of all Oklahoma elections. (Aside from its impracticality, the proposal is incredibly ignorant of the history of vote fraud in Oklahoma from the days before election machines.)

Another would raise the majority needed to amend the state Constitution from 50% to 60%.

And there's little reason to suspect that this year's constitutionally mandated redistricting of legislative constituencies will be anything less than gerrymandered to favor white, rural Republicans

…

There are, however, solutions: The John Lewis Voting Rights Act and the For the People Act, which would restore minority voter protections stripped by the Supreme Court in 2013, broaden the electorate rather than narrow it, end extreme partisan gerrymandering and overhaul campaign finance laws. The bills passed the U.S. House last year but were never considered by the then-GOP-controlled Senate.

With Democrats now in power in both chambers, voting reform on a national basis has a chance. Both measures have the endorsement of the League of Women Voters, the nation's most respected voter advocacy group.

In the past, we have generally argued for state control of elections, and we continue to see that as the ideal. But the partisan nature and racist impact of voter suppression measures pending in Oklahoma and elsewhere make a convincing argument for stronger national standards for democracy in America.

Washington MONTHLY

Making It Easier to Vote Is Good for Republicans, Too

BY BILL SCHER | FEBRUARY 8, 2021

When Democrats and progressives talk about voter rights, usually they speak in moral terms of democracy and justice. But sometimes, the quiet part is said out loud.

The Intercept's Ryan Grim, in his "Bad News" newsletter, recently wrote: "Partly because of the way the American population is flowing, and partly because the Trump administration deliberately rigged the Census, [House] Democrats are going to get pounded" in the midterm elections, and the Democrats' "For the People Act" voting rights legislation is "likely the only chance the Democrats have to stave off this disaster."

Slightly less explicitly, New York's Ed Kilgore spoke of the electoral value of the Democratic proposals: "The urgency of these measures should be obvious, with red states narrowing the path to the ballot box and with the decennial redistricting about to begin." The Washington Post's E.J. Dionne summed the general concern with the existing electoral system, asserting that "voter suppression actions across the country would hit the young and racial minorities the hardest," and counseling Democrats to "consider self-interest" and abolish the filibuster for the purpose of passing the For the People Act.

…

The Democrats' For the People Act is chock full of federal requirements on state election systems designed to making voting easier and further boost turnout, such as mandating states to allow mail voting for all eligible voters, providing at

least two weeks of early voting, and offering voter registration on Election Day. Democrats may think these provisions will help them win more elections, and Republicans may oppose those provisions based on the same assumption. But the data doesn't back it up.

…

But by telegraphing that their underlying motivation for passing the For The People Act is to help themselves win elections, Democrats have done the cause for enfranchisement a huge disservice. What Democrats should be doing is promoting the data showing that expanded voter access would not favor one party over the other.

Similarly, Republican leaders should tell their followers the truth: admit that voter fraud is not an issue and provides no reason to stymie the spread of mail voting and related measures that make it easier to vote. Vote-by-mail began in Oregon and moved to western, GOP-dominated states like Utah, where it's become part of the culture, and ballot drop boxes are like library book returns—no big deal.

The Washington Post

Our Democracy Faced A Near-Death Experience. Here's How to Revive It.

BY STACEY ABRAMS (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 7, 2021

The violent Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, coupled with ongoing threats to election officials, election workers and lawmakers at all levels, represent unprecedented attacks on the foundations of our democracy. Certainly, President Donald Trump and others in his party who inspired the attacks must be held accountable through all available means. But accountability alone will not be nearly enough.

Only meaningful reforms can undo the damage done — and establish a government that is truly representative of the people. The next real test of our democracy comes now.

Make no mistake: Democracy may have survived this year, but President Biden and Vice President Harris were elected despite, not thanks to, weakened electoral systems. Together with the Democratic Congress, they now have the opportunity to implement reforms that reaffirm our nation's promises that our country represents and works for everyone. We as Democrats must act before it is too late.

Our democratic system faces extraordinary threats today because of sustained attacks from Republican leaders who throw up roadblocks to voting and, among the worst actors, stoke the flames of white supremacy and hyper-nationalism to cling to power. There can be no clearer example than the covid-19 pandemic. The deaths of more than 450,000 people in the richest country in the world are symptomatic of a democracy in crisis and a political system that rewards

cronyism over competence. Despite strong public support for the Centers for Disease Control's work, the Affordable Care Act, and other economic justice and safety-net policies that could save lives, millions nevertheless continue to contract the disease without adequate access to health care.

No thinking person can deny that the communities of color disproportionately suffering and dying from this pandemic are also the people whose votes — and ability to hold failed leaders accountable — have been continuously suppressed. The pandemic has been a collision of tragedy and corroded institutions, and the challenge is in how we respond. We can either engage in collective amnesia about what we have just lived through, and leave an unaccountable government in place, or we can rise to meet this moment by fixing the broken social compact. Defeating Trump was not enough. Meaningful progress on health care, racial justice and the economy requires aggressive action on voting rights, partisan gerrymandering and campaign finance.

One of the first steps must be an overhaul of the Senate filibuster, which has long been wielded as a cudgel against the needs of millions who struggle. Today, the parliamentary trick creates a more sinister threat to our nation: the ability of a minority of senators, who represent 41.5 million fewer people than the Senate majority, to block progress favored by most Americans.

Democrats in Congress must fully embrace their mandate to fast-track democracy reforms that give voters a fair fight, rather than allowing undemocratic systems to be used as tools and excuses to perpetuate that same system. This is a moment of both historic imperative and, with unified Democratic control of the White House and Congress, historic opportunity.

The agenda to restore democracy also includes passing the For the People Act to protect and expand voting rights, fight gerrymandering and reduce the influence of money in politics; the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to restore the full protections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act; and the Protecting Our

Democracy Act to constrain the corruption of future presidents who deem themselves above the law. These landmark bills have broad-based support, and would have passed long ago were it not for obstructionist leaders who fear losing their own influence if the American people have more power of their own. Further, fixing our democracy requires we finally allow our fellow Americans in D.C. and Puerto Rico, the vast majority of whom are people of color, to have full access to our democracy. That means D.C. statehood and binding self-determination for Puerto Rico. In the District, as white extremist mobs destroyed the Capitol, murdered a police officer, and threatened the lives of elected officials and residents, Washingtonians were left defenseless because D.C. is not a state and its chief executive had no authority to deploy the National Guard.

Time is short. The forces standing against a democracy agenda seek to preserve and expand paths to power by shrinking the voting pool rather than winning voters over. In reaction to the historic turnout of 2020 and Democratic victories in places such as Georgia, already this year more than 100 bills have been put forward in state legislatures seeking to restrict voting access. Those efforts will not end without a fight.

We don’t know how many chances we will get to reverse our democracy’s near-death experience. We must not waste this one. We must go big — the future of democracy demands it.

Mother Jones

After Trump Failed to Overturn 2020 Election, Republicans Are Trying to Steal the Next One

BY ARI BERMAN | FEBRUARY 3, 2021

A decade ago Republicans passed new voter ID laws and other efforts to curtail voting rights when they took power in the states following Barack Obama's election. Now they're taking that strategy to the next level — trying to accomplish through legislation what Trump couldn't with litigation. All in all, these efforts amount to the most concerted attempts to roll back voting rights since the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

Georgia Republicans have already introduced an avalanche of new laws that would radically limit voting options in the state. On Monday — the first day of Black History Month — Republicans in the state Senate introduced nine bills to restrict access to the ballot, including eliminating automatic voter registration, no-excuse absentee voting, and mail ballot drop boxes, as well as prohibiting third party groups from sending mail ballot applications, and banning people who move to Georgia after the general election from voting in runoff elections. Many of the bills were sponsored by Republicans who backed Texas' unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Supreme Court to throw out election results from Georgia and other states carried by Biden. These bills come on the heels of another bill that would require voters to submit physical copies of photo identification twice to vote by mail, once when they request a mail-in ballot and again when they return it.

…

Establishment Georgia Republicans like Raffensperger publicly rebuked Trump's attempt to subvert the election results — holding three recounts of the

presidential election that found zero evidence of fraud — but now the GOP seems determined to weaponize Trump's lies about voter fraud to suit their own political ends after the state voted for Biden and sent two Democrats to the US Senate. Raffensperger, who became a liberal darling for standing up to Trump, has endorsed calls to end no-excuse absentee voting and add voter ID for mail-in ballots.

Georgia is a microcosm of how state-level Republicans are dramatically escalating a decade-long strategy to make it harder for Democratic constituencies to vote following record turnout in 2020. A recent study by the Brennan Center for Justice found that 106 bills have already been introduced in 28 states to restrict access to the ballot, three times the number at the same point this year. "These proposals primarily seek to: (1) limit mail voting access; (2) impose stricter voter ID requirements; (3) limit successful pro-voter registration policies; and (4) enable more aggressive voter roll purges," the report says. "These bills are an unmistakable response to the unfounded and dangerous lies about fraud that followed the 2020 election." Seventeen of these states are under full GOP control, increasing the likelihood that restrictive legislation will pass there.

Republican state legislators in Arizona, which Biden carried by 10,500 votes, have introduced at least 34 bills to reduce voter access, in a state where 80 percent of voters cast ballots by mail.…The most extreme bill would allow the GOP-controlled legislature to override the secretary of state's certification of election results and appoint its own electors to nullify the popular vote choice of the voters — which Trump tried and failed to persuade them to do in 2020.

…

In Pennsylvania, another state where Republicans spread baseless claims of fraud in an attempt to overturn Biden's victory, legislative Republicans have introduced 14 bills to make it harder to vote, among the most in the country.

…

Republicans in New Hampshire and Montana have introduced legislation to repeal Election Day registration, which increases voter turnout by as much as 10 percent. Republicans in Alaska, like in Georgia, want to eliminate automatic voter registration, which was approved by 65 percent of voters in 2016. Republicans in Wisconsin, Arizona, and Mississippi have introduced bills to allocate electoral votes based on congressional districts instead of the popular vote winner of the state, which would've reduced Biden's Electoral College margin by 11 votes.

…

Democrats will be largely powerless to block many of these laws through the legislative process in states like Georgia, Arizona, and New Hampshire that Republicans control. But with Democrats in charge of Congress and the White House, the party can pass federal measures like the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and sweeping pro-democracy reforms that could stop GOP voter suppression efforts.

That will only happen, however, if they eliminate the filibuster, which Democrats Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema have said they will not do. Senate Democrats now face a critical choice—they can preserve what Obama has called a "Jim Crow relic" relic and allow Republicans to undermine democracy for the next decade, which could cost them key state races, the House in 2022, and the presidency in 2024. Or they could eliminate one anti-democratic feature of the political system in order to put a stop to many more.

The Washington Post

Democrats Republicans Want More Voter Suppression. Here's How to Make Elections More Fair — Not Less.

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | FEBRUARY 3, 2021

By all credible accounts, the 2020 elections went off remarkably well: Security held up, fraud was practically nonexistent, and a record number of voters turned out in the middle of a pandemic. But conducting a sound, well-run election in Georgia resulted in stinging losses for Republicans in presidential and Senate races. So now, Georgia Republicans want to cook the rules, reinforcing Republican control of the state by suppressing the voters.

Georgia GOP state senators unveiled on Monday bills that would end no-excuse absentee voting, ban ballot drop boxes and restrict automatic voter registration. The week before, a Republican lawmaker submitted a bill that would require absentee voters to send in two copies of their IDs — when applying for and when submitting mail-in ballots.

Nothing in the 2020 election experience suggests that wide-scale use of mail-in ballots, the provision of drop boxes or the rollout of automatic voter registration pose major risks to voting integrity. Indeed, automatic voter registration programs are designed to increase the accuracy of voter registration lists. No conceivable public purpose is served by making it harder to register. Meanwhile, the crackdown on mail-in ballots reflects the fact that large numbers of Democrats shifted to absentee voting in 2020.

Georgia Republicans are not alone. The Brennan Center for Justice has counted 106 bills in 28 states designed to restrict voting access so far this year, a massive jump from last year. Republicans have concluded that if they cannot win

a fair election, they must make elections less fair. Their strategy, supposedly to promote election integrity, would, in fact, corrode democracy.

U.S. democracy needs an overhaul — not to restrict voting but to shut down politicians who seek to tilt the rules at the people's expense. Using their power over federal elections, Democrats and any Republicans of conscience in Congress must make such an overhaul a top priority in the coming months. Fortunately, Democrats have an appealing bill ready to go that they have been crafting for years. The For the People Act would require automatic voter registration, which could add 50 million people to electoral rolls while improving their quality. It would mandate bipartisan redistricting commissions for congressional maps, ending partisan gerrymandering in federal elections. The bill would ensure access to early and mail-in voting and restore voting rights to people with prior criminal convictions. And it would create a public financing system for political campaigns, amplifying the power of small contributions with matching funds for candidates who decide to participate.

The package would level the playing field in places where it is now badly tilted and expand access to the ballot box without risking election integrity. If anything, it does not do enough; the Jan. 6 electoral vote counting fiasco in Congress showed that the creaky laws governing the electoral college also need an overhaul.

The 2020 election showed that the nation's electoral system is unacceptably vulnerable — not to voter fraud but to politicians who seek to deny the will of the voters. A thorough renovation is needed, now.

POLITIFACT
The Poynter Institute

Democrats Fact-Checking Misleading Attacks on H.R. 1, Democrats' Voting Rights Bill

BY AMY SHERMAN | FEBRUARY 3, 2021

A Facebook post claims Democratic legislation is aimed at protecting the Washington establishment and is anti-American, but the post's claims don't add up.

H.R. 1, called the For the People Act, is a bill that folds together previous proposals for absentee voting, in-person voting, campaign finance and ethics. Democrats say the goal of the legislation is to make it easier for everyone to vote.

The Jan. 25 Facebook post says otherwise. It says the For the People Act will "permanently destroy voting in America." The post states that the legislation is a "direct attack promising the destruction of the Constitutional Republic."

The Facebook post reduces the sweeping legislation, which is hundreds of pages long, into brief phrases that distort the law's provisions on rules for voter eligibility, voter registration and voting by mail.

The post makes alarmist claims, such as that murderers will be allowed to vote, and broad generalizations suggesting that the bill will lead to regulation of freedom of speech. While the post doesn't use the phrase "voter fraud", it leaves readers with the misleading impression that the bill aims to weaken election security. The bill actually includes provisions to increase security through grants and cybersecurity improvements.

THE WEEK

Democrats May Only Have One Chance to Stop America From Becoming A One-Party State

BY RYAN COOPER (OPINION) | FEBRUARY 3, 2021

Democrats right now control the presidency and Congress by a very thin margin — just one vote in the Senate. Republicans are plotting to win back control of Congress not by getting more votes, but by cheating. If Democrats do not exercise their power now to pass, at a minimum, protections for voting rights, requirements for fair congressional districts, and statehood for Washington, D.C., Republicans will in all likelihood succeed in turning America into a one-party state.

…

In short, Republicans have been signaling ever-more loudly that they believe only their party can legitimately hold power, and that they will use any tool at their disposal to stop Democrats from winning elections, including open fraud and violence. And if they do, they can and will use that power to try to make it impossible for Democrats to win ever again.

So what should Democrats do? The most obvious immediate solution is to ban gerrymandering, pass new protections for voting rights, and add new states to somewhat un-rig the Senate. There are already bills drawn up to do this: The For the People Act would put district boundary-drawing in the hands of nonpartisan commissions, and add sweeping new protections for voting rights and election integrity, while the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act would overturn the Supreme Court decision gutting the original Voting Right Act. D.C. statehood has been drawn up as well — which would not only make the Senate somewhat more fair,

but also would give D.C. residents their rightful representation in Congress and allow the D.C. government to use its National Guard to protect the Capitol, as Trump allegedly prevented for a time during the Capitol putsch.

Unfortunately, to pass any of the above reforms, Democrats would have to reform or abolish the Senate filibuster. So far the key votes, Krysten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, have ruled it out. But that may change when more details are known about the Capitol putsch, and popular bills expanding voting rights are blocked by Republicans. If either of them want to have a fair chance to win reelection in 2024, they will pass laws to protect American democracy.

The Washington Post

Trump Left U.S. Democracy in Shambles. Biden Has to Build It Back.

BY JACKSON DIEHL (OPINION) | JANUARY 31, 2021

For the past four decades, U.S. presidents have wrestled with the question of "democracy promotion" — that is, where and how to encourage free speech, free assembly and free elections in other nations. President Biden will be the first executive since the middle of the 20th century to face an entirely different and far graver challenge: preventing democracy from succumbing to autocracy as the dominant form of human governance.

…

Meanwhile, liberal democracy is being undermined from within by autocratic populist movements, including that led by Trump. Thanks to him, a majority in one of the United States' two major political parties is now prepared to nullify election results, disregard court rulings and knowingly propagate lies to remain in power.

For Biden, defending democracy cannot be merely one "basket" in a variegated foreign policy or a talking-points sop to liberals. The issue is now existential. His dual imperative — and the central test of his presidency — will be to fashion a strategy that can defeat Trumpism at home while offering the world a competitive political counter-model to that being pushed by China.

…

For his part, Biden has stressed the importance of repairing U.S. democratic institutions, which must be not only hardened against future assaults from Trumpism but also become more inclusive and transparent. The extremist

movements that led to the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol must be corralled; the 1887 law that would allow a partisan majority in Congress to reject electoral college votes should be repealed. An incipient wave of state legislation by Republicans to restrict voting in future elections must be beaten back. Instead, the measures to expand voting, reform redistricting and expand public election financing included in the For the People Act, passed by the House in 2019 as H.R. 1, ought to be at the top of Biden's legislative priorities.

Revitalizing the U.S. democratic model is the precondition for prevailing over China in the global battle of governance.

…

Blinken described a contest between "techno-democracies" and "techno-autocracies" that, he said, "is going to go a long way to shaping the next decades." Democracies, he said, have to come together to ensure that "we are the ones shaping the norms and rules" of 21st-century technologies so that "they are more our values than theirs."

The new secretary of state is probably right to suggest that the United States and other democracies are not certain to prevail in this fateful contest. "There are many, many very apparent weaknesses that China tries to hide when it comes to projecting its model," he told senators. "But in the absence of an alternative, they may do better than we think."

That neatly defines the job of the Biden administration. Trump has left the U.S. model of democracy in ruins. Biden, to paraphrase his own slogan, must build it back, stronger.

The Washington Post

Democrats Are Faced with A Choice. Protect the Filibuster or Protect Democracy.

BY E.J. DIONNE JR. (OPINION) | JANUARY 31, 2021

The Democrats can use their House and Senate majorities to reform our politics, guarantee voting rights and enhance our democracy. Or they can surrender to an anti-majoritarian, money-dominated system, and allow the more accessible approach to voting created during the coronavirus pandemic to be destroyed.

This means that the party must recognize that the Senate filibuster, contrary to happy myth, does not promote bipartisanship or constructive compromise by requiring most bills to get 60 votes. No, in the face of a radicalized Republican Party, maintaining the current filibuster rules means abandoning any aspirations to a legacy of genuine achievement.

Sorry, there is no third way here. Yes, Democrats could avoid a complete repeal of the filibuster by getting rid of it only for certain categories of bills — for example, those related to voting rights and democratic reforms. But living with the status quo means capitulating to obstruction. Democrats have only 50 votes plus Vice President Harris's tie-breaker. They will never get 10 votes from a GOP that can't even find a way to exile white-supremacist extremists from its ranks.

So let the inevitable battle be waged in the memory of John Lewis and John McCain, the civil rights icon and the Teddy Roosevelt reformer. Let it be a fight for democracy itself.

There is genuine urgency because Republican legislators throughout the country have been moving rapidly to rig the 2022 elections by throwing new obstacles in the way of voters.

Last week, the Brennan Center for Justice reported that, “In a backlash to historic voter turnout in the 2020 general election, and grounded in a rash of baseless and racist allegations of voter fraud and election irregularities, legislators have introduced three times the number of bills to restrict voting access as compared to this time last year.”

The 106 bills the center identified in 28 states sought to limit mail voting, impose stricter voter ID requirements, roll back voter-friendly registration policies and enable more aggressive voter purges. What Donald Trump and his mob could not achieve before President Biden’s inauguration will instead come through the back door of state-level legislation.

When it passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965 — with the support and leadership of many Republicans — Congress recognized that defending democracy requires national action. The proposed For the People Act lives squarely in that tradition. Congressional leaders underscored its significance by designating it H.R. 1 and S. 1.

The bill takes direct aim at voter suppression by giving all Americans easy access to postage-free mail voting under a set of clear national rules, requiring drop boxes to make casting ballots easier, and guaranteeing at least 15 days of early voting. It allows for election-day registration and constrains voter purges that often throw legitimate voters off the rolls.

Other provisions would end partisan gerrymandering by requiring all states to set up independent commissions to draw congressional district lines, set up new safeguards against foreign money and subject dark money to effective disclosure rules.

The bill takes an enormous step toward democratizing political contributions (in a way that even a Supreme Court dominated by conservatives would have trouble

overturning) by creating a voluntary system in which candidates could avoid big money donations. Contributions of $200 or less would be matched 6 to 1 by a fund financed not by taxpayers but by a small surcharge on the federal government's criminal fines and penalties against corporations, corporate executives and high-income tax evaders. For the first time in history, small donors could overwhelm deep-pocketed interests.

These provisions would be worthy in a normal time. But Trump's attacks on the 2020 election, focused especially on high turnout among Black voters, make the For the People Act and a new Voting Rights Act imperative. Trump may have lost, but the impulses he represents are still powerful.

And if Democrats are not willing to challenge a filibuster against political reform on moral grounds, they might consider self-interest: The voter suppression actions across the country would hit the young and racial minorities the hardest.

"In addition to the millions and millions of voters who will be denied their sacred right to vote," said Fred Wertheimer, president of Democracy 21 and a veteran reformer, "the Democrats have to enact this quickly and have it in effect for the 2022 congressional races, or pay a very heavy price at the polls."

When we look back at all the great legislative struggles in American history, we don't remember the procedural scuffles involved; we remember the achievements they brought to life.

Senators need to ask themselves which sentence they would like historians to attach to their names. One could be: "I saved the filibuster." Here's hoping that most of them would prefer: "I saved democracy."

The New York Times

After Record Turnout, Republicans Are Trying to Make It Harder to Vote

BY MICHAEL WINES | JANUARY 30, 2021

Now, in statehouses nationwide, Republicans who echoed former President Donald J. Trump's baseless claims of rampant fraud are proposing to make it harder to vote next time — ostensibly to convince the very voters who believed them that elections can be trusted again. And even some colleagues who defended the legitimacy of the November vote are joining them.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, state legislators have filed 106 bills to tighten election rules, generally making it harder to cast a ballot — triple the number at this time last year. In short, Republicans who for more than a decade have used wildly inflated allegations of voter fraud to justify making it harder to vote, are now doing so again, this time seizing on Mr. Trump's thoroughly debunked charges of a stolen election to push back at Democratic-leaning voters who flocked to mail-in ballots last year.

…

Democrats have their own agenda: 406 bills in 35 states, according to the Brennan Center, that run the gamut from giving former felons the vote to automatically registering visitors to motor vehicle bureaus and other state offices. And Democrats in the Senate will soon unveil a large proposal to undergird much of the election process with what they call pro-democracy reforms, with lowering barriers to voting as the centerpiece. Near-identical legislation has been filed in the House.

…

Democrats and some voting-rights advocates say the Republican agenda on voting is less about lost trust than lost elections. A Republican election official in suburban Atlanta said as much this month, arguing for tougher voting laws that reduce turnout after Democratic candidates won both of the state's Senate seats in runoffs.

"They don't have to change all of them," said Alice O'Lenick, who heads the Gwinnett County Board of Registrations and Elections, "but they have got to change the major parts of them so we at least have a shot at winning."

…

In Washington, a Democratic agenda can be seen in the latest version of a far-ranging elections and voting bill that passed the House last year but died in the Republican-controlled Senate.

This time, the Democrat-controlled Senate will file its own version, with committee hearings expected in February.

Its voting provisions include allowing automatic and same-day voter registration, 15 days of early voting, no-excuse voting by mail, and online voter registration, as well as the restoration of voting rights nationwide to felons who complete their sentences. In one fell swoop, it would set minimum standards for American federal elections that would erase a host of procedural barriers to casting a ballot.

It also would require the states to appoint independent and nonpartisan commissions to draw political boundaries, eliminating the profusion of gerrymanders that the Supreme Court said in 2019 were beyond its authority to control.

New Democratic Senate Majority Opens Path to Democracy Reforms

BY BENJAMIN BARBER | JANUARY 29, 2021

Earlier this month, Senate Democrats introduced companion legislation (S.B. 1) to the For the People Act (H.R. 1), which the Washington Post called "the most comprehensive political-reform proposal ever considered by our elected representatives." Sponsored by newly elected Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia, the bill represents a broad effort to boost democracy. It includes provisions to strengthen the Voting Rights Act, expand voting by mail, overhaul the campaign finance system by requiring full disclosure of donors and contributions, increase election security by modernizing state election systems, end gerrymandering, and make the democratic process more inclusive.

"The For the People Act is important legislation that brings us another step closer to ensuring that every eligible Georgia voter can participate in our democracy," said Warnock. "When we prioritize legislation that centers people and brings their concerns to the table, we have a better chance of getting it right. This comprehensive bill makes long-needed, pro-democracy reforms that would strengthen our democracy, and help ensure that our government remains by and for the people."

Congressional Democrats are also working to revitalize the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was eviscerated by the Supreme Court's 2013 Shelby County v. Holder decision out of Alabama. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (S. 4263) would serve as an antidote to the Shelby ruling, restoring the full power

of the VRA by establishing a new formula the U.S. Department of Justice would use in determining which states need federal preclearance of election changes, targeting those with 15 or more voting rights violations during the past 25 years, and those with 10 or more violations if at least one was committed by the state itself. Under that formula, 11 states would be subject to preclearance, most of them still in the South: Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.

The Washington Post

Democrats Need to Accept the Implications of GOP Radicalization

BY GREG SARGENT (OPINION) | JANUARY 28, 2021

A new piece from the Atlantic's Ron Brownstein spells out the stakes of the failure to accept the true implications of this GOP radicalization. It argues that the single most consequential decision for Democrats is whether to end the legislative filibuster to pass reforms that would expand voting rights and unwind GOP counter-majoritarian advantages going forward.

Congressional Democrats are coalescing around a package of reforms that would dramatically expand access to voting by requiring states to implement automatic voter registration, extensive early voting and same-day registration. It would restrict voter suppression tactics and hurdles on vote-by-mail.

The reforms would also require nonpartisan redistricting commissions — a strike at the next round of GOP gerrymanders — while restoring protections in the Voting Rights Act and blocking states from disenfranchising felons. The reforms would go far in curtailing Republican counter-majoritarian tactics for years to come.

Any such package will be filibustered by Senate Republicans. That would mean the wielding of yet another counter-majoritarian tool to further entrench GOP counter-majoritarian advantages for the foreseeable future.

…

Democratic leaders are making public comments that strongly suggest they grasp the need to deliver in a big way to restore faith in democracy and usher in a post-Trump phase of civic renewal.

That's good. But we need to hear more of a recognition that the GOP's increasing radicalization when it comes to anti-democratic tactics will also require a fundamental Democratic reset going forward. That means being genuinely prepared to do away with the filibuster if it comes to it.

Republicans Eye Voting Restrictions, Despite Smooth 2020 Cycle

BY STEVE BENEN | JANUARY 28, 2021

There are a variety of reasons Republicans embraced the Big Lie about the 2020 presidential election with such vigor. Some were desperate to protect Donald Trump's ego, while others saw a fundraising opportunity. Some hoped to undermine Joe Biden's presidency from the outset, while others saw value in keeping rabid elements of the GOP base agitated.

But among the most important rationales behind the Big Lie was, and is, Republicans' desire to impose harsh new voting restrictions – because the more people were told the United States has a corrupt and broken system of elections, the more demand there would be for a crackdown.

…

This will almost certainly be a multi-state effort, but Georgia – a "red" state in recent decades that elected Biden and two Democratic U.S. senators in the most recent election cycle – is likely to be the epicenter of the GOP's anti-voting efforts.

…

Though it's likely to get ugly, congressional Democrats have rallied behind an ambitious voting-rights plan, called the For the People Act, which is designed to bolster the nation's democracy. The bill would, among other things, "dramatically broaden voting access"; "require states to implement automatic voter registration,

extensive early voting and same-day registration"; and "restrict efforts by states to place suppressive hurdles on voting and vote-by-mail."

It's among Democrats' top legislative priorities for the next two years, but the odds of it overcoming an inevitable Republican filibuster are poor.

The Atlantic

The Biggest Decision Democrats Face

BY RON BROWNSTEIN | JANUARY 28, 2021

No decision facing Democrats over the next two years will shape the long-term political competition between the parties more than whether they end the Senate filibuster to pass their agenda to reform elections and expand access to the vote.

The party's immediate political fate in the 2022 and 2024 elections is likely to turn mostly on whether Joe Biden can successfully control the coronavirus outbreak—restarting the economy and returning a sense of normalcy to daily life. But the contours of American politics just over that horizon, through 2030 and beyond, will be determined even more by whether Democrats can establish new national standards for the conduct of elections through a revised Voting Rights Act and sweeping legislation known as H.R. 1, which would set nationwide voting rules, limit "dark money" campaign spending, and ban gerrymandering of congressional districts. With both bills virtually guaranteed to pass the House, as they did in the last Congress, their fate will likely turn on whether Senate Democrats are willing to end the filibuster to approve them over Republican opposition on a simple-majority vote.

That decision carries enormous consequences for the future balance of power between the parties: The number of younger and diverse voters participating in future elections will likely be much greater if these laws pass than if they don't, especially with state-level Republicans already pushing a new round of laws making it tougher to vote based on Donald Trump's discredited claims of election fraud in 2020. Given those stakes, the Democrats' voting-rights agenda is quickly becoming a focal point of the pressure from left-leaning activists to end the filibuster. "Our grass roots will not accept the notion that we had good intentions,

but we just failed" to pass these laws, Senator Jeff Merkley of Oregon, a Democrat who is the lead sponsor of the Senate companion to H.R. 1, told me.

These grassroots activists, who spurred the enormous turnout that propelled Democrats to unified control of Congress and the White House, are sending the same unambiguous message: Allowing GOP filibusters to kill the Democrats' democracy-expansion agenda not only threatens to demobilize the party's electoral base in upcoming elections, but also virtually ensures that Republican-leaning states will continue to erect barriers that dilute the long-term influence of the diverse younger generations now entering the electorate in large numbers.

The consequences will be "enormously catastrophic" if Democrats allow the next two years of unified control in Washington to expire without passing this part of their agenda, says Nsé Ufot, the chief executive officer of the New Georgia Project, a Stacey Abrams–founded group that helped power the Democratic victories in Georgia earlier this month that gave the party the Senate majority. Protecting the right to vote "is the antecedent civil right that we need to … shore up if we are going to have a fighting chance to win and defend any of the other rights that are important to the progressive activist wing of the Democratic Party," Ufot told me.

Between them, the new VRA and H.R. 1 would create comprehensive new rules for federal elections. The new VRA is a direct response to the Supreme Court's 2013 Shelby County decision, which invalidated the original VRA's central pillar: the requirement that states with a history of discrimination in voting receive "preclearance" from the Justice Department to make changes to their election laws that could disenfranchise minority voters.

That decision, backed by the Court's five GOP-appointed justices over the opposition of the four Democratic appointees, functioned like a starting gun for the construction of new barriers to voting in Republican-controlled states. Following the party's big gains in the 2010 election, red states had already begun

advancing laws making it more difficult to vote, but after Shelby County that effort significantly intensified. In December 2019, every House Democrat voted to approve a new VRA that would restore the preclearance requirement and establish a new system for determining which states would be subject to it. (All but one House Republican opposed the bill.) But the legislation died when Mitch McConnell, then the Senate majority leader, refused to consider it.

If anything, the election-reform legislation that Democrats have introduced in both chambers—H.R. 1 and its Senate companion, S. 1—is even more ambitious. The bill, in fact, “may be more sweeping” than the original VRA, passed in 1965, Paul Smith, the vice president for litigation and strategy at the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center, told me. For federal elections, it would require every state to do the following: provide online, automatic, and same-day registration; ensure at least 15 days of in-person early voting; provide all voters access to no-excuse, postage-free absentee balloting; and offer drop boxes where they can return those ballots. It would also end gerrymandering by requiring every state to create independent commissions to draw congressional districts; establish a system of public financing for congressional elections; institute new safeguards against foreign interference in elections; and require increased disclosure of the unlimited dark-money campaign spending that was unleashed by the Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United ruling, which like Shelby County was backed by the Court’s conservative majority. (It also endorses statehood for Washington, D.C., though a separate bill, which also passed the House in 2020, is required to actually implement that.)

In all, the legislation is, as Joe Biden once said to Barack Obama about the Affordable Care Act, a “big fucking deal.” Under current Senate rules, it is also doomed.

No House Democrat opposed H.R. 1 when it passed in 2019, and its sponsors are confident it’ll clear the House again, probably no later than early March. In the Senate, every Democrat co-sponsored the bill when it was first introduced in

the last session, and Merkley told me he expects they all will sign on again. That means it will have at least 50 votes, enough for a majority with a tie-breaking vote from Vice President Kamala Harris.

But the legislation is certain to face a Republican filibuster. McConnell has excoriated it as “a radical half-baked socialist proposal” and an improper federal overreach into state prerogatives…. “H.R. 1 is going to require an end of the filibuster,” Smith told me. “There is no way 10 Republicans are going to vote for [it].”

That means the fate of the democracy-reform legislation, and perhaps also the VRA if Republicans try to block that too, depends on whether Senate Democrats are willing to end the filibuster to pass it. That’s true of a lot of things Biden and the party want to do, such as immigration reform and new gun-control measures. But the electoral consequences of passing their election agenda may be greater than that of any other issue on their plate.

Three big factors are converging to raise the stakes for Democrats’ decision making on voting rights.

The first is that the astonishingly large number of Republicans who supported Trump’s attempts to overturn the November election signals that GOP tolerance for antidemocratic measures is growing, and likely to increase in the years ahead. Already, legislators in an array of competitive states are employing Trump’s discredited claims of voter fraud to justify a new round of voting restrictions. In Georgia, Texas, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, for example, Republican officials want to roll back on-demand voting by mail; eliminate ballot drop boxes; and/or impose tighter voter-identification laws. One hundred and six bills to restrict voting access have been introduced this year in 28 states, the Brennan Center for Justice, which advocates for voting rights, reported this week.

The Republican campaign to block access to the vote “will probably get to a level that we haven’t seen since the 1960s, at least in some states,” Smith, who also teaches at Georgetown Law School, told me. Widespread Republican support for Trump’s efforts to subvert the election shows that “there has been this kind of validation of the idea [in the GOP] that we should win no matter what, and … that loops around and justifies more antidemocratic measures and voter suppression,” Smith said.

The second factor raising the stakes is the new 6–3 Republican majority on the Supreme Court. While Chief Justice John Roberts has displayed independence on some issues—with an eye toward protecting the Court’s public reputation—he has voted almost uniformly with the GOP’s preferences on questions related to the fundamental rules of elections (including Citizens United, Shelby County, and cases involving gerrymandering and voter purges). That’s convinced almost all the election-reform advocates I’ve spoken with that the Supreme Court won’t stand in the way of a new red-state offensive to restrict voter access; some recent opinions suggest that the Court’s Republican appointees might even try to block state Supreme Courts from resisting restrictive voter laws or extreme gerrymanders. “Courts are not the Democrats’ friend on voting rights,” Lee Drutman, a senior fellow at the centrist New America think tank, told me.

Each of those dynamics is compounded by a third factor: the changing nature of the electorate—and of the Democratic coalition. Nonwhite and younger voters, the groups typically most disadvantaged by barriers to voting, will only become more important to Democrats in future elections. By 2024, Millennials and Generation Z, the two most racially diverse generations in American history, will significantly exceed the preponderantly white Baby Boomer and older generations as a share of eligible voters, according to projections by the nonpartisan States of Change project.

If Democrats don’t establish national standards for ballot access, the political influence of those diverse younger generations could be suppressed for years by

restrictive state voting laws. That's especially possible in states like Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, Arizona, and South Carolina. There, Republicans still maintain an advantage based on big margins among older and nonurban white voters, but they're watching growing diversity in younger generations shave their edge.

For all these reasons, many experts in voting and elections believe that the choices Democrats make regarding their democracy and voting-reform agenda represent a fundamental crossroads in American politics. Passage of these laws wouldn't guarantee a sustained period of Democratic political dominance: In both 2016 and 2020, Trump's incredible mobilization of infrequent white voters demonstrated that Republicans could compete in a high-turnout environment. But failing to pass the laws might ensure the reverse: a lasting Democratic disadvantage. The absence of national election standards would further entrench the current system, which has allowed Republicans to frequently control Congress, the White House, or both during the past three decades, even though Democrats have won the popular vote in seven of the past eight presidential elections.

If the Democrats don't pass H.R. 1 and the new VRA, "there is a very good chance that America will wind up under an extended period of minority rule in which the party that represents 45–46 percent of the country can have a majority of power in Washington," Drutman told me. "Which is not only fundamentally unfair, but it contravenes any set of democratic values and creates a sense of fundamental illegitimacy [that] is deeply destabilizing for a democracy."

Merkley, the principal sponsor of the Senate companion bill, is no less emphatic. Especially with Trump's efforts to subvert the election, the American vision of representative government has "slid over the cliff, and [it's as if] we caught a root, and we are just holding on by our fingertips," he told me. "We must find a way to pass this bill. It is our responsibility in our majority … to defend citizens' rights to participate in our democracy. There is no other acceptable outcome."

Still, passing the bill, and perhaps the new VRA, will almost certainly require every Senate Democrat agreeing to end the filibuster in some fashion—and at least two of them, West Virginia's Joe Manchin and Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema, have been adamantly opposed to that action. Merkley's strategy for convincing Democrats to reconsider—at least for the democracy-reform legislation—is to encourage an extended debate on the bill, both within the committee and on the Senate floor, and to allow any senator to offer amendments. If Republicans still block final passage with a filibuster after that process, Democrats could either vote to "carve out" election-reform legislation from the filibuster, or require Republicans blocking the bill to actually filibuster in person, he told me. Democrats could change the rules to tell Republicans "you better be here day and night, because we are going to go for weeks and if you are not here, we are going to a final vote on the bill."

Whatever mechanism Democrats employ, it's clear the voter-mobilization groups that worked to produce their unified control are prepared to erupt if the party allows procedural constraints to block passage of H.R. 1 and the VRA. The New Georgia Project's Ufot told me that when Biden and Harris campaigned in Georgia just before the twin runoff elections, they promised big change if the state's voters gave them the Senate majority. They didn't add an asterisk that change would be possible only if McConnell somehow chooses not to filibuster their agenda. "The filibuster never made it into any of Chuck Schumer's campaign ads; the filibuster was not a part of President Biden's stump speeches, or Vice President Harris's when she was down in Savannah," Ufot said. "Their campaign rhetoric was on full blast, on 10, about why we needed to send them to Washington, D.C., to work on a progressive agenda."

Saying "we can't make progress on that agenda because of existing rules that they have the ability to change will ring like a hollow argument, and it won't bode well for this coalition," Ufot added.

The last four times a president went into a midterm election with unified control of Congress, voters revoked it. That past isn't necessarily prologue, but it does suggest that if Democrats don't establish a national floor for voting access in the next two years, they might not have another opportunity to do so anytime soon.

…. If Democrats unilaterally surrender their current leverage, the consequences not only for the partisan competition, but for the underlying health of American democracy itself, could reverberate for decades.

Congress Prepares for Major Fight Over Voting Laws in the Wake of Trump's False Fraud Claims

BY JON WARD | JANUARY 27, 2021

One of the Democrats' top priorities in the new Congress is a package of election reforms, including provisions that experts say would make it harder to cheat but easier to vote. Many of these provisions are ones that Republicans have historically resisted for ideological reasons.

…

In an op-ed published before the election, Ben Ginsberg — who for more than 20 years was one of the GOP's fiercest election attorneys and led attempts to root out cheating — said that Republican anxiety about fraud is effectively baseless. "The truth is that after decades of looking for illegal voting, there's no proof of widespread fraud. At most, there are isolated incidents — by both Democrats and Republicans. Elections are not rigged," he wrote.

Yet over the past 20 years, Republican lawmakers have limited early voting, purged voters from the rolls simply for not voting and moved to stop laws in states that would allow ex-cons to cast ballots. They've also tried to require voters to show the kinds of IDs at the polls that are more reliably used by Republicans — such as gun permits — while making it harder for voters to use IDs more frequently used by Democrats, like the ones given to college students.

Democrats call such attempts "voter suppression," and some Republicans have admitted at times that voter ID laws are designed to help the GOP. Republican

lawyer Justin Clark was caught on tape in 2019 saying that “traditionally it’s always been Republicans suppressing votes.” Voter suppression in the U.S. has a long history of being used against African Americans in particular.

If there was any doubt that stricter voting laws were mostly a bad-faith effort at helping Republicans get elected, Trump’s attempt to stay in power after an election that he clearly lost removed it. Trump constructed an entirely imaginary claim of a stolen election, which was repeatedly debunked and exhaustively rejected in more than 60 court cases.

…

Last week, more than 80 scholars — including a handful of well-known conservatives — signed a letter in which they said they have “watched the recent deterioration of U.S. democracy with growing alarm.”

The group identified numerous trends that have taken place in “other declining democracies: hyper-partisan polarization, mutual political enmity and distrust, zero-sum politics, lack of tolerance for opposition and minorities, rampant propagation of falsehoods and conspiracy theories, and the encouragement or rationalization of violence.”

The group identified one other trend. “We also see something uniquely dangerous in America right now — an electoral system that allows for minority rule,” said the letter, which was signed by Larry Diamond and Morris Fiorina, both of them influential scholars at the conservative Hoover Institution at Stanford University. They were joined by other prominent experts on American government, including Francis Fukuyama and the sociologist Robert Putnam.

The letter, which endorsed the voting legislation already introduced in H.R. 1, a bill that passed the Democratic-controlled House in 2019, stated that “none of these reforms should be dismissed as partisan.”

The group endorsed three major planks in the legislation, which has been called the For the People Act. They said access to voting should be expanded, that congressional districts should no longer be drawn by partisan politicians and that political spending should be fully transparent, ending the era of “dark money.” They also endorsed statehood for Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, two progressive priorities that are not included in the legislation.

A few weeks from now, after the Senate finishes its second impeachment trial of Trump and negotiates a COVID-19 relief package, attention in Washington will turn to this looming fight. The Democratic-sponsored bill would set national standards for expanding the vote, while keeping other parts of how elections are handled under local jurisdiction.

The bill would mandate at least 15 days of early voting in federal elections, and restore voting rights for ex-felons and prevent purges of election rolls. It would require that nonpartisan commissions draw the lines for congressional districts, which would reduce the impact of gerrymandering, a process that tends to reward radicals in both parties — increasing polarization — by stacking their districts full of voters from their own party. It would make voting by mail an option, without having to provide a reason, in every state.

And it would expand voter registration in such a way that increases participation and enhances the accuracy of voter lists state by state. One of the biggest objections to voting by mail is that if a state’s voter rolls are not up to date, many ballots are sent to wrong addresses. No evidence has surfaced of this weakness being abused by any coordinated cheaters, but voting advocates agree that voter rolls should be up to date and accurate.

H.R. 1, which has not been voted on by the Senate, would require all states to implement automatic voter registration, which would be one primary way to fix this problem. Anytime someone interacted with a state agency, whether in

updating their driver's license or in some other way, they would be registered unless they chose not to be. There are 17 states that do this already.
The U.S. is an outlier when it comes to voter registration. The Brennan Center studied 17 advanced democracies and found that the U.S. was one of only six that required its citizens to assume responsibility for registering to vote.

Yet already, Republicans are mounting attacks on voting by mail, trying to roll back the expansions that took place during the pandemic as Trump repeatedly attacked the practice and spread lies that mail-in voting would lead to massive fraud.

...

After Democrats took control of the House in 2018, they began working to restore the VRA. But the For the People Act would also reverse some of the ways in which the GOP has made it more difficult to vote. Trump himself openly admitted in 2020 that if voting were easier, and more Americans voted, it would hurt Republicans. Higher "levels of voting," he said, would mean "you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again."

…

The most toxic impact of minority rule is that once a party goes down the path of holding on to power by any means necessary, experts say, it becomes a downward spiral.

"Minority rule can prompt and enable the minority party to take increasingly radical and antidemocratic actions to entrench its dominance," said the letter signed by the bipartisan group of scholars. "When a ruling party bends the rules to suppress opposition votes or rig the political playing field, a country can no longer be said to be a democracy, no matter how much it may allow freedom of the press and association."

In that view, the Jan. 6 insurrection was the outgrowth of years of antidemocratic behavior in the GOP that had grown more severe over time.

Or as Seth Masket, a political science professor at the University of Denver, put it, “the longer the anti-democratic spiral continues, the harder it becomes to reverse.”

NBC NEWS

Trump's Capitol Mob Lends Senate Democrats the Momentum to Enact Historic Reforms

BY FRED WERTHEIMER (OP-ED) | JANUARY 7, 2021

The Jan. 6 invasion of the U.S. Capitol by an insurrectionist mob assembled and incited by then-President Donald Trump has set the stage to enact historic reforms of our democracy.

With President Joe Biden sitting in the White House, and a Democratic majority in Congress, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., recently declared that his first big legislative priorities would include the overarching reform bill S.B. 1, designed to repair America's broken political structure, fix our corrupting campaign finance system and revitalize U.S. democracy. It mirrors Speaker Nancy Pelosi's bill in the House, the For the People Act, known as H.R. 1, which passed the House in 2019 and is expected to be voted on again soon. She considers it "central to the integrity of our government."

The grave problems facing our political system make passage of this bill crucial in both houses of Congress, alongside Biden's top priority: solving the Covid-19 crisis.

…

We must seize the moment that now exists to repair our democracy. If we do not, history shows us this opportunity will not come around again anytime soon.

Here are 10 reasons why Congress must pass this law now:

1) It empowers citizens.

2) It protects the right to vote.

3) It empowers small donors instead of big money.

4) It protects voting by mail and early voting.

5) It brings dark money into the light.

6) It increases election security.

7) It enforces campaign finance laws.

8) It creates fair congressional districts.

9) It addresses presidential conflicts of interest.

10) It cuts down on foreign influence in U.S. elections.

We now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to repair our system of representative government and rebuild citizen confidence. All Americans need to know that their voices are heard and their interests represented — not just the voices and interests of the wealthy and powerful.

Democrats Have a Chance to Finally Win the Fight for Voting Rights that Started in 1965

BY REV. JESSE L. JACKSON SR.
AND DAVID DALEY (OP-ED) | JANUARY 26, 2021

It's a breeze for Georgians in white neighborhoods to vote after work. The average line after 7 p.m. only takes six minutes in precincts that are 90% white. It's a much longer slog in polling places that are 90% non-White. The average wait after 7 p.m.? Fifty-one minutes.

In mail-in voting states like Washington and Oregon, voters can easily deposit their ballots in one of thousands of conveniently located dropboxes. In Texas, officials allowed one box per county (some the size of small states), and now some lawmakers have proposed eliminating them all together.

Officials in Ridgeland, Miss., a majority White suburb of Jackson, quietly resegregated voting precincts this summer. More than 2,500 largely Black and Hispanic residents who had long voted at the local recreation center were shuffled, most without notification, to a precinct about 10 minutes away. Just under 2,500 voters, almost entirely white, voted at the rec center, plush with several hundred parking spots and eight to 10 voting machines. The new largely Black precinct, meanwhile, served some 3,700 voters, with just 25 parking spaces and five machines.

Democrats must move fast on voting

As of 2019, meanwhile, nearly 60 million Americans lived in states so gerrymandered that one or both chambers of their state legislature were controlled by Republicans after the 2018 elections, even though Democratic candidates won more statewide votes. In Michigan, a gerrymandered legislature overruled a statewide initiative and enacted an emergency manager provision that led to the Flint water crisis, a Legionnaire's disease outbreak and children with lead poisoning.

Florida's gerrymandered legislature gutted a 2018 constitutional amendment that restored voting rights to 1.4 million citizens who served their time and completed a felony sentence. Almost two-thirds of Floridians voted to unwind this cruel vestige of the Jim Crow south. The legislature responded with another racist suppression tool: A poll tax, requiring all fines and fees associated with a sentence to be paid. Only an estimated 31,000 of those 1.4 million people won back the franchise. In November, then-President Donald Trump carried the state by 370,000 votes.

The violent mobs that overran the Capitol were an especially vivid and horrifying example of how democracies die. Yet every day, if you look, there have been quieter but still unacceptable examples like these. When officials rig the rules, suppress votes through racist means, and allow vastly unequal access to the ballot box, democracy rots from the inside.

It's time to act. Voting rights are civil rights. It is crucial that the new Democratic majority in Washington move quickly to ensure that the sacred right to vote is protected for us all. The good news is that Democrats appear to have gotten the message. The "For The People Act," the first bill introduced in this new Congress, provides valuable and sweeping protections that would go a long way toward ending all these inequities and ensuring that every voice is heard, equally.

End purges, protect early voting

It would ban partisan gerrymandering and require independent commissions draw our congressional districts, not self-interested politicians. Felon disenfranchisement would be ended, everywhere, strengthening communities, restoring a civic voice to millions, and offering a H.R. 1 second chance to returning citizens. Every state would need to offer two weeks of early voting and distribute the early voting sites fairly across all neighborhoods. That would stop state legislatures from eliminating the exact times when Black voters tend to vote early, as North Carolina and other states have attempted to do.

Ever since the Supreme Court gutted the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act, states have also used unfair and unreliable purges of the voting rolls that have whacked 32 million people from the rolls between 2014 and 2018, disproportionately voters of color and with Latino and Asian last names. The For The People Act would guard against that happening again.

Just as importantly, while guarding against bad things, this legislation would actively make voting easier and safer — guaranteeing automatic voter registration, same-day registration and online registration for all Americans.

The fight has been the same since the brutality in Selma helped win the 1965 Voting Rights Act: Our democracy is only equal when all Americans have the same access to the ballot. The Capitol siege reminds us, once again, that these battles are hardly consigned to the past, and that the decay began before Trump's presidency and will not disappear now that it has mercifully ended.

Black voters in Georgia helped Democrats regain the U.S. Senate. Now it is time to use that power that we won, together, to secure the right to vote for us all.

The Washington Post

The Fight to Revive Our Democracy Has Only Just Begun

BY KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL (OPINION) | JANUARY 26, 2021

Last Wednesday, when President Biden was sworn into office on the same Capitol steps recently overrun by insurrectionists, the message to the nation was clear: Democracy had been tested, and democracy had prevailed. National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman described the day's significance: "We've seen a force," she said, "that would shatter our nation rather than share it, would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy. But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated."

Yet it would be a mistake to think the fight to preserve and revive our flawed democracy concluded on Inauguration Day. In fact, it has only begun. The Capitol siege was just the latest and most brazen instance of politicians leading efforts to delay democracy when it threatens their power — by suppressing the votes of political opponents, giving corporate funding undue influence over the people's representatives and structuring Congress so that favored factions can hold on to outsize power. This trend is growing even more dangerous now that the coronavirus pandemic has made voting even more difficult, and toxic lies about election fraud have fueled further voting restrictions. In the words of Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), "this moment might be our last opportunity to shore up American democracy and prevent it from sliding further into a state of chaos, dysfunction, and billionaire-fueled minority rule."

Fortunately, the new Congress is already fighting to restore democracy. One of the first bills before the new Senate — submitted as S. 1 to reflect its importance — will be Sen. Jeff Merkley's (D-Ore.) For the People Act. The act is the Senate counterpart to the House's For the People Act, a sweeping piece of legislation spearheaded by Sarbanes and passed in 2019. Both versions of the legislation

would implement automatic voter registration, expand same-day voter registration and institute early voting nationwide. Also awaiting a vote in the Senate is the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would restore parts of the Voting Rights Act the Supreme Court struck down in 2013. Together, these bills would do more to protect and expand the right to vote than any legislation passed since the Great Society.

True small-d democracy, however, also requires that these votes actually matter — that they determine the direction in which the country moves. This is an even tougher fight, but the For the People Act includes several provisions that form a solid start. Both the House and Senate versions combat extreme partisan gerrymandering by requiring redistricting to be led by independent commissions. They also fight “dark money” in politics by requiring all political organizations to disclose their donors. This would incentivize legislators to work on behalf of constituents, not corporations, and promote the small-dollar campaign funding that gives more Americans a fair shot at winning elected offices.

In addition to passing this legislation, lawmakers will need to be committed to tackling structural obstacles that have delayed democracy for far too many, for far too long. A truly well-functioning democracy would welcome the District of Columbia as a state and offer a referendum on statehood for Puerto Rico to end the disgraceful practice of taxation without representation for millions of Americans. It would do away with the electoral college, so that every citizen gets an equal say in who becomes the president. And it would rethink or even get rid of the filibuster that has turned the Senate into what former senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.) called a “graveyard for progress” — a place where senators cannot legislate on behalf of their constituents because they simply cannot legislate at all. Already, Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) is abusing the filibuster by threatening to block a necessary bill that sets rules and committee assignments for the new session. If this obstruction continues, Democrats will have no choice but to end the filibuster for good.

These will undoubtedly be tough fights, especially as so many crises compete for public attention. But we cannot forget that on Jan. 6, the same day a mob attempted to overturn our election, we celebrated the results in Georgia's runoff elections. Ending the voter suppression that shaped Georgia's politics for decades once seemed a hopeless battle. But a successful fight to implement automatic voter registration in 2016 and a years-long campaign to get out the vote resulted, at long last, in a sea change in the state's politics. It's because of that work that Democrats have a chance to legislate in the first place. Making investments in democracy now will ensure that the country has a credible shot at taking on the problems we face in the long term — and prove that, as Amanda Gorman put it so eloquently, democracy can only be delayed, never defeated.

Esquire

If We Don't Pass H.R. 1, 'We Are F*cked as a Nation'

BY JACK HOLMES | JANUARY 25, 2021

1-6-2021 is not a collection of numbers that evokes visions of an American democratic republic in vibrant good health. A violent insurrection will do that. But we should also have a look at another number: $14 billion. That's the pile of cash that the Center for Responsive Politics estimates was spent trying to influence the 2020 elections. That's more than twice as much as was spent in 2016.

Billions of it took the form of so-called "dark money," where donors route their money through organizations designated as "non-profits," which don't have to disclose their donors. It's a deluge of dollars, much of it opaque and difficult to trace, spent to put people in positions of power. Nobody spends this kind of money without looking for something in return. It's a corrosive element eating away at the foundations of the American project, and it's not the only one.

“It's all seamlessly connected in the public's mind,” says Congressman John Sarbanes, who's represented Maryland's 3rd congressional district since 2007. He says that through those years, his constituents have told him some version of the same few things, over and over: “We want to be able to vote for you, when you get there we want you to keep paying attention to us, and don't get tangled up in the money.” He added: “That should not be a tall order for somebody who wants to represent Americans in our democracy. At heart, you distill it all down, that's what we're trying to achieve with this bill.”

The bill is H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which Sarbanes has sponsored for the second consecutive Congress. In the 116th Congress, which followed on the 2018 midterms—price tag $5.7 billion—the bill passed the House with sweeping Democratic support, even as the Democratic Party got into big money, including

the dark variety, in a big way. The bill promptly died ‘neath the scythe of “Grim Reaper” Mitch McConnell in the Senate. But Chuck Schumer is (just barely) calling the shots in the upper chamber now, and Democrats have introduced S. 1, an almost identical companion to H.R. 1. The numbers here will, perhaps, prove a good omen: that they received the #1 designation suggest their core concern for the integrity of American democracy itself—and hopefully, the urgency with which Democratic leadership will see them considered on the floor. The situation is, after all, quite urgent.

“If we don't see sweeping reforms that are contained in this bill passed, we are fucked as a nation,” says Josh Silver of Represent.Us, a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to ending political corruption, extremism, and gridlock. Since 2012, the organization has promoted a piece of model legislation, the American Anti-Corruption Act, that is similar to H.R. 1. “Like, we will continue our decline into authoritarianism,” he added. “It is these problems that the bill addresses that are the root cause of the extremism and polarization that gave rise to Trump and the new sort of anti-representative form of government that the Republican Party has chosen to embrace. And I'm saying that as a truly nonpartisan guy.” Luckily, the bill enjoys broad support among the general public: 67 percent, according to one survey, including 56 percent of Republicans.

The first pillar of the legislation is clean and fair elections. “Title one of H.R. 1 is John Lewis's Voter Empowerment Act,” Sarbanes says, which “he introduced for five congresses in a row to try to make voting easier, and access to the ballot box easier and more convenient for people.” The bill would create automatic voter registration across the country, expand early and absentee voting, restore voting rights for felons, streamline the vote-by-mail process, and more. It prohibits various voter-suppression tactics currently in vogue, like the voter purges we've seen in Ohio and Georgia, and enhances election security through promoting the use of paper ballots and strengthening oversight of election-system vendors.

The bill also takes on the partisan gerrymandering that is driving so much extremism in our politics. As it stands, the vast majority of House races are not competitive because the parties draw districts in a way that ensures they will be safely Republican or Democratic. (They "pack" voters of one stripe into a single district, or "crack" them across a bunch of districts to dilute their representation.) Politicians get to pick their own voters, rather than the other way around, and in the process they create an environment where only primary elections are competitive. That in turn leads to a situation where the only mistake you can make in a red district is to be insufficiently conservative, which incentivizes extremism and disincentivizes cooperation (and sanity). Instead of party leaders in state legislatures drawing the districts to benefit themselves and their co-partisans, states would use independent commissions policed by strong conflict-of-interest rules. District maps would be approved differently, and would be more easily challenged on the basis they are partisan and unrepresentative.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Our System Is Rigged So the Minority Can Rule

BY JESSE JACKSON (OPINION) | JANUARY 25, 2021

The majority does not rule in the United States. The foundation of any democracy — one person, one vote — is mocked by institutionalized impediments that allow the minority to win even when they lose at the ballot box. In this era, even when Democrats win, they lose. And the will of the majority of the people is frustrated by a system rigged to empower the minority.

…

The Democratic majority in the House has passed legislation — H.R. 1 in the last session of Congress — that would remedy some of these inequities. The 51-vote majority in the new Senate wants this to be its first act. But, of course, if the filibuster is sustained the minority will block even these common-sense reforms.

The sacking of the Capitol sent a message around the world that America's democracy is literally under siege. The reality is worse: our system is rigged so that the minority can rule. The disconnect — the frustration of the will of the majority — is a clear and present danger.

Bloomberg

Biden Won, But Democracy's Fate Is Still Uncertain

BY FRANK WILKINSON (OPINION) | JANUARY 24, 2021

Strengthening America's battered democracy will require continued efforts across a range of distinct yet related realms — legal, political and cultural. They will meet fierce opposition.

…

Democratic members of Congress, many of whom are lawyers, responded to Republican transgressions with legal remedies of their own. In 2019, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1, a massive overhaul of voting rights and election administration. That bill has been revived in this Congress. It would blunt efforts to restrict voting and to gerrymander legislative districts. It calls for automatic voter registration and easier voting (including by mail), and it makes it more difficult for states to purge voters from registration lists, a tactic employed in Florida, Georgia and other states to reduce Democratic votes. To bolster voting rights against a Supreme Court that has undermined them, it calls for restoration of "protections for voters against practices in States and localities plagued by the persistence of voter disenfranchisement."

To battle egregious gerrymandering in states such as Wisconsin, where Republicans command a large majority of seats on the basis of a minority of votes, the bill requires states to use independent redistricting commissions, with members drawn randomly from both partisan and independent pools of candidates, to draw congressional districts. The bill also provides funds for enhanced election security, and it would restructure the Federal Election Commission in an effort to make the broken commission a functional cop on the elections beat.

Another bill, the Protecting Our Democracy Act, offers a litany of defensive maneuvers against crimes and ethics violations that Trump committed. It seeks to prevent abuse of the pardon power, which Trump wielded to reward criminal confederates, and codifies the Constitution's emoluments clause to prevent a president from, among other things, funneling domestic or foreign funds to his businesses.

The law would also strengthen Congress's hand against a rogue executive, protecting whistle blowers and executive-branch inspectors general and codifying Congress's power to subpoena executive personnel to investigate wrongdoing and incompetence.

Passing such laws likely requires eliminating the filibuster, which enables a minority of 41 senators to block legislation. Democrats have not reached consensus on doing so. But they may very soon face a choice between filibuster reform or failure.

Democrats Make Federal Election Standards A Top Priority

BY CHRISTINA ALMEIDA CASSIDY | JANUARY 23, 2021

House Democrats plan to move quickly on one of the first bills of the new Congress, citing the need for federal election standards and other reforms to shore up the foundations of American democracy after a tumultuous post-election period and deadly riot at the Capitol.

States have long had disparate and contradictory rules for running elections. But the 2020 election, which featured pandemic-related changes to ease voting and then a flood of lawsuits by former President Donald Trump and his allies, underscored the differences from state to state: Mail-in ballots due on Election Day or just postmarked by then? Absentee voting allowed for all or just voters with an excuse? Same-day or advance-only registration?

Democrats, asserting constitutional authority to set the time, place and manner of federal elections, want national rules they say would make voting more uniform, accessible and fair across the nation. The bill would mandate early voting, same-day registration and other long-sought reforms that Republicans reject as federal overreach.

“We have just literally seen an attack on our own democracy,” said U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, a Democrat from Minnesota, referring to the Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol. “I cannot think of a more timely moment to start moving on democracy reform.”

The legislation first introduced two years ago, known as the For the People Act, also would give independent commissions the job of drawing congressional

districts, require political groups to disclose high-dollar donors, create reporting requirements for online political ads and, in a rearview nod at Trump, obligate presidents to disclose their tax returns.

Republican opposition was fierce during the last session. At the time, then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., labeled it the “Democrat Politician Protection Act” and said in an op-ed that Democrats were seeking to “change the rules of American politics to benefit one party.”

While Democrats control Congress for the first time in a decade, the measure’s fate depends on whether enough Republicans can be persuaded to reconsider a bill they have repeatedly rejected. If not, Democrats could decide it’s time to take the extraordinary and difficult step of eliminating the Senate filibuster, a procedural tool often used by the minority party to block bills under rules that require 60 votes to advance legislation.

Advocates say the bill is the most consequential piece of voting legislation since the Voting Rights Act of 1965. House Democrats vowed two years ago to make the bill a priority, and they reintroduced it this month as H.R. 1, underscoring its importance to the party.

“People just want to be able to cast their vote without it being an ordeal,” said Rep. John Sarbanes, a Democrat from Maryland who is the lead sponsor of the House bill. “It’s crazy in America that you still have to navigate an obstacle course to get to the ballot box.”

Current plans would have the full House take up the bill as soon as the first week of February. The Senate Rules Committee would then consider a companion bill introduced in the Senate, and a tie vote there could allow it to move out of committee and to the floor as early as next month, said Klobuchar, who is expected to become the committee’s next chair.

A quick vote would be remarkable considering the Senate also is likely to be juggling Trump's impeachment trial, confirmation of President Joe Biden's Cabinet choices and another round of coronavirus relief.

While states have long had different voting procedures, the November 2020 election highlighted how the variability could be used to sow doubt about the outcome. The bill's supporters, which include national voting and civil rights organizations, cited dozens of pre-election lawsuits that challenged procedural rules, such as whether ballots postmarked on Election Day should count.

They also pointed to the post-election litigation Trump and his allies filed to try to get millions of legitimately cast ballots tossed out. Many of those lawsuits targeted election changes intended to make voting easier. That included a Pennsylvania law the state's Republican-led legislature passed before the pandemic to make absentee ballots available to all registered voters upon request.

Government and election officials repeatedly have described the election as the most secure in U.S. history. Even former U.S. Attorney General Bill Barr, a Trump ally, said before leaving his post that there was no evidence of widespread fraud that would overturn the result.

"The strategy of lying about voter fraud, delegitimizing the election outcome and trying to suppress votes has been unmasked for the illegitimate attack on our democracy that it is, and I think that it opens a lot more doors to real conversations about how to fix our voting system and root out this cancer," said Wendy Weiser, head of the democracy program at the Brennan Center for Justice, a public policy institute.

Along with the election reform bill, the House two years ago introduced a related bill, now known as the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act in honor of the late civil rights activist and congressman. House Democrats are expected to

reintroduce it soon after it had similarly stalled in the Republican-controlled Senate.

That bill would restore a key provision of the Voting Rights Act that had triggered federal scrutiny of election changes in certain states and counties. A 2013 U.S. Supreme Court ruling set aside the method used to identify jurisdictions subject to the provision, known as preclearance, which was used to protect voting rights in places with a history of discrimination.

In general, state election officials have been wary of federal voting requirements. But those serving in states led by Democrats have been more open and want to ensure Congress provides money to help them make system upgrades, which the bill does.

“If you still believe in what we all learned in high school government class, that democracy works best when as many eligible people participate, these are commonsense reforms,” said Sen. Alex Padilla, a Democrat who oversaw California’s elections before being appointed to the seat formerly held by Vice President Kamala Harris.

The New York Times

Democrats, Here's How to Lose in 2022. And Deserve It.

BY EZRA KLEIN (OPINION) | JANUARY 21, 2021

President Biden takes office with a ticking clock. The Democrats' margin in the House and Senate couldn't be thinner, and midterms typically raze the governing party. That gives Democrats two years to govern. Two years to prove that the American political system can work. Two years to show Trumpism was an experiment that need not be repeated.

Two years.

This is the responsibility the Democratic majority must bear: If they fail or falter, they will open the door for Trumpism or something like it to return, and there is every reason to believe it will be far worse next time. To stop it, Democrats need to reimagine their role. They cannot merely defend the political system. They must rebuild it.

…

But now Democrats have another chance. To avoid the mistakes of the past, three principles should guide their efforts. First, they need to help people fast and visibly. Second, they need to take politics seriously, recognizing that defeat in 2022 will result in catastrophe.

The Trumpist Republican Party needs to be politically discredited through repeated losses; it cannot simply be allowed to ride back to primacy on the coattails of Democratic failure. And, finally, they need to do more than talk about the importance of democracy. They need to deepen American democracy.
The good news is that Democrats have learned many of these lessons, at least in theory. The $1.9 trillion rescue plan Biden proposed is packed with ideas that

would make an undeniable difference in people's lives, from $1,400 checks to paid leave to the construction of a national coronavirus testing infrastructure that will allow some semblance of normal life to resume.

And congressional Democrats have united behind sweeping legislation to expand American democracy. The "For The People Act," which House Democrats passed in 2019 and Senate Democrats have said will be their first bill in the new session, would do more to protect and expand the right to vote than any legislation passed since the Great Society, and it would go a long way toward building a fairer and more transparent campaign financing system. In June, House Democrats passed a bill granting statehood to Washington, D.C., which would end one of the most appalling cases of systematic disenfranchisement in the country.

…

In other words, what Democrats need to do is simple: Just help people, and do it fast.

RollingStone

Democrats Have a Plan to Start Rebuilding American Democracy. Can They Get It Done?

BY ANDY KROLL | JANUARY 20, 2021

From the moment President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are sworn in at noon on Wednesday, they will face multiple and intertwined crises. A raging pandemic that has now killed more than 400,000 Americans. A deeply unequal economic crash that has claimed millions of jobs while enriching the very wealthy. Fast action to meet these crises with the urgency they deserve is at the top of the Biden-Harris administration's to-do list, including a proposed $1.9 trillion pandemic relief plan.

But there is another, deeper crisis, one decades in the making, that the Biden administration and the Democratic-controlled House and Senate intend to confront in the coming days — namely, the rickety state of American democracy.

The January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol brought into hideous relief the perilous condition of the oldest democracy in the world. But the mob assault on the Capitol was a capstone, the latest in a long line of symptoms that the American system of government was flatlining. Those other symptoms include, but are by no means limited to, racially motivated voter suppression, politically driven gerrymandering, the influence of the super-wealthy and corporations in elections, the flow of untraceable dark money, and the spread of viral disinformation such that Americans can't even agree on basic facts anymore.

To meet this crisis, House and Senate Democrats have introduced a pair of companion bills, both titled the For the People Act, a mega-bill filled with reforms and repairs that would begin the long-overdue work of restoring American democracy. House Democrats first introduced and passed H.R. 1 in 2019, but

then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell blocked the bill from passage. Now, with Democrats in control of Congress, H.R. 1 and S. 1, the Senate companion bill, are a top priority for the Democratic Congress and President Biden.

Rolling Stone spoke with one of the architects of H.R. 1, Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD), about what's in the new version of the bill, how the late Congressman John Lewis shaped H.R. 1's sweeping set of voting-rights reforms, and the bill's prospects for passage in Congress.

Can you give a breakdown of what's in H.R. 1?

H.R. 1 pulls together all these different core elements of reform that we know the public is anxious to see, particularly at a moment when there's clear evidence that our democracy is in a fragile state and needs its foundation shored up.

There's a whole set of reforms in the voting rights basket where we try to make it possible for people to get to the ballot box without having to run an obstacle course every two years — things that make it convenient for a person to cast their vote in America. The entirety of the voting section is basically the Voter Empowerment Act, which was John Lewis' signature legislation. John Lewis is really a central figure to this bill. Support for this bill and passage of it is central to preserving and carrying forward John Lewis' legacy.

There's a set of reforms about political gerrymandering and trying to change that so we don't have partisan gerrymandering but instead a process that's more objective in establishing congressional district lines. We've heard for years from people that they view this as a matter of fundamental respect. And then based on all the attacks we've seen on election infrastructure from foreign actors, we want to protect those systems so they're more resilient.

We know that people have become disillusioned about ethics and accountability in Washington. We have provisions to strengthen ethics rules and transparency rules, so that people know when their elected officials go to Washington, they're going to act in the people's interest, not their own self interest. That means addressing the undue influences that big money has in our politics and in the way we govern, including disclosure requirements so we know where dark money is coming from, and reforming the Federal Election Commission so it can actually do its job and blow the whistle when people break the rules in the campaign finance space.

It also means setting up a small-donor matching system of public financing to make it possible to run for office without having to know people with a lot of money. That way, when they get to Washington, they continue to represent the voters' interest, not get hijacked back by the inside crowd.

Statement on the Principles of Democracy

BY AMERICA'S LEADING POLITICAL SCIENTISTS, ACADEMICS AND SUBJECT-MATTER EXPERTS | JANUARY 19, 2021

We, the undersigned, are scholars of democracy who have watched the recent deterioration of U.S. democracy with growing alarm.

We recognize in American democracy today many dangerous conditions from other declining democracies: hyper-partisan polarization, mutual political enmity and distrust, zero-sum politics, lack of tolerance for opposition and minorities, rampant propagation of falsehoods and conspiracy theories, and the encouragement or rationalization of violence. The willingness of prominent politicians to violate basic democratic norms is a common warning sign of democratic distress. And when these violations become routine and expected, the downward spiral is very hard to reverse.

But we also see something uniquely dangerous in America right now — an electoral system that allows for minority rule. It is not only possible but now common for one party to win the presidency and the Senate, and then seek to establish long-term control over the judiciary despite a majority of citizens preferring a different party. It has also become common under divided government for an opposing party to obstruct on purely partisan grounds a president's ability to even have judicial nominations considered.

It is one thing to ensure that the rights of political (and other) minorities are respected, to plant, as our constitution does, restraints on majority rule. But it is quite something else in a democracy to give a political minority the power to rule. Minority rule is dangerous in two respects.

First, it undermines the legitimacy of governing institutions. A basic principle of democratic legitimacy is that a government must have majority support in order to make policy. A government that allows a minority to rule over a majority (especially for a prolonged period) violates this principle.

Second, and more dangerously, minority rule can prompt and enable the minority party to take increasingly radical and anti-democratic actions to entrench its dominance, by changing the rules to make it harder for its opponents to win elections, or even to cast ballots.

The minimum condition for a system to be democratic is that its people can choose and replace their leaders in free and fair elections. When a ruling party bends the rules to suppress opposition votes or rig the political playing field, a country can no longer be said to be a democracy, no matter how much it may allow freedom of the press and association.

As the world's oldest democracy, the American system suffers from many deficiencies and anachronisms in need of reform. But no goal of democratic reform is more urgent and foundational than the fairness and representativeness of our political system.

The Congress should take the following steps to enhance democratic equality and fairness:

- Defend and expand the right to vote for all Americans.

- Require nonpartisan commissions in each state to redraw congressional and state legislative districts, so that state legislatures can no longer gerrymander districts to advantage their party.

- End the ability of a small group of ultra-wealthy donors to secretly bankroll candidates and parties by requiring transparency in all political spending.

- Narrow the conditions under which the Senate filibuster can be used as a tool of legislative obstruction.

- Grant the people of the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico the right to vote for statehood, which would provide full and equal representation to nearly four million Americans who are currently disenfranchised.
- Establish a nonpartisan, independent federal elections agency to ensure that the voting process is fair, consistent, secure and legitimate.

- Study ways to reduce politicization of the federal courts.

The first three of these steps would be accomplished by the passage of H.R. 1, the For the People Act.

None of these reforms should be dismissed as partisan. Each of them seeks to address problems of unfairness and dysfunctionality that are eroding the capacity and legitimacy of American democracy at home and abroad. Each would make our precious constitutional system a more just and workable democracy, better able to address the great policy challenges that now confront us.

This is only a partial agenda for renewing our democracy. There would still remain the longer-term task of altering other perverse incentives that drive the hyper-partisan polarization of our politics. But these are harder questions that will likely require even bigger solutions.

In the near term, however, we urge our elected leaders to take these initial steps to make our democracy fairer, more inclusive, and more capable of addressing our major policy challenges. Even a democracy that seeks to prevent “tyranny of

the majority” through checks and balances must ensure that, over time, government reflects the voice and interests of the majority, as they emerge through free, fair, and equal elections. Otherwise, democracy deteriorates into “tyranny of the minority.”

HUFFPOST

Senate Democrats Announce First Order of Business for New Majority: Fixing Democracy

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | JANUARY 19, 2021

After Democrats won control of the House of Representatives in the 2018 midterm elections, they introduced and passed the For the People Act as H.R. 1 — the first bill of their majority. It aimed to restore voting rights, reform campaign finance laws and enhance ethics enforcement. Senate Democrats have now done the same after reclaiming the chamber majority with the introduction of S. 1, their version of the For the People Act.

These nearly identical bills contain a suite of policies to protect, enhance and expand democracy, according to supporters. These policies would institute national standards for expanded voting rights, create a system for publicly financed congressional elections, ban undisclosed “dark money” and forbid partisan gerrymandering.

But there’s more urgency now. American democracy is imperiled like at no other time in modern history; the country is coming off an election in which President Donald Trump refused to accept his loss. With the help of national and local Republicans, he launched legal efforts to overturn or nullify the voting results. These lies culminated in the violent sacking of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 that left five people dead.

“We have all been reminded in the starkest terms that government of the people, by the people, and for the people is not guaranteed,” Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), the lead Senate sponsor of the For the People Act, said in a statement introducing the bill. “A violent assault on the Capitol is not the only way to attack democracy. Everyone who believes in our Constitutional vision should support

reforms that make sure the American people are able to vote and that their government reflects their preferences and works for them."

Democrats prioritized these reforms in 2019 in response to the ever-growing influence of money in politics; greater Republican Party efforts to make voting more difficult, particularly for racial minority groups; and the rising threat of minority rule. These issues remain as well.
Democrats do not intend to waste time. The House bill, introduced by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) on Jan. 4, could get a floor vote as early as Jan. 28, according to a congressional aide. But it may take longer for the bill to move on the Senate side.

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), the outgoing majority leader, attacked the 2019 bill as "socialist" as he blocked consideration in the Senate. But with a new majority soon to be in place, the legislation can get full consideration, although Senate Democrats will need to hold hearings first in the relevant committees and then the Rules Committee before advancing the bill to the floor. But it may need to wait until after Congress passes another round of COVID-19 relief.
The bill would need to receive 60 votes to prevent it from being blocked by a Republican filibuster on the floor. That is unless Democrats decide to end the use of the filibuster entirely or on a case-by-case basis. Though such considerations have been discussed, there remains no consensus on how Democrats will approach the filibuster in the coming months.

There is a lot at stake in whether Democrats can pass the For the People Act quickly. State-level Republicans are already gearing up to pass a raft of new voting restrictions in states including Georgia and Texas, inspired by Trump's lies about widespread voter fraud in the November election. The states will also begin a new round of redistricting this year, which could cement Republican Party gerrymanders in dozens of states for another 10 years.

The first section of the bill would institute national standards for voting in every state to expand access to the ballot. These include mandating automatic voter registration, same-day voter registration, at least 15 days of early in-person voting, “no excuse” mail-in voting with postage prepaid, online voter registration and the restoration of voting rights to felons upon release from custody.

The bill would also block states from making it harder to vote by banning certain voter purge practices while imposing new penalties for deceptive electioneering. And it would require every state election system to maintain a paper ballot trail, among many other election security provisions.

This section was largely written by the late Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), a civil rights hero. It was Lewis who first introduced these reforms as the Voter Empowerment Act in each Congress beginning in 2012 until his death in 2020. He incorporated them into the For the People Act in 2019 as a co-author along with the bill’s lead sponsor Sarbanes and many other Democratic lawmakers.

In addition to the voting rights reforms first proposed by Lewis, the bill also includes a requirement that every state appoint an independent and nonpartisan redistricting board to draw new congressional districts after each decennial census.

The For the People Act also provides a list of congressional findings in support of the passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Act of 2021, which will be introduced in the House separately.
The section of the bill contains a litany of campaign finance reforms built on the work of Sarbanes and others over the past decade.

It would create the first public financing for congressional elections in which candidates would receive $6 for every $1 in funds raised from donations up to $200. Participants in this voluntary public financing system would also be

prevented from raising money from large donors. The bill creates a similar small-donor matching system for presidential elections.

Previously introduced election transparency proposals are also in the bill, including the Disclose Act, which would ban undisclosed dark money spent by political nonprofits on elections, and the Honest Ads Act, which mandates the disclosure of the buyers of digital and social media advertising.

The Federal Election Commission would be reconfigured from six members to five to prevent deadlocks on important issues. Coordination between super PACs and candidates would be defined in the legislation and banned. Presidential inauguration committees would be required to disclose expenditures and be banned from spending money on anything not related to the actual inauguration.

Beyond voting rights and campaign finance reforms, the bill expands ethics and lobbying laws to take on both long-standing abuses and those made evident by the pervasive corruption of the Trump administration.

Every presidential candidate would be required to disclose 10 years' worth of tax returns under the bill. The president and the vice president would be required to conduct themselves as though the executive branch's conflict-of-interest regulations apply to them. And neither the president nor the vice president would be allowed to hold a contract with the U.S. government, as Trump did for his hotel in Washington, D.C.

The Office of Government Ethics would get new enforcement powers, and ethics waivers issued by OGE would have to be publicly disclosed. The bill also closes lobbying disclosure loopholes by requiring all people engaged in lobbying to register whether they contact government officials or not.

And for the first time, the Supreme Court would be required to institute a code of ethics to govern conflicts of interest and recusals.

MSNBC

As Dems Prepare to Govern, Bolstering Democracy Is a Top Priority

BY STEVE BENEN | JANUARY 19, 2021

At roughly this point two years ago, House Democrats announced that they'd set aside H.R. 1 for a bill called the For the People Act, a sweeping reform package intended to expand voting rights, and end partisan gerrymandering, among other things. Or put another way, as 2019 got underway, Democrats made clear they intended to strengthen our democracy itself.

It passed the House two months later, before Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) made clear that his Republican-led chamber would not consider the legislation. The GOP leader condemned it as a "half-baked socialist proposal," proving in the process that Republicans no longer know or care what “socialist” means.

But two years later, it's a new Congress; there will soon be a new president; and McConnell is poised to lose control of the Senate. With this in mind, House Democratic leaders recently reintroduced the For the People Act as the new H.R. 1, intended to address "rampant voter suppression, gerrymandering, and a torrent of special interest dark money.”

This morning, Senate Democratic leaders -- which is to say, the leaders of the incoming Senate majority -- announced that they've also made the For the People Act their S. 1 for the new Congress.

Soon-to-be Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a written statement, “From a violent insurrection at the Capitol to the countless attempts to

silence the vote of millions of Americans, attacks on our democracy have come in many forms. Senate Democrats are committed to advancing real solutions and fighting to uphold the core tenets of our constitution, which is why we are announcing today that the first bill of the new Congress will be the For the People Act.”

Schumer added, "Anyone who believes in a government by the people and for the people should support this important legislation.”

…

In July, former President Barack Obama spoke at the late Rep. John Lewis' funeral, and explained that the best possible way to honor Lewis and his legacy would be to revitalize American voting rights -- not only by restoring the Voting Rights Act gutted by conservative Supreme Court justices, but also by, among other things, advancing automatic voter registration, re-enfranchisement for former felons, expanding polling locations and early voting, and making Election Day a national holiday -- and some of these elements are included in the new S. 1.

The Washington Post

An Early Move from Democrats Seeks to Undo an Ugly Part of Trump's Legacy

BY GREG SARGENT (OPINION) | JANUARY 19, 2021

After President Trump undertook an unprecedented effort to overturn the election, and after Trump incited a mob assault on lawmakers who resisted that scheme, many Republicans have already signaled how they'll carry forward this aspect of his legacy: by doubling down on counter-majoritarian tactics.

So it's good news that one of the first moves from Senate Democrats in the majority will be the introduction of a sweeping pro-democracy package that would widen access to voting and seek to ensure that executive branch officials operate in the public interest.

The first honorary bill from Senate Democrats in the 117th Congress will be the For the People Act, a Democratic aide confirms to me. It will be announced Tuesday by Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), the incoming majority leader, and Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), its lead sponsor.

Here's why this could get interesting. It could set up an early clash with Republicans over how each party will respond to the legacy of Trump's extraordinary assault on our democracy, with one party moving to aggressively expand the franchise, and the other seeking to further restrict it.

It will also test the commitments of other actors in the wake of this legacy, probing whether a new, pro-democracy center-right is emerging as a foil to Republicans who are already gearing up to respond to the party's 2020 losses with a renewed commitment to minority rule tactics.

New York Intelligencer

Democrats Push Voting-Rights Expansion with Fresh Urgency

BY ED KILGORE | JNUARY 19, 2021

When the House passed the For the People Act, a package of voting, redistricting, and campaign-finance reforms, in March of 2019, it was a symbolic and aspirational effort. It passed on a strict party-line vote. Its significance as a Democratic "messaging" vehicle was reflected in its designation as H.R. 1, the first bill introduced in the 116th Congress.

The bill is back as H.R. 1 in the 117th Congress, but this time it will also be the first bill introduced when Democrats take over the Senate this week. The Republican majority in the Senate over the past four years made democracy-reform legislation a nonstarter. But now a Democratic governing trifecta in Washington gives such reforms a new impetus, as does the baleful experience of the 2020 election cycle, in which Republicans aligned with the Trump administration doubled down on a strategy of suppressing as many votes as possible and then trying to keep votes already cast from being counted or reflected in the final Electoral College balloting for the presidency.

…

Democrats have set down an important marker with the For the People Act and the parallel reforms, and will constantly seek to expose the authoritarian tendencies in the GOP that have led it to abandon a once-strong bipartisan tradition of support for voting rights and other "good government" practices.

Roll Call

Democrats Seek Momentum for Voting, Political Money Overhaul

BY KATE ACKLEY | JANUARY 19, 2021

Democrats, on the cusp of holding the slimmest possible majority in the chamber, signaled Tuesday a symbolic first order of business: a major overhaul of the nation's voting, campaign finance and ethics laws.

The measure, dubbed H.R. 1 in the House and now christened in the Senate as S. 1 to signify that it is a top priority, died in the GOP-controlled Senate last Congress. It could see the same fate again in the 117th Congress unless Democrats remove the 60-vote threshold to end filibusters on legislation, a change the party's base eagerly wants but remains in doubt.

Advocates pushing for the overhaul said they were mobilizing anew to build public support in both chambers. House Democrats expect to take up the measure as soon as this month or next, congressional aides said, as it closely tracks the same bill in the last Congress.

Congressional Democrats, as well as representatives of outside groups pushing for passage of the package, said the overhaul would help shore up voters' confidence in a democracy damaged by a violent attempted insurrection at the Capitol on Jan. 6 and after four years of corruption scandals and flouting of ethics norms during Donald Trump's presidency.

…

The bill would create nationwide automatic voter registration and require paper ballots in all jurisdictions. It would set up a 6-to-1 optional public financing system to pay for congressional campaigns and tighten disclosure rules for political groups and super PACs that spend money to influence elections.

It would require early voting and expand voting by mail, two changes made hastily in some states to cope with the pandemic in 2020 that Trump and many of his GOP allies falsely charged led to fraud. Some House Republicans have responded with their own bill that would sharply curtail such practices in federal elections.

The bill would also put new limitations on some behind-the-scenes lobbying efforts, require more disclosure of online political ads and create nonpartisan redistricting efforts, among numerous other provisions.

In the last Congress, every House Democrat signed on to H.R. 1 as a cosponsor.

Bloomberg

Schumer Spearheads Effort to Overhaul Election and Ethics Laws

BY KEN DOYLE | JANUARY 19, 2021

Incoming Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) unveiled on Tuesday legislation to revamp elections and ethics rules, underscoring that an issue that languished in the previous Congress will be a top priority for Democrats as they take control of both chambers.

The bill (S. 1) as announced includes a public financing election provision and is similar to a wide-ranging overhaul measure the House passed in a party-line vote in 2019.

Speaking on the Senate floor Tuesday afternoon about Democratic priorities in the new Congress, Schumer said it's "a package of long overdue reforms to protect our democracy after it has been so attacked in four years and guarantee every American's right to vote."

While the measure can at least get a vote now that Democrats are in control of the Senate thanks to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote, it still faces an uphill battle to overcome a likely Republican filibuster, which requires the support of 60 senators. Outgoing Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) blocked the House-passed measure in the last Congress, saying it was a skewed attempt to benefit Democrats.

Democratic sponsors include Sen. Amy Klobuchar (Minn.), who will chair the Senate Rules and Administration Committee. That panel, which oversees campaign finance and election laws, is expected to spearhead hearings and

other efforts to advance the measure in the Senate after the House passes its version.

…

A reintroduced measure in the House for the 117th Congress could be considered on the floor as soon as next week, though it's more likely to be delayed until February, supporters said. The measure is expected to again pass with only Democratic support.

Senate Democrats Make Democracy Reform First Bill of New Majority

BY JORDAIN CARNEY | JANUARY 19, 2021

Senate Democrats are making a sweeping democracy reform package the first bill they plan to introduce after taking back the majority.

Incoming Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and incoming Rules Committee Chairwoman Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) said on Tuesday that the first bill Senate Democrats will offer will be the For The People Act, which passed the House during the previous Congress but stalled in the GOP-controlled Senate.

“Senate Democrats are committed to advancing real solutions and fighting to uphold the core tenets of our constitution, which is why we are announcing today that the first bill of the new Congress will be the For the People Act,” Schumer said in a statement.

The bill, which is endorsed by a wide swath of progressive and civil rights groups, includes, among other things, changes to voter registration requirements, more funding for election security, requirements for presidents and vice presidents to disclose their tax returns and new ethics rules for members of Congress.

The bill would also require a code of ethics for the Supreme Court, boost public funding for presidential elections and require new disclosures for online advertising.

The decision to make the bill the first offered by the incoming Senate Democratic majority comes after House Democrats made the bill “H.R. 1,” underscoring its status as a top legislative priority.

Klobuchar said as incoming chairwoman of the Senate Rules Committee a “number one priority will be to make voting easier and more secure and to halt the flood of special interest and dark money that is drowning out the voices of the American people.”

THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN
www.santafenewmexican.com

Strengthening Our Democracy — It's How We Move from Jan. 6

BY REP. TERESA LEGER FERNANDEZ (OP-ED) | JANUARY 16, 2021

Our democracy is in a never-ending process of perfecting. It began incredibly imperfect. But since our founding, Americans worked to expand rights, increase access to voting and empower previously marginalized communities. Notably, with the 14th and 19th Amendments, the Indian Citizenship Act, the Civil Rights Acts and most importantly, on-the-ground organizing, our democracy can and is getting better.

But our democracy also is vulnerable and needs protection, the way we must protect anything we love…. The way we protect our democracy is with the hard work of organizing, registering and voting. We push back against those that would limit our vote, or seek to overturn an election — whether by lying about its integrity or storming our Capitol.

We must renew our faith in our election system, and that begins now. We should celebrate the historic turnout, even during a pandemic, for an election that experts acknowledge was the most secure in American history.

…

And we must expand participation. Societies fail when they concentrate power and wealth in the very few. Our strength as a society comes from our democracy. Protecting and nurturing our democracy requires expanding power and resources out to our communities, expanding power to the people so we all can thrive.

State legislatures that pass laws to suppress the vote are only weakening our nation. The late Rep. John Lewis told us that, “Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we called the beloved community, a nation and world society at peace with itself.”

In Congress, we will act. We will pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, and H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which will greatly expand the ability of all citizens to vote, reform campaign finance law, require independent redistricting commissions and prevent states from suppressing the active participation of vulnerable minority communities in our democracy.

…

That is how we move beyond the infamy of Jan. 6.

The Center for Public Integrity

Democrats Push Wide-Ranging Voting, Ethics Reforms in Charged Moment for Democracy

BY CARRIE LEVINE | JANUARY 15, 2021

A sweeping package of voting-rights, government-ethics and anti-corruption measures failed to make it through Congress in 2019, but an updated version of the bill is at the top of Democrats' agenda.

Proponents say the aftermath of the 2020 election and last week's violent attack on the U.S. Capitol makes the need for the legislation more urgent. "If anything, I think the imperative for democracy reform has only grown since 2019," said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Maryland, the bill's sponsor. The legislation "responds directly to this moment when we need to strengthen our democracy."

The 2020 election brought new attention and endless second-guessing to the patchwork of laws and rules governing vote by mail and other key features of elections. Proponents of the bill known colloquially as H.R. 1 — which incorporates voting rights legislation introduced by the late Rep. John Lewis, a Georgia Democrat and civil rights leader — say it would standardize aspects of federal elections and voter registration and increase access to the ballot. The bill would, among other things, create national no-excuse absentee voting and restore the right to vote in federal elections for people with felony convictions who have completed their sentences.

Known formally as the For the People Act, the bill also contains a series of provisions dealing with campaign finance and ethics, such as creating a small-dollar donor matching program to fund elections, instituting new requirements for

disclosure of those behind online political ads, and proposals meant to address Trump administration-era scandals.

This time, with Democrats in control of both houses of Congress and the White House, and given that the bill already ran the gamut of legislative hearings and markups during the last Congress, reform and watchdog groups that support the legislation are hopeful it will become law. They expect it will pass the House within the first 100 days of the new Congress. Final passage still may not be easy because Democrats don't have enough votes to overcome a filibuster in the Senate.

"While neither party will have 60 seats in the Senate any time soon, there are a number of options being considered to get his bill across the finish line," said Aaron Scherb, director of legislative affairs for the watchdog nonprofit group Common Cause, which supports the bill.

H.R. 1 would commit Congress to building a legislative record proponents say would be necessary to document the need to restore preclearance requirements in the Voting Rights Act that were struck down by the Supreme Court in the 2013 Shelby v. Holder case. Separate legislation is pending to restore the Voting Rights Act, and Sarbanes and other proponents said such a record, documenting the need for preclearance of changes that affect voting, would be essential in the event of another court case challenging the requirements.

THE NEW REPUBLIC

How to Fight Climate Change and Fascists at the Same Time

BY KATE ARONOFF | JANUARY 14, 2021

What The best way to contain the militant GOP, while helping the U.S. face global warming and more, is to expand democracy — not the national security state.

…

“Without a political reconstruction and deep reforms to that antebellum electoral system, there is no stopping Trumpism as the dominant force in the Republican Party,” Waleed Shahid and Nelini Stamp wrote this week.

The kinds of commonsense democratic reforms embodied in H.R. 1 — automatic voter registration, the restoration of the Voting Rights Act, and guards against partisan gerrymandering — would help keep politicians from being able to choose their voters, making districts more competitive and allowing more people to vote.

Its campaign finance provisions, in particular, would help limit the fossil fuel industry’s outsize influence over policymaking, with federally financed 6–1 matching funds that would allow small donors to compete with polluting megadonors. It would further support a constitutional amendment to end the system established by the Supreme Court decision Citizens United, which opened the floodgates to unchecked corporate influence.

It would also help slow the revolving door between government and the private sector, among other reforms.

Yet peeling back the laws that favor minority rule in the U.S. also means a more fundamental change to its outdated political system.

…

In the coming weeks, there's guaranteed to be talk of whether fighting the American far right, and holding Donald Trump accountable for inciting a raging mob, will detract from the Biden administration's ability to make progress on Covid-19 relief, climate policy, and other urgent priorities in the first hundred days. The beauty of democratic reform is that it would help the country move toward all of these goals simultaneously. Even the most ambitious of democratic reforms are no quick fix for what ails U.S. democracy, and won't necessarily put robust climate policy within reach. But it's hard to imagine a sustainable twenty-first century without them.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Toomey and Casey Should Prioritize This Legislation Now That Dems Control the Senate

BY ADAM EICHEN AND MICHAEL POLLACK (OP-ED) | JANUARY 13, 2021

Last week's insurrection attempt at the U.S. Capitol Building is a stark reminder that our democratic system is incredibly fragile. Though we may take it for granted, the peaceful transfer of power is neither assured nor inevitable.

…

Healing our nation after such profound desecration requires, first and foremost, consequences for those involved. But if we are serious about protecting our democratic way of life, we must not merely return to the status quo prior to Jan. 6.

To survive as a nation, we must transform our democracy — from one in which a minority can exert more power than a majority; where lies are spread about noncitizens voting to justify the suppression of votes; where politicians can draw district lines to ensure their own reelection; and where lawmakers can be unduly influenced by big donors and corporate elites, to a democracy that enshrines the principles of fairness, equality, and participation at its core.

The good news is that we have the policy solutions to push our democracy in the right direction. In fact, the House of Representatives recently reintroduced the For The People Act, an incredible omnibus bill that would prevent the worst of anti-democratic politics and nationalize many of the most promising pro-democracy reforms.

The For The People Act would, among many other things, end congressional gerrymandering through independent redistricting commissions; limit discriminatory voter purges and voter ID requirements that make it more difficult to vote; implement same day and automatic voter registration nationwide to reduce the barriers to participate; and create a system of public financing for congressional elections to empower small donors across America.

While the House of Representatives passed the For The People Act in 2019, the biggest roadblock to its adoption has always been Sen. Mitch McConnell. As Senate majority leader, he pledged to never let the For The People Act come up for a vote.

But now that the Senate has flipped and Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer is at the helm, this critically important bill now has a chance of becoming law.

In the wake of one of the bleakest days for American democracy and its governing institutions, we call on the Pennsylvania congressional delegation and Sens. Pat Toomey and Bob Casey (the latter previously cosponsored the bill) to make a declaration that they will ensure the For The People Act's passage. Anything less would be to fail to rise to the challenge that this historical moment requires.

NBC NEWS

Trump Supporters Storm the Capitol to Attack Democracy. Here's How Congress Can Save It.

BY LEE DRUTMAN (OP-ED) | JANUARY 7, 2021

What happened Wednesday at the U.S. Capitol should be a moment of rupture for our political system. Something needs to change. America needs a serious democracy reform agenda, one that gives a new and elevated role to the pro-democracy Republicans who have been fighting with their increasingly extreme anti-system party for the last few weeks. Democracy reform has to be the top priority, with at least some Republicans hopping on board and Democrats finding ways to help them get there.

The fissure in the Republican Party that has emerged over the course of President Donald Trump's tenure, and rapidly intensified in the last several weeks as he has alleged election fraud, means the foundation of democracy — free and fair elections followed by a peaceful transfer of power — has itself become a political issue.

A significant percentage of Republican members of Congress decided to undermine the legitimacy of our elections for narrow political gain when they sided with Trump in refusing to recognize Joe Biden as the winner of the Nov. 3 contest. That culminated in the anti-democratic disruption of the counting of Electoral College votes certifying Biden's victory Wednesday, as a mob of Trump supporters stoked by these political leaders invaded the Capitol.

…

The most important priority right now has to be to restore faith in the fairness of the American system of democracy. The good news for the Democrats is that making the system fairer is not only good policy — but it's also good politics,

since democracy reforms like independent redistricting and limiting money in politics are widely supported.

Luckily, the initial step to doing so is already something House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has made the first order of business for her chamber, and in which she will now have a majority of Democratic senators joining her. But because of the current need for 60 senators to break a filibuster, the Democrats will need to bring some Republicans along.

The task is passing H.R. 1, a large-scale democracy reform bill that would, among other things, mandate nonpartisan delineations of congressional districts (to prevent gerrymandering that gives one party disproportionate power), make it easier for citizens to vote and implement major campaign finance reform — and then empower a new federal agency to implement and enforce the new rules to ensure the voting process is fair, consistent, secure and legitimate. These all have the benefit of being popular reforms.

Then, Congress needs to grant Washington, D.C., statehood, which is not only a matter of fairness for currently unrepresented residents but also would be expected to give Congress more Democratic lawmakers, given the city's leanings. But for this, too, the party needs the help of some pro-democracy Republicans.

…

The fight is for democracy itself, and it cannot work if one party is controlled by a faction that doesn't believe in legitimate elections. The pro-democracy forces in Congress still outnumber the anti-democracy forces. But they need to start working together to prevail.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

It Happened in America

BY PIPPA NORRIS | JANUARY 7, 2021

The experiences of other deeply polarized countries with contentious elections suggest that it is easier to destroy trust than it is to rebuild it. But the United States can at least try to do so.

Soon, the Democrats will control the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the White House. Once they do, they should renew efforts to pass the For the People Act, a comprehensive package of moderate reforms, such as reducing gerrymandering and expanding voting rights, that the House approved in 2019 in an effort to restore confidence in the electoral process.

The Republicans, meanwhile, may well react to the shock of the insurrection, coupled with the loss of the White House and the Senate, by choosing to cooperate across the aisle to fix the United States' many grave ills. But it would not be wise to count on that.

At least for the next four years, then, it will be up to the Biden administration to attempt to do what needs to be done: restore the civic culture, rebuild trust in government, and convince the country to choose unity over division, tolerance over hatred, and decency over corruption.

TIME

How the Next Congress Can Improve U.S. Elections and Protect Voting Rights

BY CORY BOOKER AND TIFFANY MULLER (OP-ED) | JANUARY 4, 2021

This year, voters across the country faced a myriad of barriers to casting their vote — a global pandemic, a concerted disinformation campaign waged by the President and his allies and amplified by foreign adversaries, shifting deadlines, hours-long wait times to vote, confusing new rules, voter purges, intimidation, discrimination and more.

…

We need to pass H.R. 1, the For the People Act, H.R. 4, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, and S. 3822, the DemocracyCorps Act. Two of those bills – H.R. 1 and H.R. 4 – have already passed the House of Representatives.

These policies would dramatically reform and improve our elections. They would set standardized rules for mail-in voting, create uniform deadlines and prohibit unnecessary and onerous barriers to returning ballots. The bills would also require every state to offer at least 15 consecutive days of early voting for federal elections and require states to implement same-day and automatic voter registration. And, perhaps most important, they would restore the protections enshrined in the Voting Rights Act.

When the new Congress is sworn in this January, it should make this once-in-a-generation suite of election and voting reforms a first priority to restore faith in our democracy.

Mr. Jones Goes to Washington
"Laser-Focused on Delivering Results"

BY BARRETT SEAMAN | JANUAY 2, 2021

The day before he was to be sworn in as the newly elected Representative of New York's 17th Congressional Dis-trict in Washington, Mondaire Jones spoke with The Hudson Independent's Barrett Seaman.

…

"We have to pass the For The People Act, HR-1, that was passed by the 116th Congress in 2019. It contains things like automatic voter registration that would enfranchise 15 million people nationally. It would replace what is currently a process of partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts with independent redistricting commissions, ensuring that representatives are responsive to the electorate, where Q-anon adherents cannot coast to victory in a general election campaign.

"HR-1 seeks to root out the corrosive influence of money in politics by establishing a system of public financing of elections. You may recall that I've had my own experience with a candidate trying to purchase an election. Our policies will be better for it. If we don't have better people in Congress, which requires democracy reforms, then we're going to continue to see critical legislation blocked, including $2,000 survival checks."

We Can Achieve Our Democratic Ideals Now by Passing the For the People Act

BY TOM UDALL (OP-ED) | DECEMBER 23, 2020

[O]ne of the most important pieces of legislation I introduced — the one that is most urgently needed to move our country forward — is stuck in Senate Majority Leader McConnell's (R-Ky.) legislative graveyard. The For the People Act or H.R.1, which the House of Representatives passed as the first bill of the new Congress in 2019, would fix many of the root causes of government dysfunction that have brought our democracy to a crisis point. The bill would end political gerrymandering, restore and expand voting rights, fight foreign interference in our elections, and empower the voices of everyday Americans over secretive political mega-donors.

Americans are sick of the bitter, partisan divide that has taken hold of Congress. Many feel that their elected officials are so concerned with fundraising for the next election that they fail to listen to their own constituents. I believe that there should be more, not less incentive for Congress to work in a bipartisan manner. We can achieve our democratic ideals now by passing the For the People Act.

McConnell and Senate Republicans have refused to even debate this bill. They have no interest in limiting the power of corporate influence in our elections because they benefit from it. But without real reform, we're facing an uphill battle to delivering real results for the American people. The vast majority of Americans agree — we must protect ourselves and our elders from the coronavirus, act on

climate change, raise the minimum wage, expand access to health care, and restructure our economy so it benefits American workers and their families, not Wall Street.

The American people overwhelmingly support action on each of these priorities. But the Republican Senate does nothing on these issues — because the Republican Senate leadership listens to special interests, not the voters who elect them. That's why, even after the American people chose to chart a different path forward in November, Republicans are even now rushing to confirm extreme judicial nominees instead of acting on pandemic relief.

And that's why we have to prioritize real democracy reform by passing the For the People Act.

Even though President Trump and the far right are attempting to sow doubt about a legitimate election because they don't like the results, American voters still retain the ultimate power of the ballot box. Millions of Americans faced down a pandemic and efforts at voter suppression to make their voices heard in historic numbers.

But the fight is not over. The American people decided to change our leadership in Washington in November, but facing the real possibility of a divided Congress, we must renew our demand that our democracy work for the people. Fixing our broken electoral system and passing the For the People Act should be one of the first items on the agenda. American democracy has earned a top spot on the to-do list — because action on the other crises like the pandemic and climate change will only follow from comprehensive democracy reform.

I am heartened and inspired by the champions of democracy reform that will carry this fight forward even after I am no longer in the Senate. That's what's powerful about the democratic experiment — it's a constant work in progress that asks all of us to participate.

There is no denying that our country's founders constructed a system that subjugated and enslaved Indigenous people. Our nation's history is one of a series of abolitionist, suffragette and civil rights movements that have pushed our country closer to achieving liberty and justice for all.

Like those before us have done during turning points in our country's history, we can make our system better. We must — because we know that America is at its best when the broadest coalition of voters choose our leaders who understand the different challenges we face and have concrete plans to address them. When we pass the For The People Act, we can come closer to achieving our ideals than any time before. My name was not on the ballot in 2020, but I am continuing to campaign for democracy this year and long into the future. Our work is not done — let's continue to fight for our democracy together.

USA TODAY

Voting Reform and Stronger Government Accountability Go Hand in Hand

BY MICHAEL STEELE (OP-ED) | DECEMBER 2, 2020

Americans turned out for the 2020 elections in numbers not seen in over 100 years. Voters made a plan and found a way to make their voices heard.

The process should not have been so difficult for so many. The American people are demanding change — investments in secure polling place technologies, easier voter registration, an end to unfair voter file purges, and the abandonment of partisan gerrymandering that helps too many incumbents avoid answering for their actions because they unfairly draw districts in their own favor.

Fortunately, the U.S. House of Representatives has already passed a bill that would fix some of these problems. H.R. 1, The For The People Act, deserves a hearing in the Senate and presidential signature.

The New York Times

Our Democracy's Near-Death Experience

BY SUSAN RICE (OP-ED) | DECEMBER 1, 2020

It appears that our democracy dodged a bullet — or, more precisely, multiple concerted efforts by the president of the United States to torpedo its very foundations.

While President Trump rages relentlessly about election "fraud," many Republican leaders continue to parrot false denials of the validity of President-elect Joe Biden's clear victory. Yet, so far, our democracy has withstood the greatest stress test of our lifetimes.

…

So, bolstering our democracy depends in large part on the people of Georgia voting out their incumbent senators on Jan. 5. If the Senate flips to Democratic control, Congress will be able to apply the lessons of our democracy's near-death experience.

It would enact the For the People Act to combat corruption, strengthen ethics rules and improve voter access as well as the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to restore the protections of the 1965 legislation. Congress would pass the Protecting Our Democracy Act to constrain the power of future presidents who deem themselves above the law and finally adopt long-stalled legislation to shore up our election infrastructure against adversaries, foreign or domestic.

Now is no time for self-congratulation or complacency. We must act with the unique urgency and courage of those who know they are living on borrowed time.

The Washington Post

How to Protect Our Democracy from a Future Donald Trump

BY BRIAN KLAAS (OPINION) | NOVEMBER 30, 2020

American democracy has spent the past four years under attack — from the White House itself. President Trump's authoritarian populism has damaged the foundations of the republic.

Yet Trump's efforts to undermine the system have an unintended benefit. He found the hidden cracks that always existed in American democracy and exposed them for all to see.

As Americans, our task now is not just to repair the damage, but to fill the cracks in, too. If we do so, the Trump era can end on a positive note by spurring reforms that make American democracy more resilient.

…

As became apparent even before Trump took office, deeper structural reforms are also required. We need greater transparency in campaign finance. The electoral college must be eliminated or reformed. We must end gerrymandering and address the rapidly growing gap between population size and political power in the Senate. H.R. 1, a package of such reforms that passed the Democratic House in March 2019 but languished in the Republican Senate, offered a good starting point.

…

The Trump era is coming to an end.

The fight to revive American democracy has begun.

San Antonio Express-News

To Restore Credibility Abroad, Start at Home

BY REP. JOAQUIN CASTRO (OP-ED) | NOVEMBER 28, 2020

For generations, the United States, at its best, has been a North Star to the world — a symbol of universal values such as freedom, human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

Imagine watching what is unfolding in America today from a foreign capital. The ruling party's leader refusing to concede a free and fair election, and delaying the peaceful transfer of power. If this were happening in another nation, we would condemn these actions. It's a subversion of our democracy, and the world is watching.

…

Our ability to promote peace and human rights abroad is also directly connected to our capacity to advance equality and justice in the United States. That's why democracy reform such as H.R. 1 — including automatic voter registration, redistricting reform and a restoration of the Voting Rights Act — should remain a priority. From foreign adversaries targeting our voting systems to partisan lawmakers gerrymandering districts to the corrupting influence of money in politics, we need to repair our democracy and ensure our government works for everybody.

Seacoastonline.com

It's Time to Address the Cracks in Our Democracy

BY REP. CHELLIE PINGREE (OP-ED) | NOVEMBER 17, 2020

Unfortunately, this election — like many events in 2020 — has exposed existing cracks in our fragile democratic experiment, and Congress must work with the incoming administration to strengthen our democratic institutions. We must double down to end voter suppression, mitigate threats to election security, stop the influence of big money in politics, and make sure every American has access to the democratic institutions the founders fought for.

…

Last March, the House passed H.R. 1, a comprehensive package of democracy reforms to clean up our elections. The bill includes campaign finance reform, automatic voter registration, restoration of voting rights for formerly incarcerated individuals, and ethics reform — all of which will restore power to the people. The bills were not even given a hearing by the U.S. Senate due to unprecedented obstruction from Majority Leader McConnell. However, I believe that under the Biden administration, Congress will pass these bills to protect the sacred right to vote.

Roll Call

Pelosi, Democrats Renew Push to Overhaul Election, Campaign Finance Laws

BY KATE ACKLEY | NOVEMBER 16, 2020

Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Monday she would press ahead early next year with a campaign finance and elections overhaul, even as the measure may face the same Senate fate it did this Congress: doom.

House Democrats passed their signature overhaul measure in March 2019 and dubbed it HR 1, indicating its priority. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell blocked it in his chamber, however.

Even though the Senate majority for the 117th Congress hinges on two runoff elections in Georgia, Democrats and their outside allies said they would still push for the measure, spotlighting McConnell's resistance.

"The strategy is to keep pointing out that McConnell is the one blocking the bill," Maryland Rep. John Sarbanes, the lead sponsor of the overhaul measure, said Monday during a call with reporters. "He sort of crossed his arms on the Senate side from Day One and said that this legislation will not see the light of day. That's not a reason not to continue the fight and to amp it up, which is what we're doing here."

Sarbanes acknowledged that even with a Democrat in the White House, the measure's future was uncertain. If Democrats had won the Senate majority outright, it would likely have been atop the chamber's agenda in the new year. As it is, if Democrats win both Georgia Senate seats, the chamber would only be tied with a Vice President Kamala Harris casting the tie-breaking vote.

“We don’t know when and how the opportunity to move this will present itself, but the key is to be ready,” Sarbanes said.

Pelosi and Sarbanes said during the call that they expect the House to move early next year to pass a bill similar to the current measure, which stretches hundreds of pages. It would set up an optional program to match contributions candidates receive from small donors with six times that amount from the government. It would also institute same-day voter registration and early voting nationwide, and impose new ethics requirements on government officials, among other provisions.

The Washington Times

House Democrats Trumpet Election Overhaul Package

BY GABRIELLA MUÑOZ | NOVEMBER 16, 2020

Speaker House Democrats on Monday rallied around their marquee legislation for the next Congress — a long-stalled package of broad election overhaul items that includes voting, campaign-finance and ethics laws.

They are looking to presumed President-elect Joseph R. Biden to break through a congressional logjam that has kept the legislation on ice for more than a year.

“With this election, the American people had just participated in — it was a historic election. A record-shattering 78 million Americans, the most in history, voted to send Joe Biden and Kamala Harris to the White House,” said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, California Democrat. “The other side had a big vote too and that’s good.”

…

Mrs. Pelosi was joined by Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon and the bill’s sponsor, Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland, on a press call to trumpet the legislation, which will be introduced as H.R. 1, the first House bill of the 117th Congress, and likely passed the first week of the new session.

The New York Times

Why Are Republicans So Afraid of Voters?

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | NOVEMBER 1, 2020

... [A] across the country, the group most responsible for making voting harder, if not impossible, for millions of Americans is the Republican Party. Republicans have been saying it themselves for ages. “I don’t want everybody to vote,” Paul Weyrich, a leader of the modern conservative movement, told a gathering of religious leaders in 1980. “As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.”

This strategy has become a central pillar of the G.O.P. platform. It is behind the party’s relentless push for certain state laws and practices — like strict voter-identification requirements and targeted voter purges — that claim to be about preserving electoral integrity but are in fact about suppressing turnout and voting among groups that lean Democratic.

…

The Supreme Court’s conservative majority has greenlit the Republicans’ anti-democratic power grabs. In 2013, by a 5-to-4 vote, the court struck down the heart of the Voting Rights Act, giving free rein to states with long histories of racial discrimination in voting. Last year, the court, again by a 5-to-4 vote, refused to block even the most brazenly partisan gerrymanders, no matter how much they disenfranchised voters.

This year, in the face of the unprecedented hurdles to voting introduced by the coronavirus pandemic, Republicans are battling from coast to coast to ensure that casting a ballot is as hard as it can be.

In Texas, Gov. Greg Abbott mandated a single ballot drop-box per county — including the increasingly Democratic Harris County, population 4.7 million. Republican lawmakers there are also suing to throw out more than 100,000 ballots cast by Harris County voters from their cars, at drive-through sites.

In Nevada, the Trump campaign and the state Republican Party have sued to stop counting mail-in ballots until observers can more closely monitor the signature-matching process. In Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Wisconsin, Republicans have fought to prevent the counting of all mail-in ballots that arrive after Election Day, even if they are postmarked on or before Nov. 3.

This all amounts to “a concerted national Republican effort across the country in every one of the states that has had a legal battle to make it harder for citizens to vote,” said Trevor Potter, a Republican lawyer who formerly led the Federal Election Commission and worked on both of John McCain’s presidential campaigns.

The effort has been turbocharged by President Trump, who has spent the past year falsely attacking the integrity of mail-in ballots. Mr. Trump’s lies have been echoed by the attorney general, William Barr, who has claimed that mail balloting is associated with “substantial fraud.” Not remotely true.

…

When that tactic fails, Republicans turn to another tried-and-true one: voter intimidation. Frightening people, particularly Black people, away from the ballot box has a long history in the United States. Modern Republicans have done it so consistently that in 1982 a federal court barred the national party from engaging in any so-called anti-voter-fraud operations. The ban was renewed again and again over the decades, because Republicans kept violating it. In 2018, however, it expired, meaning that 2020 is the first election in which Republicans can intimidate with abandon.

All the while, Mr. Trump happily plays the part of intimidator in chief. He has urged his supporters to enlist in an “Army for Trump,” monitoring polls.

…

Representative democracy works only when a large majority of people participate in choosing their representatives. That can happen only when those in power agree that voting should be as easy and widely available as possible. Yet today, one of the two major political parties is convinced it cannot win on a level playing field — and will not even try.

What would a level playing field look like? For starters, it would have more polling places, more early-voting days and shorter voting lines. Since the Supreme Court gutted the heart of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, almost 1,700 polling places have been shut down, most of them in the states that had been under federal supervision for their past discriminatory voting practices. It’s no surprise that voters in predominantly Black neighborhoods wait 29 percent longer to cast ballots than voters in white neighborhoods.

A fair election would mean giving all states the necessary funds to implement automatic voter registration and to upgrade old voting machines. It would mean allowing people with criminal records to vote as soon as they have completed the terms of their sentences.

…

To help ensure that voting is easier for everybody, the federal government needs to take action. Currently, there are two comprehensive voting-rights bills in Congress, the Voting Rights Amendment Act and H.R. 1, also known as the For the People Act. The first bill would update the old map the Supreme Court invalidated in 2013 and would identify the states and localities that are racially discriminating against their voters today, requiring them to seek federal court approval before changing any election laws.

The second bill would, among other things, create a national voter-registration program; make it harder for states to purge voting rolls; and take gerrymandering away from self-interested state legislatures, putting the redistricting process in the hands of nonpartisan commissions.

The House of Representatives passed both of these bills in 2019, with all Democrats voting in favor both times. The Voting Rights Amendment Act got the vote of a single House Republican. H.R. 1 got none. The Republican-led Senate has refused to act on either. Mitch McConnell, the majority leader, mocked H.R. 1 by referring to it as the “Democrat Politician Protection Act.” Listen to him closely. He is only repeating what most Republicans have believed for decades: When more people vote, Republicans lose.

That’s why, if either of these laws is going to pass, it will require, at a minimum, voting out Republicans at every level who insist on suppressing the vote. Only then can those who believe in representative democracy for all Americans reset the rules and help ensure that everyone’s vote counts.

MARYLAND MATTERS

Sarbanes: 'For the People' Reforms Ready to Go If Dems Sweep

BY BENNETT LECKRONE | OCTOBER 6, 2020

Rep. John P. Sarbanes (D-Md.) thinks House Democrats will again try to pass their "For the People" reform package in 2021, arguing that Democratic wins in the upcoming election could allow the act to succeed.

That extensive anti-corruption effort, also known as H.R. 1, would have banned partisan gerrymandering and established automatic voter registration for all Americans. It also would've required presidents to disclose their tax returns, and reformed the country's campaign finance system. The bill passed the House of Representatives this term, but stalled in the U.S. Senate and was unlikely to be signed by President Donald Trump.

During a virtual conversation with Maryland Matters reporters on Tuesday, Sarbanes said that if Democrats win the "trifecta" of the House, Senate and Presidency, they plan to immediately push the act through Congress.

"The H.R. 1 bag is packed and by the front door," Sarbanes said. "If we win this election, we have to grab it and go."

Sarbanes thinks that passing H.R. 1 and its slew of reforms would showcase Democrats' ability to govern in a post-Trump era. He noted that his ambition of

quickly passing the resolution hinges on Democratic wins across the board in the upcoming election.

“We’re going to absolutely come out of the gate with H.R. 1 again in the House, put as much force behind that as we can, hope that a Senate that’s in Democratic hands will understand the power of that … and get it to President Biden’s desk in the early days,” he said.

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Rep. Katie Porter Favored to Hold CA-45 Seat

BY BROOKE STAGGS | OCTOBER 6, 2020

As a House member Porter has introduced legislation aimed at increasing consumer protection, boosting health care and lowering drug prices. Most recently, she introduced a bill that would help protect new moms from surprise medical bills and another that would require members of Congress and administration officials to report if they receive benefits such as loans or contracts with the federal government.

After pledging in her 2018 campaign to make political reform a top priority, Porter said she's most proud of helping the House to pass H.R. 1, which she calls "the most comprehensive democracy and money in politics reform legislation since Watergate." The bill included an amendment she introduced to make it easier for working parents to run for office. That bill stalled in the GOP-led Senate, and remains a top priority for Porter if she's reelected.

THE NEW YORKER

Biden's Moral Imperative to Safeguard Civil Rights

BY JELANI COBB | SEPTEMBER 28, 2020

A broad landscape of other policies and laws affecting civil rights and equality must be addressed. Biden has promised to sign a new Voting Rights Act, and, if the Democrats gain control of the Senate, he should push for its quick passage. He should also urge the Senate to pass the For the People Act, which has cleared the House and would, among other things, guarantee voting rights for former felons, establish safeguards against partisan gerrymandering, and restrict voter-roll purges, all of which would remedy inequities that disadvantage minority voters disproportionately. These actions would be politic as well as morally correct, insuring that the Democratic Party's most reliable base will be able to vote unimpeded in the 2022 midterms.

THE BALTIMORE SUN

COVID-19 Has Exposed Inequities and a Broken Democracy

BY BEN JEALOUS AND JOHN SARBANES (OP-ED) | AUGUST 17, 2020

The COVID-19 outbreak and the country's long overdue reckoning with institutional racism have dramatically laid bare deep-rooted inequities in our society — inequities driven by our broken democracy. It's time to find solutions, and we believe many of them lie in ending the twin evils of voter suppression and money in politics.

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Concrete solutions to these twin obstacles are available in three critically important bills passed by the House but now languishing in Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's "graveyard": H.R. 1, known as the For the People Act; H.R. 4, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act; and H.R. 51, which would provide for D.C. statehood.

We can take the energy of this moment and channel it toward the attainable goals of protecting the right to vote and reining in the influence of money in our politics. The reforms embodied in these bills will empower communities of color at the ballot box and in the halls of Congress. The House has done the hard work of passing these key pieces of legislation. If Mr. McConnell and Senate Republicans continue to stand in the way, they will be left to answer for their intransigence. The time has come to reset the rules of our democracy and build a more inclusive and racially just society.

THE NEW YORKER

The Democrats Need a Plan to Fight Corruption—the Usual Kind as Well as the Trump Kind

BY JIM LARDNER | JULY 31, 2020

In the months leading up to the midterm elections of 2018, Paul Manafort and Michael Cohen appeared in court, adding their names to a growing tally of Trump appointees and intimates caught in career-ending, money-grubbing scandals. Thirty Republican House members lost their seats that year, many of them to Democratic challengers who had campaigned as political outsiders rejecting corporate pac money. Nancy Pelosi, restored to the post of Speaker of the House by that election, cited anti-corruption outrage as a major driver of the outcome. After the new House convened, in 2019, its first ceremonial act was to pass an unexpectedly substantial democracy-reform bill. Its provisions included nonpartisan redistricting, public financing of campaigns, and new lobbying rules. “It is fundamental to a democracy that people believe that actions taken here will be in their interest,” Pelosi said on that occasion. “That is what this legislation will help to restore.”

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But there is time for them to pick it up. By embracing a strong anti-corruption program and making it a campaign theme, Biden and his party’s congressional candidates can place a spotlight back on the Trump Administration’s breathtaking record of quasi-bribery, quasi-extortion, and inside deals.

THE DENVER POST

Vote by Mail Will Ensure A Safe and Fair November Election

BY JOE NEGUSE AND DEAN PHILLPIS (OP-ED) | MAY 17, 2020

What could Minnetonka, Minnesota and Loveland, Colorado possibly have in common? It's neither ice fishing nor rodeos. It's mail-in ballots.

In 2018, our respective congressional districts — Minnesota's 3rd and Colorado's 2nd — generated the highest voter turnout among the 435 districts in the country, with a 73% participation rate by eligible voters.

As proud community members and representatives of these districts, we have both seen how accessible, inclusive voting reforms can empower voters. Colorado and Minnesota have been at the forefront of inviting more citizens to participate in our democracy. Coloradans can mail in their ballots leading up to election day, and same-day registration and pre-registration for 16 and 17-year-olds are in place. Minnesotans can vote early by mail up to 46 days in advance of election day and are also afforded same day registration and pre-registration for 17 year-olds. These simple and reasonable reforms to the electoral process have helped increase turnout by historic proportions.

Common-sense tools like pre-registration, automatic voter registration, early voting, and voting by mail are vital for a healthy, engaged democracy. Such measures enjoy broad support among Americans of all political perspectives and were included in the House of Representative's first order of business in 2019 –

H.R. 1, the For the People Act. The act is a bold democratic reform bill focused on making voting more accessible for everyone. H.R. 1 would enact nation-wide automatic voter registration and same day registration, expand early voting and mail balloting, strengthen our nation's ethics laws and work to remove dark money from our politics.

In light of the unprecedented crisis through which our country is now navigating, we cannot allow the tiresome partisan squabbling that left H.R. 1 languishing on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's desk to risk the health of Americans who wish to vote this November. And that means all Americans; Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Independents and anyone who wishes to participate.

With over 50,000 Americans dead from COVID-19, almost 1,000,000 having tested positive, and most Americans living under stay-at-home orders and social distancing policies likely to remain in place for many more months; the 2020 election will be unlike any in living memory. That is why we must take immediate steps to ensure a safe and secure election this November, and the most logical solution is through the expanded use of mail ballots.

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The pandemic has endangered our lives and livelihoods, but we still have time to prevent it from endangering our democracy.

What Our Democracy Needs Now: Legislation That Returns Power to the American People

BY JEFF MERKLEY AND TOM UDALL (OP-ED) | MARCH 19, 2020

Last year, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 1, the For the People Act – sweeping anti-corruption legislation that would represent the biggest reform of money and ethics in government since Watergate.

We are leading the For the People Act in the Senate because this legislation is the road map we need to take our democratic republic out of the hands of the powerful and privileged, and give it back to "We the People."

The For the People Act represents a powerful step to reclaim our government from insidious forces that have maintained power for the privileged few and broken our politics.

…

With such clear need for legislation to put power back in the hands of the people, you would think that the For the People Act would have sailed through the Senate. But while all Democratic members of the House and the Senate are co-sponsors, not one Senate Republican has joined the bill.

For a year now, the For the People Act has sat buried on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's desk. This legislation has become an unfortunate victim of McConnell's legislative graveyard. And in fact, our broken democracy — with rampant voter suppression and special interest influence — is why this legislative graveyard exists in the first place.

GrandRapidsMN.com
Herald Review

Senate Needs to Pass H.R. 1

BY TINA SMITH (OP-ED) | MARCH 18, 2020

One year ago, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 1, or the For the People Act, which would protect the right to vote and expand it nationwide. This landmark legislation would make voting easier, by naming Election Day a federal holiday and making automatic, online, and same day voter registration available in every state. It would make voting more accessible by allowing early voting and voting by mail in every state. And it would also make voting more fair by limiting efforts to purge voting rolls and strengthening protections against discrimination and intimidation at the ballot box.

Still, we can only ensure voters are being heard if their voices aren't drowned out by special interests. To that end, H.R. 1 would reform our campaign finance laws by requiring Super PACs and other purveyors of dark money to disclose their donors. Since the Citizens United v Federal Election Commission decision, special interests have doubled down in their efforts to buy influence in our elections and on Capitol Hill. In the two decades before Citizens United, outside interest groups spent a total of about $750 million on federal elections. In the single decade since, those groups have spent $4.5 billion.

In fact, that's the very reason H.R. 1 has not come up for a vote in the U.S. Senate. Special interests want it to stay right where it is — on the desk of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. And Leader McConnell answers to them, not to the American people.

Ultimately, this is a battle over who holds power in our democracy. I believe the power should lie with us: the people. At a time when some would take that power away from people, the people can no longer take the right to vote for granted.

The drive to bring H.R. 1 up for a vote is no different than the one that brings American voters to the polls. It's born of the belief that it's up to us to shape this nation and define its future. In other words, democracy takes work. And under these circumstances, it takes extra work.

I'm going to keep calling on Leader McConnell to bring H.R. 1 to the Senate floor, because our democracy is worth every effort. And if he does, I'll do what Minnesotans do best — I'll turn out and vote for it.

When Voting Is Easier, More People Show Up

BY TINA SMITH (OP-ED) | MARCH 9, 2020

One year ago, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 1, or the For the People Act, which would protect the right to vote and expand it nationwide. This landmark legislation would make voting easier, by naming Election Day a federal holiday and making automatic, online, and same day voter registration available in every state. It would make voting more accessible by allowing early voting and voting by mail in every state. And it would also make voting more fair by limiting efforts to purge voting rolls and strengthening protections against discrimination and intimidation at the ballot box.

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Westword

Still Waiting for the Senate to Take On Corruption

BY JASON CROW (OP-ED) | MARCH 7, 2020

One year ago this month, I joined with my colleagues to pass the For the People Act (H.R. 1), the most comprehensive package of anti-corruption reforms since Watergate.

By bringing dark money into the light, empowering small donors in our elections and restoring ethics and accountability in Washington, the bill delivered on my campaign promise to fight the power of special interests and get Washington working again.

Unfortunately, one year later, the bill is still stuck in Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's "legislative graveyard," along with hundreds of other bipartisan bills the House has passed. It's joined there by bills to tackle climate change, reduce gun violence, strengthen our economy, raise wages, end discrimination in voting, protect the integrity of our elections, and lower the high cost of prescription drugs.

McConnell wears his obstruction like a badge of honor, but this gridlock means real harm to Coloradans. His refusal to allow a vote on any legislation to address the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs is a perfect example — and one that shows why we need to tackle corruption in Washington.

Late last year, I worked with my colleagues to pass the Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act (H.R. 3), a bill to lower the cost of prescription drugs. The legislation also includes my Freedom From Price Gouging Act, which prevents Big Pharma from profiting off unfairly raising the cost of a drug just to line their pockets with more profits.

In casting my vote for H.R. 3 in December, I thought of Sue Way, a retired nurse from Aurora who saw her insulin increase by over 500 percent overnight. Suddenly she couldn't afford her medication for a condition she had been dealing with since she was fourteen. Sue's plight isn't unique. What is notable, though, is how positive an impact H.R. 3 could have on Americans. In Colorado alone, 300,000 Coloradans with diabetes would save 75 percent on their insulin, while 400,000 Coloradans with asthma would save 80 percent on their prescriptions.

And yet....

McConnell has blocked a vote on this bill. He's even blocked a vote on bipartisan legislation introduced by a senator of his own party, Iowa's Chuck Grassley.

Why? As one report noted last year, McConnell is afraid he "could incur the wrath of the well-financed pharmaceutical industry," which opposed H.R. 3. The fact is, for every member of Congress, there are three Big Pharma lobbyists looking to buy their vote.

In fact, McConnell is the top Congressional recipient of money from pharmaceutical executives in the 2020 election cycle.

This is wrong. Corporate special interests like pharmaceutical companies shouldn't have veto power over policies simply because they can spend more money on politics than families struggling to pay for their insulin.

It's corruption, and it must stop.

If we want to fix the broken system, the first thing we must do is fix the structural inequalities in it. By passing H.R. 1 last March, we weren't just reforming our campaign finance system, we were building the foundation to ensure quality affordable health care, end the scourge of gun violence, and combat climate change. To tackle any of these issues, we must sever the ties between special-interest influence and the policy-making process.

The For the People Act would end the dominance of big money in politics by empowering small-dollar donors, bringing dark money into the light, and ensuring that the Federal Election Commission has the tools to enforce our campaign finance laws. The first bill I ever introduced, the End Dark Money Act, was also included as part of H.R. 1. It would allow the IRS to ensure that non-profits adhere to their social-welfare mission rather than secretly funnel big money into elections.

It would also restore ethics and accountability in Washington by slowing the revolving door and ensuring that public officials are working in the public interest. And it will protect the right to vote by implementing policies like same-day and automatic voter registration that have been tested in states across the country.

If we’re going to make progress on issues like lowering prescription drug prices, we need to end the dominance of big money in politics, and that starts with the For the People Act.

On the one-year anniversary of H.R. 1’s passage in the House, Senator McConnell should stop stonewalling and allow a vote on this critical legislation.

Burlington County Times

A Year of Fighting A Broken System

BY ANDY KIM (OP-ED) | MARCH 7, 2020

One year ago, I wrote an op-ed calling on Congress to take action on a landmark bill that would address the role money in politics has played in stopping real progress for the American people. I talked about the two town halls I held in my first two months in office and a system I found when I arrived in Washington that protected big corporate interests at the expense of working people.

Three days after that op-ed was published, I led the charge to pass that bill, H.R. 1, the For the People Act, through the House of Representatives.

That bill aimed at taking power away from corporate special interests by bringing dark money into the light and empowering everyday Americans in our elections. It would have strengthened ethics rules for government officials, including members of Congress, reduced the power of lobbyists, and even secured our elections.

What's happened in the year since is not just an example of the hyperpartisan politics that has plagued Washington, but it's also an example of what happens when the powerful prevail and corporate interests win out against the voice of the people.

In the last year, I have held 16 more town halls and seen in even greater depths the extent to which corporate interests stand in the way of real progress and real impact for the people of Burlington and Ocean counties. These roadblocks in the way of progress are a constant reminder of the challenges we face and the need for real change.

At my town halls over the last year, I have heard from people who are sick of both the amount of money in our politics and of the high costs of prescription drugs and health care. I have talked with too many people who are one medical emergency away from financial ruin, and simply don't have the money to compete for attention and influence with big corporations.

That's why my first bill, the SAVE Act, a bipartisan effort with my neighbor Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick from Pennsylvania, would help lower health care costs by expanding state-based options. It's why I introduced bills to expand Medicare programs that help those struggling to make ends meet afford their health care, and it's why I have joined with colleagues to press for Medicare to be allowed to negotiate down the price of prescription drugs.

These bills — and so many others, on topics ranging from expanding gun safety measures to protecting our environment — are commonsense ways for our country to come together to tackle big issues that impact all of us every day. But none of those bills will see the light of day until we change the system that keeps them in the dark.

As long as big corporate political action committees pump millions into the system, the system won't work for you. As long as special interests like the pharmaceutical lobby pump hundreds of millions into lobbying efforts, the system won't work for you. And as long as the Senate refuses to even listen to reason and debate the For the People Act, the system won't work for you.

It's not too late to make a change. The Senate can take this bill up next week and work with those of us in the House to work out our differences, like adults, and make meaningful changes to the system that is so clearly broken.

I'm ready to get to work, and ready to make this system work for the people to whom I and every one of my colleagues swore an oath to serve.

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT
Your Hometown Newspaper

To Lower Drug Prices, We Must Confront Special Interests' Influence on Our Politics

BY ABIGAIL SPANBERGER (OP-ED) | MARCH 7, 2020

As I was running for Congress in 2018, people across my district voiced a clear concern that Washington wasn't working for them, and was instead serving corporate and special interests.

No matter the topic we discussed—prescription drug prices, retirement security, voting rights, environmental protections, or healthcare costs—people expressed a doubt that change or progress could be achieved because of the power of these monied interests.

…

That's why I was proud to help lead the effort to pass the For the People Act (H.R. 1) last March. This bill would limit the power of special interests, strengthen campaign-finance requirements and ethics rules, and restore accountability in Washington at a time when it's all too rare.

This week, we mark the one-year anniversary of H.R. 1's passage in the House.

Unfortunately, this comprehensive package of campaign finance and ethics reforms has gone nowhere in the U.S. Senate. For the past year, Senate Majority Leader McConnell has blocked action on this legislation, refusing to bring it for a vote. This is an example of what's broken; one man can stand in the way of major reforms on Capitol Hill. My argument is a simple one: The Senate should bring this bill to a vote and let it pass or fail on its merits.

CHARLESTON CITY PAPER

One Year Later, It's Time for Mitch McConnell to Stop Blocking Critical Anti-Corruption and Election Reform Legislation

BY JOE CUNNINGHAM (OP-ED) | MARCH 5, 2020

When I ran for Congress, I promised the people of the Lowcountry I would work for them, not special interests and big donors. It's why I made a promise — which I have kept — to not accept a single dime from special interests or PACs. Once elected, I worked with my colleagues to do just that by co-sponsoring and helping pass the For the People Act (H.R. 1), once-in-a-generation anti-corruption and democracy reform legislation.

H.R. 1 tackles the biggest problems facing our democracy. It shines a light on the dark money that corrupts our politics, protects and expands the fundamental right to vote, ends partisan gerrymandering, and restores ethics and accountability in the federal government to ensure that we are working for the interests of the American people, rather than wealthy donors and lobbyists.

…

This month marks one year since we passed H.R. 1. I wish we could celebrate this anniversary by highlighting all of the ways that the For the People Act has improved the lives of Americans across the country. Yet, thanks to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, this bill has not been brought to the Senate floor.

Sen. McConnell has placed the For the People Act in his "legislative graveyard" along with hundreds of other bills passed by the House, including overwhelmingly popular and bipartisan measures that would lower the cost of prescription drugs, establish universal background checks and close the Charleston loophole, and — particularly important to me and the people of the Lowcountry — ban offshore drilling. Sen. McConnell's obstruction has real-world consequences for the lives of South Carolinians.

Last year, I introduced the Coastal and Marine Economies Protection Act (H.R. 1941), bipartisan legislation that would permanently ban offshore drilling along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. South Carolina needs this legislation to protect our shorelines, our economy, and our way of life. In the Lowcountry, preserving our pristine coasts from being ravaged by offshore drilling is not a partisan issue, it is a common sense one.

I fought hard with my colleagues to pass this bill, and we got it passed in the House. But Sen. McConnell has sided with the big oil and gas industry — some of his biggest campaign donors — and has refused to bring the bill to the floor.

Sen. McConnell and his GOP colleagues are preventing this vitally important environmental legislation because they care more about ensuring big money keeps flowing in from the energy industry. Indeed, a recent study shows that the more often members of Congress vote against pro-environment legislation, the more campaign donations they receive from the oil and gas industry. Without H.R. 1, too many lawmakers will continue to put Big Oil's interests ahead of the public interest.

H.R. 1 reforms our campaign finance system by addressing dark money and strengthening oversight of super PACs. H.R. 1 also fortifies federal ethics rules by closing loopholes for lobbyists, making our politics more transparent, and increasing accountability for elected officials in order to prevent political corruption and make sure the American people are put first. And H.R. 1 ensures

fair, free, and accessible elections by removing barriers to the ballot box and establishing independent redistricting commissions to ensure all Americans' voices can be heard in our democracy.

If we want to protect our shorelines from destructive offshore drilling, we need to pass H.R. 1. If we want to make progress on lowering prescription drug prices, and fighting gun violence and climate change, we need to pass H.R. 1. If we want to tackle racial inequality, we need to pass H.R. 1. And if we want to make sure that our government is working for the people, not special interests and big corporations, we need to pass H.R. 1.

On the one-year anniversary of its passage, Sen. McConnell needs to stop blocking this critical legislation and bring H.R. 1 to the Senate floor for a vote.

An Inclusive Democracy Demands D.C. Statehood

BY ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON AND JOHN SARBANES (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 24, 2020

One of the most glaring examples of disenfranchisement can be found in our nation's capital, the District of Columbia, where residents have been denied voting rights and full self-government for 219 years. Residents of the nation's capital are held to all federal laws and pay all federal taxes, yet they are denied voting representation in their own Congress. To add insult to injury, even their local governing authority is subordinated to Congress, which wields ultimate power over the District, including the right to overturn local laws, referendums, and spending decisions.

This month, the House Oversight and Reform Committee took a key step toward reversing this gross injustice by passing Congresswoman Norton's D.C. statehood bill, which would establish the State of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth as our nation's 51st state.

…

In 2019, the fight for D.C. statehood continued as House Democrats moved swiftly to pass H.R. 1, the For the People Act – a comprehensive anti-corruption and clean elections bill that would protect the right to vote, strengthen ethics laws, and reduce the corrosive influence of big money in politics. Importantly, H.R. 1 declared that District residents deserved the full citizenship rights that only statehood could provide. The bill's passage in the House marked the first time in history that a chamber of Congress had endorsed D.C. statehood.

Not Up for Debate: Ending Corruption and the Power of Special Interests in Washington

BY CHRIS PAPPAS (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 7, 2020

In December we passed H.R. 3 through the House, a bill to dramatically reduce the price of medicines by allowing the government to negotiate prices directly with pharmaceutical companies. H.R. 3 also included a provision I added to the bill, the Advancing Enrollment and Reducing Drug Costs Act of 2019, that would expand low-income seniors' access to prescription drugs under Medicare Part D.

Unfortunately, the drug companies and special interests are digging in to oppose this bill and protect their record profits. Like with nearly 300 bipartisan bills passed by the House, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has blocked a vote on H.R. 3 in the Senate. He has even blocked a drug pricing bill supported by members of his own party.

The sway the special interests hold over this issue is incredible. Last year there were nearly three industry lobbyists for every member of the House and Senate. McConnell himself works hand in glove with these interests, and it was reported earlier this year that he's the top recipient of campaign contributions from executives of big drug companies.

If we're going to make progress on any issue in Washington, we must change this system which rewards monied interests at the expense of the American people. Whether it's drug prices, climate change, or gun violence, the dominance of big money in our political system is skewing our democracy and hurting our people.

It’s time that an American struggling to fill a prescription has the same clout as the CEO of a drug company. That’s why tonight’s debate at Anselm College is a perfect opportunity for presidential candidates to tell New Hampshire voters about their plans to end corruption and the influence of big money.

Their plans should start with H.R. 1, the For the People Act, the most comprehensive package of anti-corruption reforms since Watergate. The bill passed in the House last March, and it would sever the ties between special interests and politicians, protect the right to vote, and ensure public officials are working in the public interest.

They should also include the SHIELD Act to protect our elections from foreign interference, the SAFE Act to shore up our voting systems, and the Voting Rights Advancement Act to protect Americans from discrimination at the ballot box.

The House has taken the lead to protect our democracy, and it’s important for every presidential candidate to let voters know if they’ll join us. My constituents deserve to know if the candidates will support, prioritize, and work to get a comprehensive reform package on their desk that they can sign into law.

We can end corruption and the power of special interests in Washington, and in doing so we will restore a level playing field in our democracy and an ability to make meaningful progress. I hope to have the opportunity to work with the next president to do just that.

CONCORD MONITOR

Ask Candidates How They Will Fix Our Democracy

BY PAUL HODES (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 7, 2020

As the presidential candidates descend on New Hampshire for their last appeals to voters here, we must hear directly from the candidates about how they will fix our democracy to put the voices of our voters above the special interests and outsiders who meddle in our elections to gain an edge.

Despite the threats our democracy has faced in recent years – whether it's presidential abuses of power, partisan gerrymandering, or undue influence of dark money and corporations – we have yet to see a real conversation and specific plans during the debates about how to put the power back in the hands of the people.

Importantly, there is already a solution that will reform our democracy and put the power back in the hands of the people. In March 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which is a comprehensive package of much-needed reforms to fix our democracy. The bill, which was supported by our congressional representatives, Chris Pappas and Annie Kuster, would strengthen our voting and election laws, reform our campaign finance system and impose new ethics requirements. Specifically, to address the influence of wealthy donors and corporations, this bill would require super PACs and "dark money" political organizations to make their donors public. It also strengthens oversight rules to ensure those who break our campaign finance laws are held accountable.

KITSAP Daily News

Rep. Kilmer Hosts Suquamish Town Hall

BY KEN PARK | FEBRUARY 5, 2020

Before heading back to Washington D.C., Washington's 6th District Representative Derek Kilmer — along with his 13-year-old daughter in tow — held a town hall meeting at the Suquamish Tribal Center to field a variety of questions ranging from what he is doing to help local tribes maintain their treaty rights, to cleaning up the Puget Sound.

…

Kilmer went spoke broadly about what he and his office have been doing to get the government and the economy working better for people.

"I think there is too much money in our political system and I thought it was a really good thing when democrats took the majority in the House, the very first [bill] that we passed was a bill called H.R. 1, the For the People Act," Kilmer said. "It was a bill that focused on a number of things, most importantly trying to reduce the role of money in politics."

H.R. 1 includes a number of other bills that reduce the roles of special interest and political action committees in campaign finance. Rep. Kilmer is the lead sponsor of two bills that are encompassed in H.R. 1, one which would seek to restore the Federal Election Commission (FEC).

Kilmer joked that the FEC was almost as dysfunctional as Congress, before sharing a story about the commission arriving at an impasse when trying to decide whether to buy donuts or bagels for a recent anniversary breakfast.

The second bill sponsored by Kilmer, The Honest Ads Act, would require political candidates and special interest groups to disclose who they are when buying internet ads to influence an election.

“We know more and more political spending is going onto the internet and second we know that there are foreign countries that are trying to influence American elections by buying ads on the internet. Right now, there are no laws that protect against that and have suitable disclosure,” Kilmer said.

The New York Times

More Money, More Problems for Democracy

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | FEBRUARY 1, 2020

There is a straight line from the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in the *Citizens United* case to a dinner party the president attended at the Trump International Hotel in Washington in April 2018.

…

But the dinner also provides a clear view of the ways in which the wealthy seek to influence politicians and politicians gather donations, particularly in the wake of Citizens United. That ruling, handed down almost exactly 10 years ago, allows corporations to spend freely on electioneering, provided the money is not given directly to a candidate or a political party. It is the most famous in a set of recent Supreme Court rulings that have made it far easier for wealthy individuals and corporations to translate their economic power into political power.

The economic inequalities of modern America increasingly are manifest in our politics, too.

At the dinner, donors willing to spend lavishly in support of Mr. Trump's re-election had the chance to seek the president's help in placing their own interests above the public interest.

…

Politicians have always needed money, and wealthy patrons have always found ways to provide it in exchange for special consideration of their needs. "There are two things that are important in politics," Senator Mark Hanna said more than

a century ago. “The first is money, and I can’t remember what the second one is.”

In recent decades, however, a pair of intertwined developments have magnified the influence of money on politics: The rich keep getting richer, and the Supreme Court has made it much easier for politicians to tap that wealth. The result is an arms race that leaves politicians ever more beholden to funders.

The Supreme Court effectively has taken over the work of regulating campaign finance by striking down congressional efforts to restrict money in politics and substituting more permissive standards. The first such decision, Buckley v. Valeo, in 1976, held that election spending is a form of constitutionally protected free speech, although it permitted some restrictions to prevent corruption. Under Chief Justice John Roberts, who was installed in 2005, the court has issued a series of rulings significantly expanding what counts as free speech while simultaneously restricting what can be done to prevent corruption.

In Citizens United, the court struck down restrictions on election spending by corporations and unions, leaving only flimsy prohibitions on giving the money to a candidate or taking instructions from a candidate. The court justified this stance by defining political corruption narrowly — as quid pro quo arrangements in which donations effectively purchase desired political outcomes — and then concluding that the protections it had preserved were sufficient.

Mr. Trump, whose administration has been shaped by his willingness to stretch the law, is providing an object lesson in the consequences of the court’s capacious standards. There’s no reason to think the April 2018 dinner was an unusual event.

The unusual part is only that it was taped by one of the supplicants, Mr. Fruman. The guests were donors or potential donors to America First Action SuperPAC, a political organization with no legal ties to Mr. Trump that still managed to obtain

more than an hour of the single most valuable commodity in Washington: the president's time.

Such super PACs are vehicles for complying with the letter of the law by maintaining the legal fiction that their spending is not controlled by any particular politician or party, while still allowing donors to feel confident that the money will be used for a specific purpose and that the beneficiaries — but often not the general public — will know who deserves their thanks.

…

The political scientists Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page presented evidence in a 2017 book, "Democracy in America?," that the wealthiest Americans exercise disproportionate influence, and are particularly successful in blocking even broadly popular policies they don't like.

...

Citizens United is bad law. Limits on corporate political spending are a necessary and legitimate check on the economic power the government grants by letting businesses incorporate. But there is little prospect the court will reverse the decision in the foreseeable future, and proponents of a constitutional amendment have a very long road to travel.

Moreover, the problem is broader than Citizens United. Some guests at Mr. Trump's dinner party made personal donations to America First Action, which could remain legal even if there were limits on corporate donations. The largest political donors in the United States in the 2018 midterm elections were Sheldon Adelson, a casino magnate and big fan of Israel's right-wing government, and his wife, Miriam Adelson, who together gave $123.7 million.

And the presidential candidacies of the billionaires Michael Bloomberg and Tom Steyer offer a valuable reminder that even limits on individual donations would

not entirely suffice, because billionaires still would be able to fund their own candidacies. Mr. Bloomberg already has spent more than twice as much on his own 2020 campaign as Mr. Adelson spent during the 2018 campaign — including $11 million to air a one-minute ad during the Super Bowl.

The best path forward, therefore, is to limit the influence of wealth by allowing candidates to tap other sources of financial support. The federal government offers funding to presidential candidates, but the system is virtually defunct because it imposes spending limits, and major candidates can raise much more money from private sources.

The House passed a bill last year that would create a system of matching public funding for presidential and congressional candidates. A companion bill is backed by all 47 Senate Democrats. Instead of matching contributions dollar for dollar, the legislation would match each dollar from a private donor, up to $200, with $6 in public funding, up to $1,200. That could allow candidates to run competitively without relying on big donors. It would not prevent billionaires from sponsoring political candidates, but it could allow candidates to run without such sponsorship, and to let voters choose accordingly.

Disclosure is crucial, too: A legal loophole allows political nonprofits to conceal the identities of donors. The Supreme Court has suggested that stronger disclosure requirements would be legal. Congressional Republicans have repeatedly blocked such common-sense changes.

The weight of wealth can seem like an overwhelming force, but there is reason for hope. Consider the example of Seattle, which gave registered voters $100 in “democracy vouchers” to donate to local candidates in its City Council elections last year. The public funding did not come close to matching the spending by third parties, notably Amazon. The giant retailer spent $1.5 million, while city funding for each candidate was capped at $150,000. But it was enough to help several candidates win seats over Amazon’s opposition.

Burlington County Times

Rep. Andy Kim Held A Town Hall. No One Wanted to Talk Impeachment

BY DAVID LINSKY | JANUARY 22, 2020

U.S. Rep. Andy Kim's 3rd Congressional District may be known as one of the most politically divided in New Jersey, but you'd never know it from his latest town hall meeting.

There were no protests, interruptions or expressions of outrage from the over 100 residents who crowded into Ocean Gate's tiny town hall. The only raised voice came from one resident who said she was fed up with the Veterans Administration's handling of her husband's medical care.

…

Kim also said he continues to push for Congress to take action on campaign finance reform. He argues that by eliminating the influence of so-called "big money" on Washington will make it easier for lawmakers to reach compromise on difficult issues like health care and prescription drugs.

"I've heard people on both sides of the aisle talking about how important it is to lower drug prices. One thing that makes it particularly difficult is the insane amount of money put in by the pharmaceutical industry against this," he said.

…

Kim said he was encouraged that the Democratic-controlled House succeeded in passing a sweeping campaign finance and ethics bill early last year but lamented

that the Senate, which is under GOP control, has taken no action to either debate or amend it.

The campaign finance measures in the bill include a requirement that 501(c)(4) nonprofits disclose the identity of donors who contribute more than $10,000. It would also ban corporations from contributing to political campaigns if they are substantially owned or controlled by foreigners, and would set up a public financing system for House races that provides matching federal funds for small donations received.

…

Kim said he plans to keep pushing for Senate support for the measure.

“I wish we could see the efforts on campaign finance move forward. I grew up in a time when Republicans like John McCain were champions on campaign finance. I’d love to find those types of people we can work with,” he said Tuesday. “I think everyone in this country can agree we just have too much money in politics. It’s crazy and insane and it drives people crazy.”

Lawmakers: The U.S. Cannot Afford Another 10 Years of Citizens United

BY TOM UDALL AND JOHN SARBANES (OP-ED) | JANUARY 21, 2020

Ten years ago, the Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission unleashed a torrent of outside spending by corporations and wealthy donors who seized the opportunity to buy unlimited influence in Washington. The decision exponentially increased the amount of money in our politics and emboldened foreign actors to corrupt our elections. Our democracy has paid a heavy price.

…

Too many voters believe – with good reason – that their elected representatives work for the wealthy, privileged and powerful, instead of the American people. This loss of faith undermines our democracy.

But in Congress, Democrats are taking direct aim at Citizens United and fighting back against the scourge of big money in our politics. Early last year, we introduced the For the People Act – a historic package of reforms to clean up corruption in Washington, expose secret foreign money in our politics, crack down on lobbyists, strengthen election security, protect the right to vote and return power back to the American people with clean, citizen-owned elections. Backed by every Democrat in the US House of Representatives and the US Senate, the For the People Act – H.R. 1 – passed the House in March, but it has gathered dust on Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's desk in the Senate.

…

The past decade has taught us that we cannot afford another 10 years of Citizens United. The divisions in our country are widened and fueled by unfettered money in our politics. We must move forward from this divisive political moment by returning to one of our most basic American values -- that each person's voice carries equal weight, regardless of how much money they can spend in a political campaign. Leading with the For the People Act, we will keep fighting for that basic American value, we will end the special-interest agenda in Washington and we will return to government of, by and for the people.

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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Citizens United: A Decade of Unlimited Political Spending — and Consequences

BY ELIOT ENGEL (OP-ED) | JANUARY 21, 2020

Is money speech? That's the question the Supreme Court decided 10 years ago in Citizens United v. FEC. The case, which subsequently became landmark for all the wrong reasons, undid years of painstaking bipartisan work by Congress to rein in money in politics. By making the money/speech equivalency, SCOTUS unleashed a torrent of campaign spending by special interest groups and our democracy has not been the same since.

…

Since my first days in Congress I have been a strong advocate for instituting real campaign finance reform. I was proud to work with my colleagues in the House to pass the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, a bicameral effort to combat the flow of money in our elections. The bill passed in 2002 and became the law that was ultimately struck down in Citizens United v. FEC. But just because there have been losses at the Supreme Court, it does not mean we stop fighting.

In March 2019, the House passed H.R. 1, the For the People Act, new legislation designed to overhaul our broken campaign finance laws. H.R. 1 requires Super PACs to disclose their wealthy donors, establishes a voluntary small dollar matching system, and — importantly — supports amending the Constitution to nullify the Citizens United v. FEC decision.

In Stamford, Himes Talks Campaign Finance 10 Years After Citizens United Ruling

BY IGNACIO LAGUARDA | JANUARY 21, 2020

It's an issue U.S. Rep. Jim Himes hears about all the time.

"I don't have a town hall meeting in which somebody doesn't stand up to express their concern over the state of money in our politics today," he said Tuesday at a town hall meeting.

He visited the University of Connecticut-Stamford to host a talk about campaign finance on the 10-year anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling to uphold Citizens United, the court case that prohibited the government from restricting political contributions from corporations and special interest groups.

…

Himes was one of 234 members of the House of Representatives to vote in favor of the 2019 For the People Act, or H.R. 1, that limits the influence of private donor money in politics, among other things.

But even Himes recognizes that the bill is "very, very unlikely" to be taken up in the Senate.

So what are other ways to implement change?

One option is at the state level, and Connecticut is leading the way when it comes to leveling the playing field for candidates.

The state's Citizens' Election Program provides public financing to candidates running for statewide office, a program that was applauded by all of the members of the panel on Tuesday.

…

Cheri Quickmire, executive director of Common Cause, a government reform group, agreed.

"Connecticut really is an example for the nation," she said.

Quickmire added that the program has led to a much more diverse General Assembly than in the past.

She hopes such laws will be passed in states across the country as a way to enact change on the federal level.

"We need to see this bottom-up pressure on our Congress by passing additional reforms at the local level, and only then I think will Congressional Republicans realize what it is that other Republicans and Democrats around the country see, which is that … we have to get big money out of politics," she said.

Minnesota Reformer

Clean Up Our Campaign Finance System

BY DEAN PHILLIPS (OP-ED) | JANUARY 21, 2020

We have legalized corruption in our country through our laws and through our acceptance of a campaign finance system and general culture that requires — and even rewards — the relentless pursuit of money. Most members of Congress spend between 20 and 30 hours per week dialing for dollars. Collectively, that equates to 10,000 to 15,000 hours per week spent raising money, even when Congress is in session.

…

These are serious — and possibly existential — challenges to our democracy. That's the bad news. The good news is that it's not too late to fix it — starting with the very first bill of the 116th Congress: H.R. 1, the For the People Act.

H.R. 1 is an expansive voter protection and campaign finance and ethics reform package. It would expand voter participation in our elections by making it easier for eligible voters to cast their ballots, including by making Election Day a national holiday. It would reduce the influence of money in politics by requiring stricter disclosure requirements and creating a public financing system that would empower small donors. And it would enhance our ethical standards by slowing the revolving door between government and lobbying and enhancing the disclosure rules that govern members of Congress as well as lobbyists.

To most Minnesotans — and huge majorities of Americans, according to public opinion polls — these are commonsense proposals. And yet, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell declared H.R. 1 dead-on-arrival, calling it a Democratic "power grab."

I have often said that we do not have a hardware problem. What we have is a software problem, meaning that we need more elected representatives in Congress — especially in the Senate — who are willing to place the common interest ahead of narrow self-interest and make commonsense reform a priority.

As a vice chair of the Democracy Reform Task Force — and a proud cosponsor of H.R. 1 — I am doing what I can to lead the charge for reform on the inside. What we need are people like you — and millions more across the country to cast your ballots in November for others who are willing to join us.

For that reason, even if campaign finance reform is not your top priority in the upcoming election, I encourage you to make it your number two issue. Chances are, nothing meaningful will happen on the issue you care most about without making real progress on campaign finance and ethics reform — and that begins with H.R. 1.

Citizens United Decision Weathers 10 Years of Controversy

BY ALEX GANGITANO | JANUARY 21, 2020

A decade after the Supreme Court's landmark Citizens United decision, which ushered in the era of super PACs and unlimited donations, the fight over the contentious ruling shows no signs of easing.

The case upended the campaign finance system, after the justices in a 5-4 ruling authored by Justice Anthony Kennedy on Jan. 21, 2010 found that restrictions on corporate campaign spending violated free speech.

Democrats blasted the decision, warning of the impact of corporate money flooding into elections. But the ruling also opened the door for labor unions and nonprofits to ramp up their campaign spending, altering the landscape.

…

End Citizens United has been advocating for House Resolution 1, the Democrats wide-ranging bill that passed the House in March but was not taken up by the GOP Senate. The bill includes proposals for electoral reforms and more campaign finance transparency.

…

Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), chairman of the Democracy Reform Task Force which is behind H.R. 1, called 10 years of Citizens United a “very sober” anniversary at a press conference last Tuesday.

“It’s where this arrogance began on the part of Super PACs and the super wealthy armed with this idea somehow that corporations are people, money is speech. They decided that they were going to take over American politics,” he said.

Sarbanes also pointed to the many Democratic candidates who have had to drop out of the 2020 race, while billionaire candidates have stayed in.

If H.R. 1 passed, Sarbanes said, that would change.

INSIDER NJ

Congressman Andy Kim to Hold Town Hall in Ocean Gate

JANUARY 15, 2020

Today, Congressman Andy Kim announced that he will host a town hall meeting in Ocean Gate on Wednesday, January 22nd at 12:30pm.

…

This will be the sixteenth town hall held by Congressman Kim during the 116th Congress, and part of a monthly series to allow the Congressman to hear directly from constituents throughout New Jersey's Third District. The Congressman, focused on issues impacting the lives of people in Burlington and Ocean Counties, will provide an update on efforts to lower prescription drug costs, address the opioid epidemic and support New Jersey's veterans.

Congressman Kim will also be joined by Tiffany Muller, President and Executive Director of End Citizens United Action Fund, a group dedicated to ending the influence of money in politics. Kim and Muller will provide an update on efforts to reverse the impact of the Citizens United Supreme Court Case, which was decided 10 years ago this week.

Congressman Kim was a vocal advocate for the passage of H.R. 1, a bill that passed the House that strengthens ethics laws and puts political power back in the hands of the people.

This Is the Silent Political Revolution of 2020

BY LAWRENCE LESSIG (OP-ED) | DECEMBER 12, 2019

Democrats s the Democratic Primary kicks into high gear, it is increasingly clear that 2020 could give America a choice that it has not had since Richard Nixon resigned: An election that promises critical change to our political system. At least 7 of the remaining candidates in the Democratic primary have committed to making fundamental government reform their first priority in office. We have not been this close to real change of America's politics since the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It is therefore time that the candidates' plans – and how they differ – become the focus of more media attention.

Michael Bennet, Pete Buttigieg, Tulsi Gabbard, Amy Klobuchar, Tom Steyer, Elizabeth Warren and Andrew Yang have promised both to make this reform happen, and to happen first. This itself is a first in the history of American politics.

The inspiration, in part, for this movement is House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Many of these candidates are following the template of H.R. 1 or the "For the People Act of 2019." In the lead-up to the 2018 election, Pelosi's colleague, Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD), convinced her and the Democratic leadership to make political reform the priority in 2019, if indeed the Democrats won control of the House. Pelosi delivered on her promise, passing H.R. 1 in March this year. But as important as the substance of that bill is, the title is even more important – by denominating the bill as first, Pelosi said what reformers have been insisting upon for decades now: that we must fix democracy before democracy can sensibly address America's problems.

The GOP Is Ignoring the Will of the American People

BY JANA MORGAN (OP-ED) | NOVEMBER 5, 2019

Three times. That's how many attempts Senate Democrats have made to pass much-needed democracy reform legislation in recent months, only to have it blocked by Senate Republicans. The latest example was last Wednesday when Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Senate Republicans blocked a critical vote on H.R. 1, the For the People Act, a groundbreaking democracy reform bill that passed with unanimous Democratic support in the House earlier this year.

Our democracy works best when everybody's voice can be heard, instead of being drowned out by the voices of corporate interests and dark money. H.R. 1 is a bold, once-in-a-generation democracy reform package designed to realize the promise of our democracy and repair our democratic institutions.

The bill includes three key areas of reform: voting and election laws, campaign finance and ethics. Some of the new changes it proposes include allowing national automatic voter registration, ending partisan gerrymandering, strengthening election security, requiring the president and vice president to disclose 10 years of tax returns, requiring super PACs and "dark money" political organizations to make their donors public, and eliminating loopholes in rules designed to prohibit coordination between candidates and super PACs.

It is deeply concerning that McConnell and Senate Republicans once again blocked H.R. 1. By stopping the legislation from moving forward, Senate Republicans are standing in the way of critical election security measures, ones that will strengthen

our laws that prevent interference in our elections by Russia and other foreign adversaries, which takes on particular salience given the impeachment inquiry and the pressure our president put on Ukraine's leader to influence the 2020 election.

In their refusal to support critical democracy reform legislation, the GOP is ignoring the 77 percent of people who say that "reducing the influence of special interests and corruption in Washington" is either the most important or a very important issue facing the country. They're also ignoring the 66 percent of U.S. adults who agree that wealthy individuals and corporations have too much influence in our current election system. They're ignoring the interests of the American people and sticking with a democracy that works for them instead of those they serve.

There should be nothing partisan or controversial about making our democracy more accessible and accountable to voters. The majority of the public wants reform. What are Republicans waiting for?

If the GOP opposes the bold reforms demanded by the overwhelming majority of their constituents, they should have the courage to take a vote. The Senate must bring H.R. 1 to the floor for a vote immediately. This continued obstruction by McConnell and Senate Republicans signal that they are putting special interests over the interests of the American people.

The San Diego Union-Tribune

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Rep. Mike Levin Talk Government Reform, Ethics in Oceanside

BY CHARLES T. CLARK | NOVEMBER 4, 2019

At the event, with dozens of pro-Trump protesters amassed outside, Pelosi joined Rep. Mike Levin and more than 250 San Diego County residents for a discussion focused mostly on campaign finance and ethics reform.

Pelosi and Levin, a freshman Democrat from San Juan Capistrano, touted House Resolution 1, the first bill Democrats passed when taking control of the House earlier this year.

The bill, dubbed the For the People Act of 2019, is an anti-corruption bill that seeks to expand voting rights, propose new financial disclosure requirements on campaigns and creates incentives for elected officials to build campaigns around small donors rather than large corporate donations.

The bill has little chance of passing. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., made it clear early that he does not intend to take it up in the Senate.

But that didn't deter House Democrats from making it a priority and some candidates from using it as a campaign issue.

"We're breaking down the cynicism that exists in our electoral system by saying to people, your voice is as important as anyone," said Pelosi, a San Francisco Democrat. "To do that we must rid our political system of dark, special-interest money."

Getting money out of politics could open the door for progress on other issues, she said.

Levin echoed the point.

“Whether it be health care, gun violence prevention or any of the rest of them, campaign finance reform is the overarching issue that impacts all of it,” said Levin. “If we took meaningful steps in that direction it would dramatically improve our system.”

Pelosi and Levin also discussed threats such as voter suppression efforts and the strategic spread of misinformation online.

Pelosi said there is an ongoing mission from people inside and outside the country to demoralize voters.

“America is a great country; we’re a country of optimism and hope, entrepreneurship and the American Dream,” she said, “but online they are sending a message — amplified by their bots — that nobody cares about you in Washington, D.C.”

She said the fight against misinformation is at home and abroad.

“We have a fight on our hands for who we are as a country,” she said. “Forget politics. Forget Democrats and Republicans. This is about patriotism.”

The Washington Post

Trump Is the Culmination of All That Has Gone Wrong in Our Politics

BY E.J. DIONNE JR. (OPINION) | OCTOBER 13, 2019

The indictment of Giuliani's associates is well worth reading as a road map to how the system can be gamed. It illustrates, said veteran campaign reformer Fred Wertheimer, how Citizens United "created a clear path for unlimited amounts of foreign money to enter our political system."

...

The indictment, said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the lead sponsor of H.R. 1, the comprehensive reform bill approved this year by the House, "is a glimpse into the broad culture of corruption and ethical blindness that has infected our politics, particularly in the area of campaign finance."

His use of the word "culture" is important. Legal limits on unsavory practices outlaw socially destructive actions but also signal what kinds of public behavior are morally unacceptable. Bad laws encourage bad habits.

"People cross these lines with impunity," Sarbanes told me, "and if they can't even see the lines, they start thinking they can get away with anything."

Which brings it all back to a man whose words and actions suggest he really does believe he can get away with anything. It is a supreme irony that Trump triumphed by exploiting public disaffection with a political system so many Americans see as infested with sleaze and controlled by forces operating entirely for their own benefit.

Rather than being the cure for such maladies, he is their apotheosis, the culmination of all that has gone wrong in our politics. The task of the impeachment inquiry is to use his Ukrainian misadventure to bring home the breadth of the president's venality and self-dealing. The goal should be not only to rid the country of a dangerous leader but also to show how desperately our system needs repair.

Roll Call

Democrats Press Senate to Take Up Overhaul of Campaigns and Ethics

BY KATE ACKLEY | SEPTEMBER 27, 2019

As House Democrats pursue an impeachment inquiry based largely on possible campaign finance violations against President Donald Trump, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other House Democrats sought a fresh spotlight for their stalled political money, ethics and elections overhaul measure.

The House passed the bill by a vote of 234-193 along party lines on March 8, 200 days ago, the California Democrat noted.

“We sent this legislation over to the Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and it’s been sitting there in his grim reaper role,” Pelosi said at a Friday news conference flanked by several House Democratic freshmen who ran on many of the proposals included in the measure. “We’re saying to him, ‘You may think this is dead over there, grim reaper' — what a nice thing to say about yourself — but it is alive and well in the public.”

House Democrats’ mega overhaul bill seeks to remake the nation’s voting, campaign finance and ethics laws and to shore up security at ballot boxes. That’s an especially urgent matter, Democrats argue, with the 2020 elections about a year away.

The measure’s lead sponsor, Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland, acknowledged that the Senate was unlikely to take up the bill under McConnell's leadership, and he said it would remain a signature proposal for his party’s congressional and presidential candidates in the 2020 campaigns.

Democrats Press for Action on Election Security

BY MAGGIE MILLER | SEPTEMBER 17, 2019

Congressional Democrats renewed their call for election security legislation during a national day of action on Tuesday, as a Senate Appropriations subcommittee left out funding for it in its annual spending bill.

...

One of the bills Democrats have called for a Senate vote on is H.R. 1, a sweeping voting rights and election security bill passed by the House along party lines in March. Republicans have blocked this bill.

...

Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the primary sponsor of the bill in the House, said during the same press conference on Tuesday that in blocking H.R. 1, McConnell "is standing in the way with his arms folded at the gates of democracy and saying to the American public, you shall not pass."

Associated Press

Democrats Call for a Senate Vote on Elections Reform Package

BY JENNIFER MCDERMOTT | AUGUST 22, 2019

Democratic congressmen held an event Thursday in Rhode Island to try to pressure Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell into allowing a vote on a comprehensive elections and ethics reform package.

Maryland Democratic Rep. John Sarbanes, who is the bill's main author, met with Rhode Island Rep. David Cicilline and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse in North Providence.

The influence of big money in politics is impeding efforts to address climate change, gun violence and prescription drug costs, they said. Activists working on those issues attended the event.

"This isn't just some theory, like wouldn't it be good to reform government because good government is an abstract idea," Cicilline said. "It has a direct effect on people's lives. The corrupting influence of money and its impact on public policy is hurting the American people."

The legislation, called H.R. 1 to signify its importance, would make it easier to register and vote, require "dark money" political groups to make their donors public, and create a public financing system for congressional campaigns that Democrats say will cut down on corruption and reduce the power of lobbyists and other special interests.

It would also tighten election security and require presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns. The House passed it in March , with all Democrats voting "yes" and all Republicans voting "no."

…

Sarbanes, Cicilline and Whitehouse all said the reforms are crucial to making the government respond to the needs of the American people, rather than special interests and corporations, and restore the public's faith in government.

Sarbanes said they're also asking voters to choose a team of reformers in 2020 and not reelect President Donald Trump, whom he called a "demagogue."

"Mitch McConnell is standing at the doors of the United States Senate with his arms crossed, saying to the American people, 'You shall not pass,'" he said. "We're going to keep the pressure on him. The message to him is, if you won't put that the bill on the floor, then we're going to try to change the composition to make sure it gets to the floor. Democrats have made a promise to clean up government."

PROVIDENCE Journal

Whitehouse, Cicilline Call for McConnell to Allow Vote on Ethics-Reform Bill

BY PAUL EDWARD PARKER | AUGUST 22, 2019

Three congressional Democrats staged a news conference Thursday morning to put pressure on Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to allow a vote on what they described as the most sweeping ethics-reform bill since the Watergate era.

Sponsored by Rep. John P. Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat, who attended the news conference, the bill known as H.R. 1 would, he said, improve voter access to elections, tighten ethics rules for federal elected officials and reduce the influence of money on politics.

“People understand increasingly, they get it, that money is blocking progress,” Sarbanes said.

He was joined by Rhode Island Democrats Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse and Rep. David N. Cicilline. The three cited the pharmaceutical industry’s opposition to prescription price limits, the oil and gas industry’s opposition to climate-change controls and the National Rifle Association’s opposition to restrictions on gun ownership as examples of where money has stymied legislation.

“The purpose of this event is to keep pressure on the Senate majority leader” to allow his Republican-controlled chamber to vote on H.R. 1, Cicilline said.

Seacoastonline.com

$90K for One Daily Pill: Pushing Back on High Cost of Rx Drugs

BY KAREN DANDURANT | AUGUST 22, 2019

State and federal leaders met Thursday with local residents and health officials to discuss prescription drugs and the role they believe removing money from politics will play in expanding access to affordable treatment.

…

Pappas, who was joined by Congressman John Sarbanes, D-Maryland, and a panel of experts and advocates, is supporting the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act of 2019 and supported the Strengthening Health Care and Lowering Prescription Drug Costs Act, which has already passed the House. The congressman said they came to hear the stories and input of New Hampshire, so they can bring them back to Washington when they reconvene after Labor Day.

…

“We know we have to do something now,” said Sarbanes. “No one I know is not upset and yet we can’t seem to get anything done in Washington because of the influence of big industry, particularly big pharma, who spend millions to make their case, who fund SuperPAC groups. That influence is what is stopping us from getting legislation through. We must go to the root of the problems and change the culture so it’s not the insiders and money people calling the shots, but the people of this country.”

Both congressmen support House Resolution 1, a bill led by Sarbanes. It addresses voter access, election integrity, election security, political spending, and ethics for the three branches of government.

LAS VEGAS SUN

Lawmakers: Transparency, Shining Light on Dark Money Donations Key to Curbing High Cost of Prescription Drugs

BY JOHN SADLER | AUGUST 21, 2019

Thirteen-year-old Joey Ward's asthma attacks are so severe that he often has to leave school when he is suffering an attack.

The cost of the prescription drugs he has taken for years to control his asthma continues to rise, so much so that his mother sometimes has to ask for help to pay for his medication.

…

Ward's was just one of the stories about soaring prescription costs told Tuesday afternoon in Las Vegas during a roundtable discussion led by U.S. Reps. Steven Horsford and Susie Lee.

The two Democrats, whose districts include parts of Southern Nevada, say rising prescription drug costs can be traced to a number of factors, including a lack of pricing transparency, market exclusivity for drug creators and pharmaceutical industry influence in politics.

…

"There's not many issues in this country where I think we can come together, but I do think that prescription drug pricing — it doesn't matter if you're a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, it doesn't matter if you live in rural Iowa or you live in Los Angeles — this is an issue that affects every single American and one that we in Congress need to come together to address," Lee said.

Lee touted passage of the For the People Act, which she called probably the most important piece of legislation that has cleared the House this year. The act would require political organizations that dole out money to candidates to make their donors public. These dark money donations, she said, are one of the tools in the drug lobby's arsenal.

"I'm part of a historic freshman class," Lee said. "We got elected on an agenda of cleaning corruption out of Washington, of bringing government back for the people, and (the act) does that by getting rid of dark money — the dark money that pharmaceutical companies (have) used to control Congress for so long."

The For the People Act, however, has hit a roadblock in the Senate, with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, keeping it and many other Democratic-backed bills from the House from being debated in the upper chamber.

HUFFPOST

Freshmen Dems Bash Mitch McConnell While Calling for a Senate Vote on Their Reform Bill

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | JUNE 5, 2019

Nearly every freshman House Democrat sent a letter on Wednesday to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) calling on him to bring the sweeping campaign finance and election reform bill passed by the House to the Senate floor for a vote.

The For The People Act (H.R. 1) would create a system of publicly financed House elections, expand voting rights by mandating early voting and automatic voter registration, enhance election security and enact ethics reforms like requiring presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns. It passed the House on a 234-193 party-line vote on March 8. Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) has introduced a companion bill in the Senate backed by every Senate Democrat.

McConnell, a fierce opponent of campaign finance reform, has attacked the bill a "power grab" by the Democratic Party and refused to bring it to the Senate floor for a vote. As majority leader, he is under no obligation to bring any piece of legislation to the Senate floor for a vote.

The freshmen Democrats calling on McConnell to give their bill a vote in the Senate attacked McConnell as a "bought-and-paid-for" representative of the Washington elite on Wednesday at a press conference hosted by End Citizens United, a pro-campaign finance reform political action committee.

"Mitch McConnell remains in the pockets of the special interests," Rep. Max Rose (D-N.Y.) said.

“He won’t even take a meeting with us,” Rose added. “At this point, I’m thinking the only way we can get a meeting with Mitch McConnell is if we take out our checkbooks and max out to him. That’s the only reason why he sits down with people cause he is bought-and-paid-for.”

Rep. Sharice Davids (D-Kansas) said that McConnell “continues to defend a rigged system.”

New Hampshire Rep. Chris Pappas (D) added: “Mitch McConnell doesn’t know what democracy looks like.”

“He has no argument for holding up legislation to protect our democracy from foreign interference,” Malinowski said. “He is putting party over country.”

These House freshmen won election in 2018 by running on issues like campaign finance reform and expanding voting rights. Those calling on McConnell to give the For The People Act a vote in the Senate had previously sent a letter during the 2018 campaign calling on House leadership of both parties to prioritize these issues.

McConnell has promised not to bring this bill — or practically any bill passed by House Democrats — to the Senate floor. While Democrats want a vote on their bill, they also plan to use McConnell’s refusal in their 2020 election campaign to showcase their support for reforming Washington and the Republican Party’s opposition.

Freshman Democrats Call on McConnell to Hold Vote on Election Reform Bill

BY MAGGIE MILLER | JUNE 5, 2019

A group of 62 freshmen House Democrats demanded Wednesday that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) allow a vote on a sweeping election reform and security bill previously passed by the House.

The bill includes language to reform the election process, along with language to secure voting systems against cyber attacks. Senate Democrats have also introduced a companion bill.

…

McConnell, though, has shown no sign he'll agree to hold a Senate floor vote.

…

The bill was the first major piece of legislation introduced by the new House Democrat majority in January. Beyond its provisions on cybersecurity, it would require redistricting commissions to prevent gerrymandering, tighten rules around political lobbyists and stop foreign money from being used in U.S. elections.

Roll Call

H.R. 1 Provides Freshman House Dems a McConnell 101 Lesson

BY CHRIS MARQUETTE | JUNE 5, 2019

While it is not quite an unstoppable force meeting an immovable object, the metaphor is close enough: Freshman House Democrats who roared into the majority in January with ambitious legislative plans are increasingly facing the reality of a Senate majority leader who has little interest in what they want.

The latest reality check came on Wednesday when a substantial portion of first-year House Democrats — 62 members — urged Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to act on HR 1, a sweeping House-passed bill that seeks to fortify ethics rules for public officials, overhaul campaign finance and expand access to voting.

In a letter to the Kentucky Republican, the Democrats stressed how they pledged action on those three pillars as their first priority of the 116th Congress. Several of the signatories staged a press conference in front of the Capitol where they implored the Senate to act.

“We call upon Mitch McConnell. What are you waiting for? What are you waiting for? I’m not asking for him to vote for this. I’m asking for him to put it up for a vote,” Rep. Andy Kim, D-N.J., said.

The For the People Act, introduced by Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., was passed by the House in March and had 235 Democratic co-sponsors. The companion bill in the Senate, S 949, was introduced by Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M. in March and no action has been taken since.

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT
Your Hometown Newspaper

Spanberger Leads Campaign-Finance, Ethics-Reform Push

BY CLINT SCHEMMER | JUNE 5, 2019

Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D-Va., yesterday urged the Senate to vote on the campaign finance and ethics reforms passed by the House of Representatives in March.

The 7th District congresswoman called on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to let senators debate House Resolution 1, the For the People Act, the most sweeping clean-government measure passed by the House in a generation. The legislation, which passed 234-193, was House Democrats' top priority after they took office on Jan. 3.

…

H.R. 1 includes Spanberger's bipartisan amendment to strengthen the integrity of U.S. elections and prevent foreign interference in our political system.

Several provisions in H.R. 1 derive from bills with bipartisan support in the House or Senate, including the DISCLOSE Act to address dark money in elections, the Honest Ads Act to require digital ad disclosure, and the Prevent Election Hacking Act of 2018 to upgrade the nation's election infrastructure.

Calling it "a terrible proposal," McConnell has openly mocked the bill and vowed not to bring it to the Senate floor.

St. John News

Urge Senators to Support the For the People Act

BY TERESA BRIGGS AND CILLE KING (OP-ED) | MAY 29, 2019

The For the People Act (H.R. 1/S.949) passed the U.S. House of Representatives and was introduced in the Senate in March.

This act would include expanded early and absentee voting. It would also provide online and same day voter registration, which has been shown to increase voter turnout by as much as 10% in other states and reduce the number of uncounted provisional ballots.

Some communities have been divided by district maps, drawn by politicians to serve themselves, not us. Both Democrats and Republicans have been guilty of controlling the redistricting process to benefit their own party. H.R. 1/S.949 would require independent redistricting commissions to abolish gerrymandering, giving voice to every voter.

Money now plays a major role in our elections. Our government should respond to the will of the people, not the interests of powerful corporations and wealthy donors. This legislation will repair the broken Federal Election Commission, and it would improve campaign finance transparency and strengthen ethics enforcement.

We urge every Kansan to contact your Senators and tell them about the above reforms that you support, and especially to call on them to support a hearing on the For the People Act (H.R. 1/S.949). As a member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee which has the power to advance this legislation, Senator Roberts needs to hear from us that we want a debate and vote on these reforms.

U.S. Election Cybersecurity Agency Staff 'Strained to the Breaking Point'

BY CHRISTOPHER BING | MAY 22, 2019

As the U.S. government prepares to defend the 2020 presidential election from cyber threats, the federal agency charged with helping administer elections, the Election Assistance Commission, says it is “strained to the breaking point,” according to Chairwoman Christy McCormick.

“Obviously we’re a very small agency and quite under funded,” McCormick said on Wednesday during a House of Representatives Oversight Committee hearing. “We’re stretched very thin.”

McCormick told lawmakers the agency is seeking additional funding from Congress. That funding is part of a sweeping election reform package, known as H.R. 1, which passed the House earlier this year but has yet to be voted on in the Senate.

Multiple federal agencies, including the Justice Department, Homeland Security Department and intelligence community, play a role in protecting U.S. elections from foreign interference.

The Election Assistance Commission is responsible for setting standards and guidelines for election officials and voting equipment makers. But since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the agency has also taken on additional responsibilities related to cybersecurity, McCormick said.

“We’re asking for more money so we can hire more staff to meet the demands. The EAC’s mission has expanded since it was created,” said McCormick. “We didn’t have the cybersecurity needs at the time. We always worried about election security but since 2016, this is an additional mission for our agency. And we’ve stepped up in every way we can given the resources we have.”

Lawmakers expressed concern on Wednesday about the EAC’s ability to perform its responsibilities because of a lack of resources.

…

McCormick told lawmakers last week that the agency’s budget had been cut by 50 percent since 2010, when it had 49 staffers.

“If there’s going to be any practical impact on what happens in 2020 given the threats that have been discussed here today, urgent action is needed,” said Massachusetts Secretary of State Bill Galvin, who also testified during the same hearing on Wednesday. “Particularly at the level of the EAC.”

The Detroit News

For the People Act Fixes Broken System

BY BRANDON JESSUP (OP-ED) | MAY 22, 2019

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed the For the People Act, a groundbreaking democracy reform package which ensures every voter can cast a ballot free from barriers, curbs the culture of corruption in Washington, D.C. and ends the dominance of big money in politics. These reforms are critical in building a democracy that works for everyone, not just wealthy elites. I am proud Democratic U.S. Sens. Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters of Michigan support its Senate companion bill. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell must stop standing in the way and hold a vote.

…

The For the People Act will curb the big money politics that led to and continues to fuel Flint's water crisis, putting our elections back in the hands of everyday citizens. The bill will multiply the power of small donors, bring dark money into the light, and strengthen oversight and accountability of public servants.

The bill also builds on decades of pioneers who spent their lives making it easier to vote. More than 40 years ago, Michigan's first African-American elected to statewide office, Secretary of State Richard Austin, implemented the nation's first "motor voter" law, allowing citizens to register to vote when applying for a driver's license. Michigan wouldn't see another reform like this until last year's midterm elections, when a near super-majority of voters approved constitutional amendments to end gerrymandering, create an automatic voter registration system, allow same-day registration, and implement no-excuse absentee voting – reforms that are expected to empower 300,000 new voters in 2020.

The For the People Act heeds citizen-led movements in states like Michigan to forge a stronger democracy that makes sure every vote is heard, counted, and protected.

It’s time to eliminate barriers to the ballot box, enact tougher ethics standards to hold public officials accountable and end big money in politics. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell should stop standing in the way of the For the People Act so we can fix our broken political system and create a democracy that works for everyone.

The Gazette

'For the People Act' Deserves Debate

BY MARY RAE BRAGG (OP-ED) | MAY 21, 2019

The For the People Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 1) and was introduced in the Senate in March. The League of Women Voters of Iowa strongly believes this act is needed to protect voting rights in Iowa. The For the People Act will improve and modernize our elections and put power back into the hands of the American people.

The act is a bold, transformative set of reforms that will strengthen our democracy. It will restore voting rights to felons, limit gerrymandering, and help with campaign finance reform.

In Iowa, 52,000 citizens are unable to participate in elections because of felony convictions. Iowa and Kentucky are presently the only two states with such restrictions since Florida's citizens voted to restore voting rights for felons. Once ex-felons have served their sentences, there is no good reason why that right should not be restored. Indeed, restoration of voting rights is credited with reducing recidivism and promoting public safety.

In many states gerrymandering is used to create districts with an unfair advantage for one political party. The state of Iowa's method of redistricting, in which the lines are drawn by the Legislative Services Agency and approved by the Legislature, is considered a model for how to create congressional and state legislative districts. The For the People Act would make sure that such a fair process is used in all states.

Campaign finance reform is a concern for Iowans as well as all political parties. Not only would the For the People Act introduce voluntary public financing for all campaigns, matching small donations at a 6:1 ratio, it would set stricter limits on foreign lobbying and require “dark money” organizations to disclose donations. It would also restructure the Federal Election Commission, to reduce partisan gridlock.

The power to advance this legislation lies in the hands of the Senate Finance Committee chairman, Iowa’s U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley. Grassley has made no secret of the fact that he does not support portions of the bill, but that should not prevent him from bringing it before his committee for a full discussion of the problems and concerns it addresses.

In the name of good governance, we urge every Iowan to contact Grassley and demand he provide a hearing of the For the People Act.

Tampa Bay Times

U.S. Senate Should Pass For the People Act

BY ANDREW GILLUM (OP-ED) | MAY 16, 2019

We need to ensure that every voice is heard, every vote is counted and every vote is protected. The U.S. House recently passed a sweeping new democracy reform bill called the For The People Act, which removes barriers to the ballot box, ends the dominance of big money in politics and ends the culture of corruption in Washington. It was the first bill introduced in the 116th Congress, and I am proud that every Democratic representative in Florida voted to ensure its passage. These reforms are a necessary first step in making progress on the very real problems Floridians face. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is standing in the way. Our very own senators, Marco Rubio and Rick Scott, should support the Senate companion bill — and call on McConnell to hold a vote.

The Supreme Court's decision removed the formula to determine which states and counties had a history of racial discrimination in voting and needed the government's approval before changing voting laws. That formula covered many counties in Florida, including Collier, Hardee, Hendry, Hillsborough and Monroe counties.

In the absence of federal protections, states have enacted harmful new forms of voter suppression, like mismatch signature laws, voter purges and strict identification requirements. States like Georgia, Alabama, and Kansas have removed polling places and driver's license offices in majority-minority communities. And, despite Florida voters overwhelmingly approving Amendment 4 that restored the vote to men and women with past felony convictions, our own

Legislature and governor are attempting to deny enfranchisement to these returning citizens, who are disproportionately black and brown.

We have seen some states take initiative and implement more inclusive measures such as automatic voter registration and early voting. But this will never be enough. We need comprehensive federal solutions.

Fixing our broken political system is not a partisan issue. Americans across the country, Republicans and Democrats, have said in poll after poll that the government and our electoral system needs extensive reform. Americans of all political stripes know that democracy is at its best when everyone is given a chance to fully participate, no matter where they live or what they look like.

Too much is at stake for our democracy not to deliver on the reforms in the For the People Act. The legislation would not only fight against targeted voter suppression. It would also address partisan gerrymandering, dark money influence, campaign finance reform and ethics abuses by elected officials.

It is past time that we implement the will of the people and make the For The People Act the law of the land. It may be the only way to restore free and fair elections in states like ours, which have begun to crumble under the weight of bad political actors. This bill is a once-in-a-generation proposal, and it is on us to make sure we hand down a democratic process that our children and grandchildren can prosper under.

POLITICO

Dems Plan Slice-and-Dice Strategy to Pressure McConnell

BY SARAH FERRIS | MAY 16, 2019

House Democrats can't get Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to hold a vote on their biggest legislative accomplishment.

So they're going to pass it all over again.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) is eyeing a new strategy that would take the caucus' signature achievement this year — a sprawling elections and government transparency bill — and break it into bite-size pieces with fresh votes on the floor, according to multiple lawmakers and aides.

The move is intended to pressure Senate Republicans into taking up House bills and underscores a desire by Democratic leadership to spotlight all the legislation that has languished on the other side of the Capitol.

"Since Senator McConnell refuses to take up H.R. 1, I am prepared to bring to the Floor and pass individual bills to address the reforms included in the For the People Act," Hoyer said in a statement to POLITICO.

The package, which passed on a party-line vote in March, is expected to be sliced into separate pieces in the coming weeks on election security, voting rights and campaign finance.

THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

Republicans Abandon Election Security

BY ELIZA NEWLIN CARNEY | MAY 16, 2019

Russian attacks on the U.S. election infrastructure in 2016 were even more serious than reported at the time, recent disclosures show, and intelligence officials say they are bracing for more aggressive attacks from a wider array of foreign adversaries in 2020.

Yet instead of moving to shore up the nation's vulnerable voting machines and databases, the Trump administration is sabotaging efforts to enhance election security at every turn. Trump's determination to portray Russian interference as a hoax has made it taboo for members of his own administration to even talk about foreign meddling, and has derailed the leading bipartisan election security bill on Capitol Hill.

To make matters worse, Republicans have signaled that they don't even plan to hold a single hearing on election security legislation—despite a growing list of bills introduced in recent weeks to block foreign interference on multiple fronts, many of them bipartisan. The reason? It seems that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is in such a fit of pique over House Democrats' approval of sweeping democracy legislation that he's unwilling to discuss election legislation of any kind.

Never mind that Democrats' reform package, known as H.R. 1, contained multiple election security measures, including grants for voting machine upgrades and testing, that are broadly supported on both sides of the aisle. McConnell abhors the bill's disclosure and public matching funds provisions, and has slammed it as a "Democrat Political Protection Act." That's poisoned the

waters, say Republicans who argue that the election security stalemate is therefore (somehow) Democrats' fault.

Democrats' approval of H.R. 1 has "made it even less likely" that an election security bill would come to the floor, Republican Senator Roy Blunt told The Kansas City Star. Blunt chairs the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, which has jurisdiction over election security, but he told the Star that there would be no point marking up a bill "that can't possibly be voted on on the floor."

Instead, Blunt held an oversight hearing this week on the Election Assistance Commission—a worthy topic, but one that still leaves crucial election security legislation on the back burner. The Senate's leading bipartisan election reform bill, authored by Oklahoma Republican James Lankford and Minnesota Democrat Amy Klobuchar, was abruptly yanked from a markup before Blunt's committee last year amid White House opposition. The bill, which would require states to use machines that produce a paper record and to conduct post-election audits, has influential GOP backing, including from Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr, of North Carolina.

…

The FBI is "very much viewing 2018 as just kind of a dress rehearsal for the big show in 2020," said Wray in a speech last month at the Council on Foreign Relations. Russia's campaign to interfere and sow discord "is not just an election-cycle threat," Wray said. "It's a 365-day-a-year threat." The FBI has deployed agents and analysts, and requested additional funding from Congress, to defend against foreign interference. Republicans on Capitol Hill, by contrast, are taking their cue from the White House—essentially inviting foreign adversaries to attack American elections once again.

TULSA WORLD
MEDIA COMPANY

The 'For the People Act' Is Critical to America's Future

BY JAN LARGENT | MAY 13, 2019

H.R. 1 — the For the People Act — is a democracy reform bill that passed in the House of Representatives on March 8.

The League of Women Voters of the United States and the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma proudly support this legislation, which would be the most sweeping anti-corruption and voting rights legislation that has come about. Some of the main tenets of the bill are the expansion and protection of voting rights, transparency and regulation of campaign finance and efforts to fight corruption and maintain ethics in election processes.

…

The Oklahoma League appreciates Sen. James Lankford's efforts to ensure the security of our democracy, especially his participation in the bipartisan Secure Elections Act. Now we call upon the senator to do even more to secure democracy in America by demanding a hearing for and supporting the For the People Act.

We encourage Oklahomans to contact Sen. Lankford and tell him HR 1 is critical to America's future. It is time for Congress to make our election system freer, fairer and accessible to all eligible Americans.

NM POLITICAL REPORT

Rejecting Corporate PAC Money for New Mexicans

BY BEN RAY LUJÁN (OP-ED) | MAY 10, 2019

At the start of the last Congress, one of the first votes House Republicans took was on a bill designed to unravel protections for workers exposed to chemicals like beryllium. Beryllium is one of the chemicals that poisoned my father's lungs and caused his cancer.

Watching House Republicans vote against the health and safety needs of people like my father in order to placate special interests left me sick.

That first vote is indicative of the Republican party. Last Congress, House Republicans raised taxes on and stripped health care from working Americans all to satisfy their special interest donors.

Watching House Republicans put the interests of big corporations over hard-working Americans was the reason I worked so hard, as chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee last year, to elect a Democratic majority – a majority that would put people like my father and my constituents first.

And of this new majority, dozens of candidates – from districts across the country – recognized that in order to change Washington, they'd have to change how we elect the people who serve there. These candidates built campaigns powered by people, not corporations.

It worked, and they won. And now House Democrats – including the most diverse class of freshmen in history – have taken concrete actions to bolster working women and men. Our first major legislative vote: The For the People Act, a sweeping campaign finance package that would drastically curb the influence of big money in politics.

The pride I felt watching that legislation, which I helped shepherd, pass in the House was matched only by the anger I felt when Mitch McConnell announced it was dead-on-arrival in the U.S. Senate. That's become a common refrain from McConnell – whose dubbed himself the "Grim Reaper" for the good legislation we're championing in the House.

It's one of the reasons I'm running for Senate. McConnell's refusal to address our broken campaign finance system is stifling the voices of the American people.

That's not how it's supposed to work. That's never been my approach to governing – it's just not the New Mexico way. In New Mexico, we work together for the good of the community. It's how I've spent my time in Congress and how I'll continue to work in the U.S. Senate. Whether that means securing millions of dollars in opioid treatment funding, protecting the 300,000 New Mexicans with pre-existing conditions, or introducing an ambitious plan to cut greenhouse gases by 60 percent – my work is always for the people.

Today, I'm taking that advocacy a step further: my campaign for the U.S. Senate will not accept corporate PAC money.

This decision is at the core of the kind of campaign I'm running. A campaign run on New Mexican values that is built by the people, not corporations.

SunSentinel

Federal Voting Rights Bill for Ex-Felons Merits Support of Rubio, Scott

BY MONÉ HOLDER (OP-ED) | MAY 6, 2019

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed the For the People Act, a groundbreaking democracy reform package which will ensure that every voter can cast a ballot free from barriers, end the dominance of big money in politics, curb the culture of corruption in Washington, and make sure all public officials are working for the people, not themselves or wealthy special interests. Without these reforms, we won't be able to make progress on the challenges we face in our state — everything from income inequality to climate change.

I'm proud that all 13 Florida House Democrats co-sponsored and voted for the bill. U.S. Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott should do the right thing and support the Senate companion bill. They can start by calling on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to hold a vote.

The For the People Act goes one step further than last year's historic Amendment 4 victory, which returned voting rights to men and women who have completed felony sentences in Florida, including those under parole and on probation. Currently, only 14 states and the District of Columbia automatically restore voting rights immediately after release. The For the People Act makes that right universal — and would render the Florida Legislature's voter suppression tactics null and void.

The bill also includes important reforms Florida desperately needs to ensure every person has complete access to the ballot box. Our elections supervisors would be required to create an automatic voter registration system to register

eligible voters using data from government sources, including the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. It would also require same-day voter registration, ensuring that nothing — not hurricanes or glitches with our online registration system — stops an eligible voter from registering to vote. This is a critical reform to ensure that no one is barred from ballot box.

The For the People Act also requires elections supervisors to offer at least 15 consecutive days of early voting. Florida voters used to enjoy a mandatory 14 days until the Legislature cut early voting in 2011, which led to unacceptably long lines in the 2012 election. Now, supervisors are required only to open early voting sites for a minimum of 10 days, ending no sooner than the Saturday before the election.

Florida's voters of color are more likely to vote early, especially during the last Sunday before Election Day, when many African-American churches around the country organize "Souls to the Polls" turnout campaigns. But now some voters may not get that option if a supervisor decides not to open the polls that Sunday. The For the People Act makes sure everyone has the chance to vote, even if they can't take time from work to vote on Election Day.

We must continue to organize against hateful policies, bigotry, and division to demand a Florida that works for all, not just special interests of the elite. The For the People Act is the first step in achieving that goal. We have to do better, because Florida has one of the largest gaps between rich and poor. We have to do better because climate change threatens to destroy our way of life. And we have to do better to center the needs of those historically kept at the margins.

I urge Floridians everywhere to call our U.S. senators and demand they stop standing in the way of the For the People Act. Passing these reforms will allow us to fix our broken political system, and create a democracy that works for everyone.

SAN JOSÉ spotlight

Zoe Lofgren Pushes Bill to Clean Up Washington Corruption

BY NADIA LOPEZ | MAY 4, 2019

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren is trying to do what some might say is impossible: Take money out of politics.

On Saturday, the veteran lawmaker met with constituents at a town hall meeting in San Jose to discuss a recently passed bill in the House — a sweeping anti-corruption measure aimed at adopting stronger voting rights, enforcing stricter ethical standards on federal officials, ending partisan gerrymandering and getting big money out of politics.

“People worry about the role of big money in politics — rightly so,” said Lofgren. “You want candidates to be able to run without having billionaires as friends.”

The bill, titled H.R.1 or “For the People Act” was drafted by the House administration committee that Lofgren leads and passed in the House in March by a 234-193 margin.

…

The ambitious proposal is the Democrats’ latest attempt at cracking down on corruption and making government more transparent — a promise they’re trying to keep following the 2018 midterms.

Democrats Put Spotlight on Election Security

BY JOHN VERHOVEK | APRIL 18, 2019

Whatever the fallout from the Mueller report, the newly empowered Democratic majority in the House has sought to put the spotlight on election security, pushing a number of bills aimed at shoring up the country's electoral infrastructure.

The party's first sweeping piece of legislation addressing election security, H.R. 1 or the "For the People Act," was introduced in January with broad support within the Democratic caucus.

The ambitious bill, introduced by Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., largely focuses on anti-corruption and campaign finance-related issues and would also give $1.5 billion in new voting technology funding.

It also includes provisions to enable automatic voter registration, mandates that states use paper ballots in elections, better protect against cybersecurity threats and make Election Day a national holiday for federal workers.

In February, the House Homeland Security Committee, chaired by Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., convened a series of panels on various security-related measures including H.R. 1, urging more support for local governments that bear the brunt of conducting and securing the country's elections.

DAILY BULLETIN

100 Days in the Majority: House Democrats Are Working for the People

BY PETE AGUILAR (OP-ED) | APRIL 16, 2019

People are sick of Washington. They're sick of partisan bickering. They're sick of scandal and corruption. They're sick of watching nothing get done.

These are the sentiments I heard throughout the past few years from Inland Empire families who had watched a Republican-held Congress grind the government to a halt under a Democratic president. That same Congress went on to use their two years of unified Republican government to attack people's health care, allow corruption to grow unchecked within the federal government, and give massive tax cuts to wealthy corporations while leaving the middle class behind. So, when Democrats regained a majority in the House after the historic 2018 election, we promised we'd do things differently. We promised that we'd return to the principles that made our nation great in the first place — a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

April 12th marked the 100th day of the Democratic Majority in the House of Representatives, and 100 days of keeping that promise. On day one of the 116th Congress, House Democrats introduced H.R. 1, the For the People Act. This sweeping legislation ends years of undemocratic policies and addresses a range of issues, from voter suppression to gerrymandering. It strengthens our campaign finance system to take dark money out of politics and returns control of our government to the American people. This landmark legislation, which I was proud to help pass, set the standard for how Democrats will use our time in the majority. Our priority is to empower ordinary Americans.

CHARLESTON CITY PAPER

100 Days of Serving the Lowcountry

BY JOE CUNNINGHAM (OP-ED) | APRIL 15, 2019

It has been an honor to serve as your congressman over the last 100 days and I am grateful for the opportunity I have been given. When I ran for Congress, I promised to fight for the Lowcountry and break through the political tribalism and gridlock that defines Washington. I committed to working with both parties and our president to get things done. Over the last 100 days, I have found ample room to work across the aisle. Of the 25 bills I have cosponsored, 17 have been bipartisan.

Since I was sworn in on Jan. 3, I have introduced bills to ban offshore drilling, close the Charleston loophole, ensure carbon monoxide detectors in public housing units, and improve veterans' access to podiatric care.

…

In an era of divided government and dysfunction, the House has managed to pass meaningful legislation that solve problems on which I campaigned. One of the bills of which I am most proud is H.R. 1, the For the People Act — once in a lifetime reform legislation that combats the culture of corruption in D.C. and ensures Washington serves the people. H.R. 1 promotes clean and fair elections, ends partisan gerrymandering, reins-in the influence of special interests, and takes dark money out of our political system.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

To Defend Democracy Around the World, We Must First Fix It at Home

BY JEFFREY PRESCOTT AND TIFFANY MULLER (OP-ED) | APRIL 2, 2019

Last week, Senate Democrats introduced their version of the For the People Act, the democracy reform and anti-corruption bill adopted by the House earlier this month. The bill represents among the most significant measures in decades toward making our democracy more fair, inclusive, and accountable to the American people.

That work — to practice what we preach and stay true to our values — is crucially important at home and abroad. My co-author and I understand that better than most, as one of us heads an organization centered on democratic protection and reform within our shores, and the other leads a group dedicated to restoring principled American leadership around the world.

…

The For the People Act would help secure our democracy against hostile adversaries and restore public faith in our government. The bill enacts important reforms that would protect our elections from foreign adversaries, curb the flow of foreign money into our politics and end pay-to-play as we know it.

…

Congress has an opportunity to restore the confidence of the American people in their government and protect our elections against foreign threats. Our democracy and national security are at stake.

AHWATUKEE FOOTHILLS NEWS

We Must Do Better by the People, for the People

BY GREG STANTON (OP-ED) | APRIL 2, 2019

We have a lot of work to do to create change, but the new Congress is taking an essential first step with House Resolution 1.

H.R. 1 is a transformative set of reforms that will shine a light on dark money and return political power to the public. Fittingly, we've named it the "For the People" Act.

…

The "For the People" Act reforms will limit the influence of special interests and wealthy donors and crackdown on corruption, getting down to the root of dysfunction in Washington. It puts transparency and disclosure front and center by requiring political groups to disclose their large donors.

…

This new legislation means more everyday voters' voices will be heard, and politicians will be able to focus on the issues that matter most to constituents – like quality jobs, affordable health care, clean air and water, and strong infrastructure.

In our democracy, each of us has a responsibility – an obligation – to make sure our government is truly "of the people, by the people."

By working together to lift the voices of everyday Americans above anonymous special interests, Congress can do its part to ensure it will remain "for the people."

Chillicothe
Times-Bulletin

McConnell Must Allow Senate Vote on For the People Agenda

BY CHERI BUSTOS (OP-ED) | APRIL 1, 2019

Folks across the political spectrum are disgusted by it — and I don't blame them. As a former investigative journalist, I exposed stories of greed, corruption and secrecy in politics — and that work hasn't stopped since I got to Congress.

That's why as a member of House Democratic leadership, I helped develop our For the People agenda we campaigned on during the last election — which focuses on bringing down the cost of health care and prescription drugs, rebuilding America through investments in our crumbling infrastructure and cleaning up the mess in Washington.

And when voters entrusted us with the House majority, one of the first steps we took was introducing and passing H.R. 1 — known as the For the People Act — to confront Washington's culture of corruption.

…

At its core, this legislation takes power from Washington and the special interests and returns it back to the people. The U.S. House of Representatives took bold action — and now the ball is in Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's hands. Unfortunately, entrenched politicians like him are clinging to power and protecting the special interests — and he's refusing to bring our For the People Act up for a vote.

But we can't back down from this fight to give Americans a voice in our democracy and to clean up the corruption in Washington.

BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

Republicans Are Voting Against Democracy

BY STEVE CICKAY (OP-ED) | APRIL 1, 2019

Recently, the majority of Democrats in the House of Representatives proved that they can support our democracy in two ways.

Number one: By aggressively and patriotically conducting oversight on this administration, which has egregiously attacked the institutions of our democracy over the last two years.

Number two: By introducing legislation responsive to the needs of the American people. In fact, their first bill H.R. 1, aptly named “For the People Act,” was designed to strengthen our democratic processes which the people have seen so dangerously attacked for years by the Republican Party.

The substance of the bill involved expanding access to the ballot box for the American people, reducing the influence of big money in politics and strengthening ethics rules for public servants. Thankfully it passed, 234-193, but no thanks to Republican representatives, including our Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick. But of course, it languishes in the Republican-controlled Senate and I am not surprised.

…

If Republican leaders don’t believe our democracy needs strengthening, they are either totally blind or willfully complicit. I hope in the future they use their power to protect our fragile democracy. If they idly whistle and continue to do nothing, I fear it will be too late.

The Salt Lake Tribune

A Big Step to Eliminate the Corrupting Influence of Money in Politics

BY JONATHAN M. RUGA AND SCOTT F. YOUNG (OP-ED) | MARCH 31, 2019

Our democracy is broken. The average American's voice is muffled – in many cases, silenced. The voices of ordinary Americans cannot be heard above the overpowering voices of the wealthy. Over the past few decades, our system turned into a plutocracy, or rule of the wealthy, and the American people are growing frustrated with a status quo that leaves them voiceless, powerless, and disadvantaged.

…

This Congressional session, House Democrats introduced H.R. 1, the For The People Act, to address money in politics in a number of innovative and necessary ways. Reforms include mandated disclosure of corporate political spending, public databases of political ad disclosure requests, and most importantly instituting a new matching-fund program for House candidates who agree to accept only small-dollar donations, revamping the public financing system for presidential candidates. (A matching-fund program for Senate candidates would have to originate in that chamber.)

…

Ultimately, we must create a system where no people or organizations have disproportionate influence in our elections because of the size of their bank accounts. Elected officials shouldn't be able to insulate themselves from their constituents' needs and demands by virtue of the backing of wealthy benefactors or corporate interests. With H.R. 1, the For The People Act, America can realize these values and return the power where it belongs: in the hands of the people.

The Washington Post

Senate Democrats Push to Match House's Ethics and Election Reforms

BY MIKE DEBONIS | MARCH 27, 2019

Responding to action in the House, Senate Democrats unveiled their own version of a sweeping election and ethics reform bill Wednesday — one that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has vowed never to bring to a vote.

Dubbed, like the House bill, the "For the People Act, " the Senate legislation includes a vast suite of proposals — ranging from measures meant to expand voting to provisions aimed at unmasking and diluting the power of moneyed interests to new ethical strictures for federal officials to a new public financing system for congressional campaigns.

The bill, according to its lead author, Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.), has the support of all 47 senators in the Democratic caucus. The House bill passed 234-193 this month with unanimous Democratic support, meaning every congressional Democrat is on record in support of the bill.

…

"Today we are seizing their momentum and the momentum of the American people," Udall said at a news conference Wednesday. "Now the ball is in Senator McConnell's court . . . This should not be about Democrats versus Republicans, this is about people versus special interests."

Senate Democrats Unveiled an Anti-Corruption Companion Bill. Mitch McConnell Is Already Blocking It.

BY ELLA NILSEN | MARCH 27, 2019

The sweeping anti-corruption bill House Democrats passed recently as the centerpiece of their platform has officially been introduced in the Senate — where it is certain to fail.

Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) is the lead sponsor of the For the People Act, the sprawling bill aimed at getting money out of politics and increasing transparency around donors, cracking down on lobbying, and expanding voting rights for Americans by implementing provisions like automatic voter registration.

“The contrast we are laying out for the American people could not be clearer,” Udall said at a Wednesday press conference unveiling the bill. “This is a historic day for our democracy, and it is not a day too soon. Our democracy is at a crisis point.”

Among many other things, the bill would set up a public campaign finance reform system, implement redistricting reform for federal elections to curb gerrymandering, and implement same-day registration. The House bill was authored by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD).

While all 47 Senate Democrats support the anti-corruption bill, they’ve already run up against Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who has openly mocked the bill and vowed not to bring it to the Senate floor.

HUFFPOST

Every Senate Democrat Backs Sweeping Campaign Finance, Voting Rights and Ethics Reform Bill

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | MARCH 27, 2019

Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) on Wednesday introduced the Senate version of the campaign finance, voting rights and ethics reform bill that House Democrats made their top priority.

With all 47 Senate Democrats signed on as co-sponsors, Udall's bill marks a newfound unanimity in the party in favor of establishing publicly financed congressional elections and dramatically expanding voting rights.

"Every single member of the Senate Democratic caucus is an original cosponsor of our For The People Act — which means that every single congressional Democrat, in the House and Senate, supports this landmark package of reforms," Udall said in a statement. "That is historic, and as Mitch McConnell vows to do the bidding of the special interests and obstruct these badly-needed reforms, the contrast that we are laying out for the American people could not be clearer."

The bill is a near identical copy of the For The People Act (H.R. 1) passed by the House by a partisan vote split of 234-193 on March 8. It includes sweeping voting rights reforms that would re-enfranchise ex-felons, ban common voter suppression tactics and reduce barriers to voting across the country; campaign finance reforms that would create a system of publicly funded elections for congressional campaigns for the first time; and ethics reforms for the executive branch and Supreme Court.

Roll Call

Senate Democrats Take Up H.R. 1 Battle Cry

BY KATE ACKLEY | MARCH 28, 2019

Every Senate Democrat, taking their House colleagues' cues, signed on to their chamber's version of a major campaign finance, voting and ethics overhaul on Wednesday.

The measure, nearly identical to a bill that passed the House earlier this month, serves primarily as a campaign messaging document for the 2020 elections. That's because Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has vowed not to bring it up for consideration in the chamber.

Republicans and K Street lobbying interests have blasted the proposal, which would establish a voluntary public financing system for federal candidates, would require same-day and automatic voter registration nationwide, and would require nonpartisan commissions to redraw the boundaries of congressional districts. The measure would also toughen ethical standards for administration officials and would require new public disclosures of donations to nonprofit groups that are active in politics.

"Now the ball is in Sen. McConnell's court," said Tom Udall of New Mexico, the lead sponsor of the Senate version, during a Capitol Hill press conference Wednesday. "We know that K Street lobbyists, special interests and big money donors are calling out the cavalry to defeat this bill. … And I think that means we've got ourselves a good bill."

Senate Democrats Propose Sweeping Election Reform Bill Despite Likely Opposition from Trump and McConnell

BY YLAN MUI | JANUARY 4, 2019

Senate Democrats on Wednesday unveiled a sweeping bill to protect and expand voting access, limit big-money influence in elections and boost public officials' ethics requirements, following the passage of near-identical legislation in the House.

But even Democrats doubt that the ambitious bill stands much of a chance of making it through the Republican-held Senate led by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

The "For The People Act," introduced by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., and Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., offers a laundry list of reforms that its Democratic sponsors claim will "put power back in the hands of the American people."

…

The Senate bill was introduced less than three weeks after its so-called companion legislation in the House, H.R. 1, cleared that Democrat-led chamber on a 234-193 party-line vote.

…

Neither the White House nor McConnell's office immediately responded to a request for comment on the legislation.

knox news.
PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

We Need More Honesty in Washington, at Home and in Our Elections

BY RENEE HOYOS (OP-ED) | MARCH 25, 2019

It's one thing to vote against a bill. It's another to be dishonest about the legislation. That is what U.S. Rep. Tim Burchett did with H.R. 1. The bill would ensure the right to vote in free and fair elections, enact campaign finance reform and enforce ethical standards. It deals with problems we've encountered with voter suppression, election integrity and White House ethics for decades.

In his now-famous Twitter account, Burchett claimed it would tell "states to let convicted felons and illegals vote." While the bill does allow for reform in reinstating the voting rights of the incarcerated, we have that system in Tennessee. It is in need of reform and is not a new idea. As for allowing the undocumented to vote, that is simply untrue. Now, in all fairness, he may not have actually read the legislation and just voted the way his party bosses told him. Still, we should expect more of our Congressman.

…

Who would win with the passage of H.R. 1? The people. That's what the bill is all about.

This legislation passed the House 234-193, without a single Republican vote. In the Senate, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell won't even allow a vote. That's because he knows Republican policies are so terrible for working people they have to rig the system to stay in power. The least they could do is be honest about it.

NEWS8 wtnh.com

Rep. DeLauro Highlights "For the People Act"

BY BRIAN SPYROS | MARCH 22, 2019

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro held a very candid conversation about the American political system at the Miller Library in Hamden on Friday.

"And it is not just dark money but big money donors that haven taken over the system," said DeLauro.

Congresswoman Delauro was talking about the "For The People Act," which recently passed the House of Representatives.

"I think this will make sure everyone plays by the same ethics rules. The wealthy special interest don't rule our politics," said Cherie Quickmire, Common Cause of CT.

The bill deals with a number of things, one of which is campaign spending.

"It would also hold elected officials and those in campaign activity to a higher standard of transparency and ethics," said Arnold Skretta, CT Compliance and Law, LLC.

It enhances oversight when it comes to the big donors and the influence they can sometimes have on our elected leaders focusing mainly on the federal level.

THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

Voter Turnout Is Surging — And Mitch McConnell Is Terrified

BY ELIZA NEWLIN CARNEY | MARCH 22, 2019

Recent findings that voter turnout broke a century-old record last year and could cause another "100-year storm of voters" in 2020 must play on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's worst fears.

Not only did the annual America Goes to the Polls report, put out by Nonprofit VOTE and the U.S. Elections Project, show historic jumps in Latino and youth voter turnout. The report also found that voter-friendly policies, such as same-day and automatic voter registration, are vastly boosting turnout. The top ten states with the highest turnout—averaging 61 percent—were also the ones that made it easiest for voters to cast ballots. By contrast, the ten lowest-ranking states had turnout averaging in the low forties.

This is one of the leading reasons McConnell is so hostile to H.R. 1, the package of democracy reforms that House Democrats recently approved unanimously, with nary a GOP vote. The legislation does far more than facilitate voting, of course. It also sets out to overhaul the political money, ethics and lobbying rules, among other changes. But a big part of the so-called For the People Act is about removing barriers to the polls.

…

Such measures could dramatically boost voter turnout—which is precisely what has put McConnell so on edge.

…

But McConnell's real problem with the bill, he acknowledged at a press conference on the eve of last month's House vote, is that it would help Democrats win more votes. "What it really is, is a bill designed to make it more likely that Democrats win more often," McConnell declared. "Nothing else."

Low-turnout elections favor Republicans, the conventional wisdom goes, in part because GOP voters tend to skew older and turn out more reliably, while younger, more ethnically diverse voters are likely to favor Democrats and vote more sporadically. Such presumptions tend to be overblown, say voting experts, but Republicans have nevertheless devoted decades to suppressing the vote via voter purges, voter ID laws, and other restrictions that ostensibly combat fraud, but that disproportionately disenfranchise voters of color and other Democrat-friendly blocs.

Such GOP tactics are still in full swing, as evidenced by Texas officials' recent botched attempts to remove thousands of eligible voters from the rolls, efforts in Kansas to reinstate barriers to registration that have already been thrown out in court, and a bid by Florida officials to sabotage a ballot initiative that recently restored voting rights to most former felons in that state.

But a funny thing is happening while national Republicans fret about Americans actually voting. State legislatures — including in some deep-red states — are suddenly embracing many of the same voter access measures that are at the heart of H.R. 1. These include same-day voter registration, which consistently boosts turnout from 7 to 12 points, and which has been approved in the District of Columbia and in 19 states, including Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. It will take effect in three more states by 2020.

Automatic voter registration is also taking off. In 2016, Oregon was the only state with automatic voter registration. By the end of this year 17 states and the District of Columbia will have it in place, including Alaska, Georgia, and West Virginia. Election officials like it because it saves time and money, and improves the

accuracy of the voter rolls. States have been enacting democracy at “dizzying speed,” writes Myrna Pérez, of the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, who counts 589 “pro-voter” bills in 41 states.

This should come as no surprise, given that two-thirds of Americans say “everything possible should be done” to make it easy for citizens to vote. Democrats are keenly aware of the popularity of democracy reforms, which helped them regain the House majority, and are a central theme in their presidential primary. In addition to H.R. 1, House Democrats are advancing a voter protection bill — the Voting Rights Advancement Act — that would restore federal supervision to states with a history of voter discrimination. A majority of House members have signed on, all Democrats.

All that promises to make things increasingly awkward for McConnell, who has vowed to block H.R. 1 from coming to the Senate floor. Next week Democrats are expected to trot out the Senate version, sponsored by New Mexico’s Tom Udall, to much fanfare. At last month’s Senate press conference to discuss the House bill, one reporter asked McConnell point blank: “Why is incentivizing people to vote a power grab?”

McConnell responded somewhat testily, interrupting to ask: “Well, what is the problem? We had the biggest election turnout since 1966 last year.” In fact, when measured against the voting-eligible population, turnout last year was higher than at any point since 1914, at 50.3 percent, according to the America Goes to the Polls report. More than 118 million Americans voted, and the report’s authors predict record turnout again in 2020—thanks in part to state policies that are making it easier to vote. McConnell’s obvious horror at such a prospect speaks volumes.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

GOP Refusal to Debate A Major Ethics Bill Should Haunt Them in 2020

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 20, 2019

The U.S. House early this month approved an extensive ethics measure to reform how campaigns are funded, put sunshine on “dark money,” expand voting access and open presidential candidates’ tax returns. H.R. 1 encompasses many reform ideas Democrats campaigned on last November, which helped them win back the House and muster the votes to approve this measure.

Leaders in the Republican-controlled Senate declared the bill dead on arrival there. But it should be kept very much alive in the 2020 campaigns — giving voters a loud-and-clear message about which party is really seeking to “drain the swamp,” and which one is standing in the way.

It seems like a long-ago era when then-presidential candidate Donald Trump vowed to cleanse Washington of its noxious ways. Early on, it seemed like something such an unorthodox candidate might actually do if he won. His refusal to release his tax returns, in defiance of decades of presidential campaign tradition, was the first clue of his true intentions. The swamp was never under real threat.

Once in office, Trump went from condemning the swamp to personifying it. Instead of engendering a culture of reform, he brazenly shattered norms of presidential ethics, holding on to his business empire and blatantly using the presidency to enrich it, while loading up his administration with people mired in conflicts of interest.

He undermined America's electoral system at every turn, falsely crying fraud with any ballot outcome that didn't go his way. He weakened safeguards that President Barack Obama had put in place against revolving-door influence in the White House. And after continually promising to eventually release his tax returns, he finally admitted that he wasn't ever going to.

The measure House Democrats passed March 8 on a party-line vote would require presidential candidates to release 10 years of tax returns. It would make Election Day a federal holiday and undertake other reforms to open up voting access that Trump and the GOP have been busily trying to close. It would change rules for redistricting, lobbying and campaign funding and disclosure.

It would reform some of the worst ethics failings of America's political system. Yet Republican Senate Leader Mitch McConnell quickly made clear he would block it. He clearly doesn't even want to subject his members to a public debate on these issues.

And why not? As McConnell said after the House vote: "Because I get to decide what we vote on." Spoken like a true role model for America's children.

If Democrats want to change that in the 2020 elections, they'll need to make sure that H.R. 1 is symbolically on every ballot. Trump was right about one thing during the campaign: Americans are, indeed, eager to drain the swamp. Republican opposition to this measure should make clear exactly who's clogging the drain pipe.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Pelosi Promotes House Election Law Package, Clay's Re-Election Bid in St. Louis Area Visit

BY MARK SCHLINKMANN | MARCH 19, 2019

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi swept through the St. Louis area Monday to promote a Democratic voting rights and ethics package, tour two social service agencies and raise money for her party's House campaign committee.

…

The event, at the Urban League Empowerment Center on West Florissant Avenue, was to draw attention to House Democratic efforts to push election law changes embodied in H.R. 1, which Clay co-sponsors.

About 100 people attended, including various local-level Democratic officials.

The measure, which won House approval this month, would make it easier for people to register and vote, tighten election security against cyberattacks and require presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns.

…

Pelosi said the legislation is among three major goals of House Democrats, along with reducing prescription drug costs and "increasing paychecks by building infrastructure."

"Cleaner government is essential to the other two," she said. "It gives people confidence that we can get it done because the voices of the people will be heard" by removing obstacles to participation.

DAILY FREEMAN

H.R. 1 Would Bring Much-Needed Campaign Finance Reform

BY ANTONIO DELGADO (LTE) | MARCH 19, 2019

For too long, the outsized influence of corporate special interests in politics has outweighed the interests of the people. We've been left with a broken system in which an unlimited amount of money from a wealthy few can drown out the voices of constituents. It's time for real, meaningful change. Earlier this month, the House of Representatives passed the historic government reform bill H.R. 1, the first bill I co-sponsored in Congress.

H.R. 1 enacts much-needed campaign finance reform while making it easier for folks to vote and have a say in our democracy. It expands access to the ballot box by creating automatic voter registration across the country, expanding early voting, and eliminating institutional barriers.

The legislation promotes integrity by committing Congress to restore the Voting Rights Act and prohibiting voter roll purges. It gets rid of partisan gerrymandering by requiring states to create independent redistricting commissions, making our government more accountable.

This comprehensive road map for reform also includes the Connecting Lobbyists and Electeds for Accountability and Reform (CLEAR) Act, a bill I am proud to have introduced.

Currently, there is no direct, transparent way for individuals to identify lobbyists connected to political spending in campaign finance reports. The CLEAR Act would fix this by requiring additional, publicly accessible disclosures for lobbyists funding political activities. This commonsense proposal would shine a light on

dark money in politics and ensure the American people can see when lobbyists are attempting to influence their elected officials.

A healthy democracy requires participation. We must keep working together to eliminate barriers to engagement and raise up the voices and concerns of constituents. I'm committed to advancing the mission of H.R. 1 and continuing the fight for a more fair and just system for everyone.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

For the People Act Is the Boldest Democracy Reform Since Watergate

BY JAY YOUNG (OP-ED) | MARCH 19, 2019

Americans deserve a democracy that is accountable to the people, not special interests.

For far too long, wealthy special interests have plagued our politics and rigged the rules against everyday voters, both in Illinois and in Washington, D.C. That's why it was so important that the U.S. House of Representatives moved quickly to pass the boldest democracy reform package since the Watergate era: H.R. 1, also known as the For the People Act.

While the legislation is filled with strong, commonsense democracy reform proposals that would elevate the voices of everyday Americans, Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Taylorville, Ill., emerged as one of the bill's most vocal critics for all the wrong reasons.

For years, Davis has touted the fact that he has one of the most bipartisan records in Congress, a fact that makes his criticism of the For the People Act all the more surprising. Many of the bill's sensible proposals have passed at the state level with bipartisan support across the country, including in Illinois.

The For the People Act covers three major areas of government reform: ethics, campaign finance and voting rights. The bill would enact prudent ethics laws to ensure we have accountability in government and that politicians play by the rules. It includes improvements to our campaign finance system to increase transparency and limit the influence of big political donors. Finally, the legislation

expands and protects voting rights for all eligible voters and creates new safeguards in our election system.

Illinois has already championed several of the provisions in the bill. For instance, in 2017, the Illinois Legislature passed, with strong bipartisan support, a bill that would automatically register eligible citizens to vote when they do business with the Department of Motor Vehicles and other government agencies. Then-Gov. Bruce Rauner became the first Republican governor in the country to sign an automatic voter registration bill into law, saying it is “good bipartisan legislation” that “addresses the fundamental fact that the right to vote is foundational for the rights of Americans in our democracy.”

The For the People Act also includes a requirement for states to move to a nonpartisan redistricting process, a common sense reform that Davis has claimed to support in the past. By requiring states to create independent and impartial commissions to draw voting maps, this legislation could end partisan gerrymandering as we know it. Yet, Davis is now opposed to this much-needed reform.

Davis also criticized the For the People Act for establishing a voluntary citizen-funded elections program in which small donations are matched 6-to-1 with a fund paid for by wealthy lawbreakers, not taxpayers. This type of program is a new and better way of funding elections and has already been tested in states and cities across the country. Instead of the current system of corporate and special interest-funded elections, citizen-funded elections have resulted in candidates relying less on raising money from wealthy donors, and instead allows them to focus more on their constituents. It also breaks down barriers on who can run for office so you don’t have to be a millionaire or well connected to run and win public office.

In opposing the bill on the House floor up to nearly the final minute before passage, Davis argued that these innovative reforms are a waste of money and claimed that citizen-funded elections in particular are too expensive. Yet, when the previous Congress decided to make President Donald Trump's tax bill its first order of business, Davis enthusiastically supported the bill and had no problem spending billions of dollars and increasing the federal debt to benefit the wealthy donor class and big corporations. It makes no sense for Davis to suddenly become cost-conscious when fundamental issues like voting rights, ballot access and fair elections that benefit all of us are at stake.

Ultimately, the American people are looking for a new generation of leaders who are ready to create an accountable government and a true democracy that works for everyone.

By leading the House Republicans against H.R. 1, Davis has proven he is more interested in playing partisan games than investing in big opportunities to strengthen our democracy with the For the People Act.

saukvalley.com

First Step in Rebranding the Democratic Party

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 18, 2019

The Democrats' sweeping legislation targeting corruption in Washington and removing barriers to the ballot box passed the U.S. House of Representatives on March 8.

What's interesting about H.R. 1, known as the For the People Act, is that it has no real chance of passing the Senate, yet it is likely to remain at the forefront of American politics until some form of the 700-page bill does become law.

The bill is part campaign finance reform. It would require dark-money political organizations to disclose the origin of large donations – more than $10,000 – in an effort to reduce the role of big money in determining elections.

It would attack what Democrats, including one of the bill's sponsors, Rep. Cheri Bustos of East Moline, refer to as the culture of corruption in the nation's capital. Lawmakers would be banned from serving on corporate boards and required to turn over personal tax information.

For Democrats, there was a sense of urgency to this bill – H.R. 1 was the first piece of legislation introduced in the new session of Congress. Getting the bill through the House was one of three goals the party had set for this session. For Democrats, who want to rebrand themselves as the party of ethics reform, it also is the most important, Bustos said.

"When I'm out talking to people in our district at events like Supermarket Saturdays, the number one issue that's been brought up for a long time is cleaning up the mess that is corruption in Washington," Bustos said.

The bill also takes aim at the fundamentals of the electoral process. In an attempt to ensure fair elections, there would be changes to make it easier to register and vote. Highlights are automatic voter registration, restoring voting rights to people with a felony on their record, and providing more poll workers. Perhaps most important, it would take partisan redistricting out of the hands of the politicians who benefit by diluting the power of voters.

The other two most pressing priorities for Democrats in this session are passing an infrastructure bill and improving access to affordable health care, which includes lowering prescription drug prices.

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, has vowed that the bill won't be brought to the Senate floor for a vote. One thing both parties agree on is that H.R. 1 is a power grab. While Democrats call it a power grab for the people, the GOP calls it a ploy to keep Democrats in power.

While H.R. 1 won't pass the Senate any time soon, Democrats believe it sets the table for passage if and when Democrats gain control of the Senate and White House. In the meantime, you'll be hearing plenty about the For the People Act. It makes good on the Democrats' promise to clean up Washington – a vow that helped the party regain a majority in the House. It is the centerpiece of the party's congressional agenda. It also is likely to become the basic framework of the party's platform in the 2020 election cycle.

SOUTH DADE NEWSLEADER

Restoring Faith in Our Government

BY DEBBIE MUCARSEL-POWELL (OP-ED) | MARCH 18, 2019

When I travel across South Florida, I listen to people's concerns: quality health care isn't affordable; student debt is crushing our economy; polluters can operate unchecked even when individuals are taking steps to reduce their own carbon footprint. South Floridians have been feeling that Washington isn't responsive to their needs. I heard it over and over: Washington is broken. Well, Washington is broken because special interests and their dark money can buy influence, while working families are shut out of the process, even though they're playing by the rules.

A recent poll showed that seventy-five percent of Americans have little to no confidence in elected officials to act in the best interest of the public. People don't feel that their government represents them. With my constituents' concerns in the front of my mind, taking on the special interests was one of the first issues we tackled. Last week's vote for the For The People Act was a vote against corruption. It was a vote to strengthen our democracy and restore people's trust in their government.

I'm a member of the House Judiciary Committee, and I'm proud the very first hearing we held focused on how the For The People Act would strengthen voting rights.

In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states with a history of suppressing voting rights no longer had to get changes to their voting laws approved by the U.S. Department of Justice. In the first election cycle after this decision, sixteen million voters were removed from voter rolls across the country. That's a thirty-

three percent increase over the previous election cycle. States that used to need Justice Department approval removed voters at a significantly higher rate than states that didn't need such approval. Several counties in Florida were previously subject to those rules.

Ensuring every citizen has their constitutional right to vote couldn't be more important, so I introduced a bill to prevent voter roll purges through a tactic known as "voter caging." Simply put, voter caging is sending mail to a targeted neighborhood and, if a voter's mail is returned as "undeliverable," that voter is removed from the rolls. Here are just a few of examples why someone might be a victim of voter caging: mail sent to you could have been delivered to the wrong address; mail sent to you was lost; or maybe you're temporarily out of town. My bill that passed the House as part of the For The People Act would outlaw that voter suppression tactic.

The For The People Act will strengthen access to the ballot box. It creates automatic voter registration, ensures individuals who have served their felony sentences have their voting rights restored, expands early voting, ends voter purging, and modernizes the U.S. voting system. Our democracy is strongest when people trust that their voice is heard at the ballot box. To hinder a person's right to vote is a step towards weakening people's faith in their government, but it's not enough to make sure everyone's right to vote is protected. The American people need to feel that public servants are serving them, not corporations and the ultra-wealthy. That's why the For The People Act revamps the Office of Government Ethics to ensure strong enforcement of federal ethics laws. It closes registration loopholes for lobbyists and former members of Congress. Government officials can't be allowed to profit from their public service, so this bill also cracks down on the revolving door in Washington by stopping private companies from creating and influencing the laws that will apply to them.

Elected officials should be held to the highest of standards – especially the President of the United States. In the face of the least transparent Administration

in modern history, the For The People Act requires Presidents and Vice Presidents to get rid of their business dealings – like Trump's ownership of Mar-a-Lago – and it forces them to release their tax returns to protect the Executive Branch against conflicts of interest. Hardworking families know the system should not be set up to work only for the wealthiest Americans and the special interest that control those in elected office.

My vote for the For The People Act takes aim at the special interests that the Trump Administration has allowed to run wild. By ensuring people's right to vote and cleaning up the culture of corruption, our government will better represent working families. A strong and healthy democracy is not a partisan issue. The For the People Act must be signed into law, so Floridians and all Americans can know their government will work for them.

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

Blocking H.R. 1, the GOP Seems Afraid of Democracy

BY SCOTT TURNER | MARCH 18, 2019

Members of New Mexico's congressional delegation call the passage of the "For the People Act" a way to open the ballot process to millions of Americans and a way to combat corruption in the political process.

…

New Mexico Democrat U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland was a co-sponsor of the bill in the House. U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., is sponsoring a companion bill in the Senate, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has vowed not to let it reach the floor for a vote.

…

"This is not about Democrats versus Republicans," Udall said. "This is about the people versus the special interests. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join with us to secure real reform to stamp out corruption, bring transparency, and put power back in the hands of the American people."

"I'm pleased the bill includes my provision to ensure any voter can register on the same day they vote, and am pleased it contains provisions that will rein in corruption and the influence of money in politics," Haaland said.

…

House Republicans tried to tack several amendments onto the House bill, including one prohibiting undocumented immigrants from voting.

No Democrats voted for the amendments, including U.S. Rep. Xochitl Torres Small, D-NM.

“I don’t think non-U.S. citizens should be able to vote in federal elections,” she said. But, “That is already the law. The motion to recommit was just more of Washington’s divisive politics.”

The Palm Beach Post
REAL NEWS STARTS HERE

Blocking H.R. 1, the GOP Seems Afraid of Democracy

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 17, 2019

For anyone who doubts that Americans are fighting a war today over the future of democracy, take a look at what's happening in the U.S. Congress.

On March 8, the House of Representatives voted for the Democrats' major reform bill, 234-193 -- an important blow against the incessant erosions of our political process. All 13 of Florida's Democratic congressmembers voted for it; none of the 14 Republicans did.

And in the Republican-controlled Senate, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell won't even bring the measure, H.R.1, up for debate. Instead, he and his allies are attacking the "terrible bill."

What makes this bill so dastardly? Why, it seeks to lessen the influence of super-rich donors. To tighten ethics rules for Congress and force presidential candidates to reveal their tax returns. Most important, it would ban the most common forms of voter suppression and greatly expand voter participation.

McConnell reads all this as threat. He calls the bill a "power grab."

Think about that. The Kentucky Republican is practically shouting for all the world to hear: "If more people vote, they'll vote against our party. And that's not fair!"

Basically, McConnell is admitting that Republicans' efforts to tamp down the votes of blacks, Hispanics, young people and the poor -- nationally and in Florida, particularly under Gov. Rick Scott -- had nothing to do with their standard

rationale that they are fighting “voter fraud.” No. He’s saying that democracy is bad for the Republican Party.

McConnell’s stonewalling of this bill -- the same move he made with Merrick Garland -- flies in the face of public opinion. Recent polling from the PAC End Citizens United found that 82 percent of all voters and 84 percent of independents said they support a bill of reforms to tackle corruption.

And Democrats aren’t pure here. When it comes to issues like gerrymandering, Dems have historically been just as guilty as Republicans of trying to game the system to their advantage. But with their bill, the For the People Act, they are acknowledging the public demand for change -- which, really, should be a bipartisan enterprise. In 700 pages, the bill tackles all the major problems that the Post Editorial Board has repeatedly pointed out as poison to our politics.

…

It is too much to hope that Florida’s senators, Rick Scott and Marco Rubio, will buck their party and embrace this comprehensive reform package. Neither is up for re-election in 2020. But Florida’s 27 congressional members are; and voters would be wise to remember who supported democracy, and who didn’t.

BOSTON Herald

1 Citizen, 1 Vote

BY STEPHEN LYNCH (LTE) | MARCH 16, 2019

On March 7th, the U.S. House of Representatives considered H.R. 1, the "For the People Act," which included various campaign funding and voting rights issues. My own legislation, H.R. 391, the "White House Ethics Transparency Act," which requires disclosure of possible conflicts of interest and ethics waivers granted to White House officials, was also made part of that bill. At the close of debate, my Republican colleagues who were opposed to H.R. 1 offered a "Motion To Recommit," which is a standard procedure in the House rules that is used as a last-ditch procedural motion to change a previously debated bill on the floor. In recent times, it has been also used as a "gotcha tactic" to bring down legislation.

For this purpose, the Republican Motion To Recommit H.R. 1 included a gratuitous statement that non-U.S. citizens should not be allowed to vote in federal elections. It is important to note that non-U.S. citizens are already prohibited from voting in federal elections by statute, 18 U.S.C. sec. 611, which provides penalties including imprisonment, fines and deportation for anyone violating that law. The exclusive right of U.S. citizens to vote in federal elections is a principle that I continue to strongly support. In fact, I have previously voted in favor of a stand-alone measure to restate the principle that the right to vote in federal elections remains a profound and essential right that should be reserved solely for those who enjoy the status of U.S. citizenship.

In the procedural vote on the Republican Motion To Recommit H.R. 1, I voted No. After passage, H.R. 1 (and H.R. 391) will now proceed to the Senate for further consideration. Most importantly, the federal law that prohibits non-U.S. citizens from voting in federal elections remains the law of the land.

THE SEGUIN GAZETTE
CELEBRATING 130 YEARS SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

Proposed House Bill Really Is 'For the People'

BY J.C. DUFRESNE | MARCH 15, 2019

I often hear the phrase "elections matter" when suggesting that a judicial appointment or new law has been either especially good or bad. Last week that phrase took on an additional meaning when Maryland Congressman, John Sarbanes introduced H.R. 1, the For the People Act which is designed to clean up corruption in Washington, make it easier to vote, and give the American people more power in our democracy. The bill was written because elections matter — and elections matter because without the 2018 election resulting in the Democratic Party majority in the House this bill wouldn't have seen a chance for passage. All 236 Democrats have co-sponsored the bill but not a single Republican cares enough about the right of the people to free and fair elections or open and honest representation.

Oakdale Leader

Lobbying Disclosure Amendment Authored By Congressman Harder

BY STAFF | MARCH 13, 2019

An amendment authored by Representative Josh Harder (CA-10) on lobbying disclosures was included in the final package of H.R. 1, the For the People Act, which was voted on Friday, March 8.

The For the People Act is described as the most sweeping piece of election reform and anti-corruption legislation since the Watergate Era, and the Harder amendment says that whenever a registered lobbyist makes contact with members of the Legislative or Executive Branch, they must disclose they are a lobbyist and which clients they work for.

“In the Central Valley, too many people pay outrageous prices for prescription drugs. Too many lack access to affordable health care. And too many struggle in an economy that doesn’t work equally for everyone. None of this is an accident – it’s the price we pay for Washington’s pay-to-play culture of corruption. That’s why today’s vote on the For the People Act is a bold step towards making sure our government works for hard working families, not well-connected insiders,” Harder said. “I am proud that this bill contains my amendment to bring greater transparency to lobbying in DC. If someone is being paid to influence elected officials, they should have to say who they actually work for.”

The Dallas Weekly

Congresswoman Johnson Votes to Expand Voting Rights, Applauds Passage of For the People Act

BY STAFF | MARCH 13, 2019

Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson voted for passage of H.R. 1, the For the People Act, out of the House of Representatives. The bill, cosponsored by Congresswoman Johnson, implements sweeping election reforms, including same-day voter registration, that make the country's electoral system more transparent and more accessible to the American people.

"Our democracy is what we make of it, and today, I proudly joined every member of the House Democratic Caucus in voting to return it back into the hands of the American people," said Congresswoman Johnson. "The largest obstacles to a more responsive and fair government are the barriers that prevent Americans from having equal access to the ballot box. The For the People Act represents the most ambitious effort to overcome them since the historic voting rights laws passed under President Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s."

…

"When I asked my constituents to send me back to Washington this past November, I made restoring voting rights and making government more representative a core part of my campaign," said Congresswoman Johnson. "My vote for this bill marks a significant commitment to keep that promise, restore the American people's trust in their representatives, and advance the voice of TX-30 residents in their democracy."

The Washington Post

The War Over Democracy Is Going to Get a Lot Nastier

BY GREG SARGENT (OPINION) | MARCH 12, 2019

Last week, House Democrats passed a sweeping pro-democracy bill that, among many other reforms, would make voting easier in multiple different ways. This is widely being treated as a “message bill,” since it has no chance of going anywhere in the GOP-controlled Senate.

But the passage of this bill also tells another story that I think hasn’t been sufficiently appreciated: Democrats are bringing a new level of realism to the war over democracy itself, one that they increasingly recognize is absolutely crucial to their long-term hopes, and one that may well get worse over time.

Over at CNN, Ron Brownstein has a new analysis that sheds light on the broader dimensions of this conflict. The reform bill includes multiple measures to facilitate voting and make voter suppression harder, such as federal standards for things like automatic voter registration, early voting, and independent redistricting commissions (to prevent extreme gerrymanders); limits on voter ID laws; and purges of names from the voter rolls, and so forth.

Brownstein looks at the evolving war over voting in the context of the country’s changing demographics, and how that is impacting each party. As Brownstein notes, with Democrats increasingly reliant on a rising coalition of minorities and young people, they will also be harder pressed to knock down barriers to their participation. On the flip side, with Republicans increasingly threatened by such voter groups, they will be increasingly reliant on putting up such barriers.

The Battle Over the Voting Booth Is Just Beginning

BY RON BROWNSTEIN (OPINION) | MARCH 12, 2019

The unanimous vote among House Democrats to approve sweeping political overhaul legislation last week opened what is likely to be a sustained confrontation over access to the voting booth that could reshape not only the competition between the political parties but also the racial division of power in an irreversibly diversifying America.

The legislation, H.R. 1, has little prospect of becoming law anytime soon because Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has already indicated he intends to block it from reaching a vote – and President Donald Trump has committed to a veto if it somehow passes Congress.

But the bill identified a comprehensive agenda – particularly in razing obstacles that discourage people from registering and voting – that has quickly moved to the top of Democratic priority lists for the 2020 campaign and beyond.

And it makes clear that Democrats and civil rights groups are committed to a long-range campaign to leverage federal power to overcome state-level barriers, particularly across the Sun Belt, that local Republican parties have constructed, partly to delay the political emergence of growing minority communities, critics suspect, which tend to vote Democratic.

Lakeshore Weekly News

U.S. Rep. Dean Phillips Hosts Community Conversation After H.R. 1 Passes House

BY LARA BOCKENSTEDT | MARCH 12, 2019

U.S. Rep. Dean Phillips' voting rights and campaign finance reform bill, H.R. 1, passed the House March 8 with three amendments.

Phillips co-sponsored the bill, and authored the amendments which, according to a news release, were to heighten the "independence, bipartisanship and diversity" of the Federal Election Commission, and to close a loophole that allowed Executive Branch officials to lobby when they leave government office.

The For The People Act is targeted at election and government reform, including increasing transparency and accountability in online political ads.

…

After the first community conversation was rescheduled due to a winter storm, Phillips' H.R. 1 community conversation happened Saturday, March 9. Staff said 200 people were in attendance.

Also at Saturday's event were Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon, President Tiffany Muller of End Citizens United and Professor David Schultz of Hamline University.

The HERALD-NEWS

Local House Members Back Bill Addressing Voting Rights, Money in Politics

BY ALEX ORTIZ | MARCH 11, 2019

Two local Democratic members of Congress announced their support for the House of Representatives passing the sweeping For the People Act, which tackles the role of money in politics, voting rights and more.

…

Our political system has become increasingly focused on the powerful, drowning out the voices, experiences and needs of families," U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood, D-Naperville, said in a news release. "Today the new majority said loud and clear – not anymore."

U.S. Rep. Bill Foster, D-Naperville, said he was "proud" to vote for what he called a "historic" bill that would provide essential reforms to the American political system, reduce corruption, increase transparency and protect the right to vote.

"The American people deserve a system of government that works for all Americans," Foster said in a statement. "This legislation is a vital first step to returning to the fundamental principles of our democracy and a government by the people, for the people."

Congresswoman Katie Hill Supports 'For the People Act of 2019'

BY MICHAEL BROWN | MARCH 11, 2019

H.R. 1, also known as "For the People Act of 2019," was introduced by Congressman John Sarbanes, D-Maryland, at the beginning of the year.

The bill passed on a final vote of 234 to 193 on Friday.

"We just passed H.R. 1 and made history," Hill wrote in a Facebook post Friday. "We just voted to get big money out of politics, clean up corruption (and) make voting easier."

…

"Our government belongs to the people, not corporations or special interests," wrote Hill.

The bill also creates a six-to-one matching system for donations to congressional and presidential candidates who reject high-dollar contributions of up to $200. This would be funded by an additional 2.5 percent fine on corporations found to have broken the law, according to officials.

CAPE MAY COUNTY HERALD

Van Drew Explains His Vote on H.R. 1

BY JEFF VAN DREW (PRESS RELEASE) | MARCH 11, 2019

U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew (D-2nd) voted to protect the integrity of elections, reduce the corrupting influence of dark money in elections, and impose new and higher ethical standards for those running for high office.

H.R. 1, the For the People Act, will protect the nation's democracy and put power back in the hands of the American people, according to a release.

Following the Supreme Court's Citizens United v. FEC ruling in 2010 which allowed unlimited corporate spending in politics, huge amounts of undisclosed money flooded politics, crowding out the voices of ordinary Americans, the release continued.

This legislation seeks to reduce the corrupting influence of dark money in elections by requiring the disclosure of all Super PAC (political action committee) donors, places reasonable limits on campaign contributions, and ensures complete transparency.

H.R. 1 also protects the integrity of elections by strengthening voting rights protections and ends the process of partisan redistricting.

"This reform bill will clean-up corruption in Washington, restore our democracy, and promote bipartisanship," stated Van Drew. "We need to restore our democracy to a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

THE CAP TIMES
Madison, Wisconsin

Pocan Tackles the Cruelest Abuse of Gerrymandering

BY JOHN NICHOLS | MARCH 10, 2019

Congressman Mark Pocan accomplished something remarkable last week. Amid all the wrangling in Washington, he proposed to end an injustice and got the House to go along with him.

The Dane County Democrat who co-chairs the Congressional Progressive Caucus has been an ardent supporter of House Resolution 1, which The Washington Post describes as "perhaps the most comprehensive political-reform proposal ever considered by our elected representatives."

Sponsored by Congressman John Sarbanes, D-Maryland, this "For the People Act" is designed "to expand Americans' access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, and strengthen ethics rules for public servants and for other purposes." It does all that. And, thanks to Pocan, it also addresses one of the great injustices in American politics — prison gerrymandering.

"The way the Census Bureau counts people in prison creates significant problems for democracy and for our nation's future. It leads to a dramatic distortion of representation at local and state levels, and creates an inaccurate picture of community populations for research and planning purposes," explains the Prison Policy Institute. "The Bureau counts incarcerated people as residents of the towns where they are confined, though they are barred from voting in 48 states and return to their homes after being released. The practice also defies most state constitutions and statutes, which explicitly state that incarceration does not change a residence."

…

When H.R.1 was considered by the House last week, Pocan proposed an amendment that “ends the practice of prison gerrymandering whereby incarcerated persons are counted in Census population counts as residents of correctional facilities and not their most recent residence prior to imprisonment.” In addition to fairer districts, he explained: "If we count incarcerated persons as being present at their last-known residence, we know that the right community will receive an appropriate amount of population-based funding."

Pocan’s argument carried the day. The amendment was approved by a voice vote and included in the final measure, which passed the House by a 234-193 party line vote.

THE POST-STANDARD

syracuse.com

John Katko Votes Against House Campaign Finance, Voting, Ethics Reforms

BY MARK WEINER | MARCH 9, 2019

U.S. Rep. John Katko on Friday voted against a sweeping package of campaign finance, election and ethics reforms that had become the top priority of Democrats in the new Congress.

Katko, R-Camillus, joined Republicans in trying to defeat the "For the People Act," a bill intended to reduce the influence of wealthy donors and money in politics.

…

Rep. Anthony Brindisi, D-Utica, who also represents parts of Central New York, voted Friday to pass the bill.

The House bill that passed Friday included an amendment written by Brindisi that requires all regions of a state to have the same polling hours during an election.

Brindisi said his amendment is aimed at changing New York state's practice of the giving primary voters in New York City and its suburbs six more hours to vote in federal primary elections than voters in the rest of the state. Polls open at 6 a.m. in New York City during federal primaries, compared to noon in Upstate New York.

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT
Your Hometown Newspaper

Voting on Side of Central Virginians—Not Special Interests—Never a Difficult Decision

BY ABIGAIL SPANBERGER (OP-ED) | MARCH 9, 2019

As I campaigned across Central Virginia last year, I met constituents who readily shared their concerns with me. They spoke of issues as varied as the cost of prescription drugs to the lack of rural infrastructure to the impact of climate change. They spoke of a desire to see Congress work to solve problems for the people, and yet far too many also expressed a resignation that Congress wouldn't serve their interests or solve any real problems.

Constituents wondered out loud whether corporate dollars or special interests, rather than the needs of the American people, were driving policies. What else explained Congress' inaction as prescription drug prices escalated? What else could keep Congress from taking up a bipartisan background check bill that languished in committee, though the vast majority of citizens, most gun owners, and a substantial number of law enforcement officers supported it? What else could explain a tax bill that exploded the nation's deficit, while giving record tax breaks to corporations, including more than $42 billion in savings to the five largest pharmaceutical companies?

These misplaced priorities and motivations, real or perceived, shake the faith that so many constituents have in our system of government—and it is up to us, members of Congress, to change it.

The U.S. House just passed a major reform package to begin this process. H.R. 1 would require greater disclosures of campaign funding, prohibit foreign money from flowing into our elections, allow the American people to know who is trying to influence them, break down unnecessary barriers that keep our citizens from

the ballot box, and require the highest standards of ethics from members of Congress.

I cosponsored this legislation during my first week in office, because Congress needs to show our commitment to accountability through actions, not just campaign promises.

H.R. 1, the For the People Act of 2019, would help end the reign of special interest money in American politics by requiring mega-donors to properly disclose their donations and by expanding online political ad disclosure. Our legislation would also slow the revolving door between Capitol Hill and corporations, and members of Congress would be barred from serving on corporate boards following their public service.

Our legislation would also endeavor to safeguard our elections from foreign influence or attack. To this end, I introduced and led an amendment that would address the threat of possible foreign cyber attacks against our elections by requiring the director of national intelligence to assess and identify potential threats to state voting systems.

My bipartisan amendment would permit states to mitigate these threats in advance of general elections. The integrity and security of our elections—the bedrock of our democracy—should never be a partisan issue, and I was pleased to see my amendment pass.

In passing this legislation, we are one step closer to limiting the influence of special interests, making it easier for citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote, and restoring a higher standard of ethics and transparency across our federal government.

Public servants should be focused on serving the public—not any special interest group, and good governance should be an expectation—not an exception.

The Modesto Bee

Washington Is Rigged. We Finally Did Something About It

BY JOSH HARDER (OP-ED) | MARCH 9, 2019

On one of my first nights as a representative in D.C., I was invited to dinner with some freshmen colleagues. I thought it was going to be a chance to talk about the issues we care about — healthcare, jobs, education. Instead, it was a room full of lobbyists with very different priorities, the priorities of their wealthy clients.

That room is how Washington has worked for far too long — the voices of everyday Americans being drowned out by the voices of the wealthy corporations who can buy access. If we actually want to bring drug prices down or bring paychecks up, then we have to change rooms like this into town halls and open office hours with our constituents.

It's time for a change, and I've decided to lead by example. From the start, I've never accepted corporate PAC money — and because of that, I can spend my time listening to who really matters: our families in the Central Valley. Because I don't rely on corporate PAC money, I can lead the fight against the system that keeps them in power.

I don't think this should be a voluntary move; we have to change the rules of the game for all elected officials. Last week, we took a bold step toward making that a reality.

On Friday, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1, the most sweeping piece of anti-corruption legislation since Watergate.

I am proud that this bill contains an important amendment I wrote to directly combat that room full of lobbyists — it says that if you are a lobbyist you must

disclose to any elected official or staff member who you are and who you are paid to actually work for. It's common sense.

I've also decided to do something completely new. I am opening up one of the most important but least transparent processes in D.C. — the appropriations process. Billions of dollars are appropriated each year to programs that directly affect our lives, but you know who has the largest say in where the money goes? Lobbyists. The process is done behind closed doors in rooms like the one I described. That's not what my office is going to do. If you have ideas on where I should be advocating we spend money, you can go right to my website at harder.house.gov/appropriations-requests and let me know.

If we want to make real change to help our families, if we want to make sure the Central Valley gets our fair shot, we have to start by changing the corruption in D.C. I'm ready to do my part, and I hope you'll join me.

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H.R. 1 Returns Power to the People

BY CHRIS PAPPAS | MARCH 9, 2019

In late November, I joined a group of future House colleagues to outline the For The People Act, or H.R. 1, a bill that sets a clear tone for the new Congress. The legislation is the first priority of our history-making freshman class, a group that was elected by focusing on changing the way Washington works.

…

The For The People Act recognizes that we can't realize action on urgent priorities if we don't shore up our democracy. Right now, the outsized influence of big money, corporations, and special interests takes power away from everyday Americans. In addition, members of Congress too often act in their own self-interests and seek to use their position as a stepping stone to lucrative careers after politics. To top it off, voting rights are being eroded and too many Americans are encountering barriers to participate in the democratic process.

H.R. 1 is designed to take common sense steps to address these challenges. If we cast aside the influence of big money, ensure that members of Congress are working for you and not themselves, and protect the right to participate in elections, our democracy will be better for it and our system will serve you better.

The legislation includes an array of pro-democracy, anti-corruption reforms that are a breath of fresh air. H.R. 1 tightens requirements for lobbyists, unmasks anonymous dark money donors to campaigns, and incentivizes candidates who raise money from small, grassroots donors.

There are provisions that will help end the culture of corruption that unfortunately is alive and well. The bill strengthens the Office of Government Ethics, slows down revolving door between Congress and the special interests, and makes politicians—not taxpayers—liable for sexual harassment settlements.

Because we must ensure everyone can exercise their right to vote and the will of voters is supreme, H.R. 1 makes it easier—not harder—to participate in the electoral process. The legislation ends partisan gerrymandering, requires automatic voter registration nation-wide, and expands early voting opportunities in federal elections.

Too many Americans have lost faith in our system's ability to secure results for regular people, and they wonder if we can ever make progress on major issues like climate change, health care, the cost of college, or expanding middle class opportunity. Now is the time to recognize that we can do better by getting back to basics.

I was proud to stand with my colleagues this week and vote to pass the For The People Act in the House, and I am hopeful it will gain further traction. This is truly a monumental step toward reform, but the fight is far from over. Let's continue to work to restore the pillars of our democracy and get Washington back to work for us. Let's restore a government that is truly of, by, and for the people.

The New York Times

Only One Roadblock on the Road to Reform: Mitch McConnell

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 8, 2019

With the conspicuous perversion of the political system on daily display, congressional Democrats are eager to brand themselves the party of reform. They took another step in this direction on Friday, when the House voted 234-to-193 — along straight party lines — to pass the For the People Act, a sweeping package of proposals aimed at rooting out political corruption and shoring up the integrity of the electoral system.

The bill is the Democrats' chief policy priority and covers close to 700 pages. H.R. 1, as it is officially known, seeks, among other reforms, to strengthen ethics laws for lawmakers and lobbyists, increase voting access, improve voting security, tighten campaign finance laws and create an alternative campaign-finance system geared toward small donors.

To advance the bill, Democratic leaders had to work through more than 70 proposed amendments. Some were embraced, including several aimed at spotlighting questionable behavior in the Trump administration. One, for instance, bars federal money from being spent at businesses owned or controlled by the president or other top administration officials. Others were rejected, including a plan to lower the voting age to 16.

As a sign of Democrats' commitment to a cause that helped power its takeover of the House, the bill's passage was an important achievement. As a practical legislative matter, it's a bit of a hollow victory. As fired up as Democrats are to shake up the system, Republicans are perhaps even more fired up to stop them.

The Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, has been openly hostile to the anticorruption package since its inception. This week he made clear that he would refuse even to bring it up for a vote.

Think of H.R. 1 as the Merrick Garland of reform legislation.

Mr. McConnell called the bill the “Democrat Politician Protection Act” (and a “turkey”) and predicted that lawmakers who back it will suffer come re-election time. As political logic, this is questionable. If the Republican leader really thought the package was a loser, he would absolutely bring it to the floor to force Democratic lawmakers to own it — which is, notably, the path he has pledged to pursue with the Green New Deal, which is supported by many Democrats. The Green New Deal, an assortment of ideas for fighting climate change and remaking the economy, is even more sprawling and amorphous than the For the People Act. Mr. McConnell is panting to have members vote on it.

Asked this week why the two measures were being handled so differently, the Republican leader didn’t bother making up excuses. He said simply, “Because I get to decide what we vote on.”

This grade-school taunt masks a deep current of fear and loathing. Loathing, because Mr. McConnell is a longtime enemy of campaign finance reform. Killing such efforts can seem like his singular legislative passion.

The fear is less targeted, but even more existential. Ever the shrewd political animal, Mr. McConnell is well aware that a majority of Americans favor overhauling a system they see as broken and unfair. In a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll from September, 77 percent of respondents said reducing corruption and the influence of special interests was either the most important or a very important issue facing the nation. Having his members blamed for derailing a major reform package could prove politically risky. Thus Mr. McConnell turns to his go-to move: stonewalling.

At the same time, he and prominent House Republicans have been loudly assailing H.R. 1, cranking the fear-mongering demagogy to the max. Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy went so far as to star in an overwrought attack video. Mr. McCarthy asserts that the provision restoring voting rights to felons is not only "dangerous, it's unconstitutional;" he goes on to say that under the optional matching-fund system, in which political donations up to $200 would be matched 6-to-1 with public funds, the Democrats would send your tax dollars to pay for campaigns; and he warns that the bill would facilitate voter fraud by providing for automatic voter registration, which would make it more difficult to strike ineligible voters from the rolls. "So future voters might be underage, dead or illegal immigrants, or maybe even registered one, two or three times!"

No, no and no. There is nothing unconstitutional or inherently dangerous about re-enfranchising former prisoners. The new matching-funds system would be financed through fines levied on companies caught violating federal law. And the Brennan Center for Justice has found that automatic voter registration, already working swimmingly in several states, increases registration rates and improves the accuracy of voting rolls.

H.R. 1 would put an end to at least some of the vile voter suppression practices that Republicans have embraced in recent years. Which goes to the heart of the party's opposition.

Well before President Trump erupted on the scene, Republicans made the calculation that, with demographics trending against them, their best strategy was to make voting harder rather than easier, particularly for certain nonwhite segments of the electorate. Across the nation, they have pursued voter restriction tactics with vigor. Any effort to expand access to the ballot box sets off alarm bells within the party.

This leaves Republicans in the peculiar position of arguing that weeding out corruption, reducing the influence of special interests and protecting voting rights are inherently Democratic values.

The For the People Act is far from perfect. For Democrats, it is arguably a grand values statement more than a practical legislative blueprint. Not even its most fervent supporters expect it to go anywhere without considerable adjustment. But McConnell and Co. aren't interested in debating or improving the package. They want it dead.

There should be nothing partisan about a push to make the American political system more accessible and accountable to the American people. The public is increasingly hungry for reform, thanks in part to the continuing outrages of President Trump. Mr. McConnell may turn out to be right that the issue will cause lawmakers pain in the coming elections — just not in the way he expects.

USA TODAY

Democrats Have Their 2020 Rallying Cry and It Goes Way Beyond 'Dump Trump'

BY JASON SATTLER (OPINION) | MARCH 8, 2019

The 2020 election cannot just be a referendum on Donald Trump. It has to be a referendum on the rotten system that made Trump's presidency possible.

Democrats had better be ready to make their case. And now it looks like they are.

The new House majority passed H.R. 1 on a 234-193 party-line vote, putting Democrats squarely behind the historic "For The People Act" that wraps vastly expanded voting rights, campaign finance reform and anti-corruption measures into a landmark civil rights bill.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says it will "restore the promise of our nation's democracy." She's right. But if Republicans get their way, it will never even come to a vote in the Senate. Why not? "Because I get to decide what we vote on," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Wednesday.

This cynicism reflects McConnell's typical contempt for the democratic process, but his fear also makes sense. H.R. 1 is designed to be a nightmare for anyone who relies on a corrupted system fueled by billions in untraceable outside spending to secure extraordinary power for a shrinking party that has only won the presidential popular vote once since 1992.

McConnell — who represents a Senate “majority” that received 9 million fewer votes than the “minority” — called the bill a “power grab” and that accurately describes what it does.

H.R. 1 grabs power from the donor class unleashed by a conservative Supreme Court to achieve unpopular goals, such as tax relief for corporations and the wealthy, with little to fear from voters, whose impact has been dulled by “hundreds of harsh measures making it harder to vote,” according to the Brennan Center for Justice.

Restricting the right to vote has been a pillar of those who have worked to keep America from becoming a more equal nation since our founding. As a result, America has one of the worst voter turnout rates in the rich world.

The bill aims to change that with popular electoral reforms like national early voting, making Election Day a holiday, independent redistricting commissions and automatic voter registration, which has already spread to 14 states and Washington, D.C. since it was first enacted in Oregon less than four years ago. In early results, Oregon’s efforts to register any voter who comes into contact with Oregon’s department of motor vehicles have both increased voter turnout and made the electorate “more representative of the state’s population.”

A political document that unites Democrats

The "For The People Act" also takes aim special interest domination of our politics by adapting Rep. John Sarbanes’ revolutionary public finance proposal to empower small donors. The act would match their contributions 6-to-1 for candidates who participate in the system. This could help people like Katie Porter run for office, said Rep. Katie Porter. A single mom of three, Porter was one of the record 102 women elected to the House last fall.

On top of these reforms that make it easier for citizens to participate in our electoral system, there are anti-corruption provisions that, among other things, demand disclosure of anonymous “dark money” and prevent members of Congress from sitting on corporate boards while requiring tax returns from candidates for president and vice president.

Yes, at this point the bill is “as much a political document as a legislative one,” as Mother Jones’ Ari Berman notes. But it’s a powerful political document. It contains an argument that unites Democrats — from the moderates who make up most of the party's new House members to the many Democratic presidential candidates outbidding each other with full-throated progressive proposals.

The argument is that fixing our broken political system isn’t just an important issue; it’s the issue that makes all other reforms possible.

A rallying cry for a better democracy

“I think the first thing you have to do is move on democratic reform,” said 2020 hopeful Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana. “It’s kind of the way this Congress decided rightly to start in the House side on H.R. 1. And it’s not because I have any illusion that that’s one of the easier things to do or even that some of the things we need to do can happen quickly.”

There’s no better evidence that these reforms are needed than Donald Trump, who had to settle a fraud case for $25 million weeks before he became president and whom 64% of America says committed crimes before he took office. Only a sick system could allow Trump to co-opt the executive branch into a mesh of personal interests and authoritarian instincts that make it nearly impossible to determine what is a criminal conspiracy and what is legalized bribery.

But Trump is just a Macy's Thanksgiving Day balloon filled with the bad faith that has been dragging America's politics to the right for decades. Both parties have relied on millions in anonymous dark money to win elections, but Democrats are making the case that they actually want to clean up the system.

It's a battle they won't win as long as Mitch McConnell and Donald Trump are in charge. But it's the kind of rallying cry that could help Democrats take them down.

The New York Times

House Passes Democrats' Centerpiece Anti-Corruption and Voting Rights Bill

BY CATIE EDMONSON | MARCH 8, 2019

The House passed the Democrats' showcase anti-corruption and voting rights legislation on Friday, an expansive measure that aims to dismantle barriers to the ballot box, end big money in politics and impose stricter ethics rules on federal officials.

The sweeping legislation, passed 234-193, makes good on the campaign pledge to clean up Washington that helped catapult Democrats into the majority. It also serves as a campaign platform for Democrats ahead of 2020. It has virtually no chance of passing the Senate.

"It's a power grab for the American people," said Representative Zoe Lofgren of California, who leads the House administration committee that shepherded the legislation.

The ambitious compendium, at nearly 700 pages, includes proposals … automatically registering citizens to vote, and restoring voting rights to people who have served felony sentences. It also creates a six-to-one matching system for donations of up to $200 to congressional and presidential candidates who reject high-dollar contributions, funded by an additional fine on corporations found to have broken the law.

The Washington Post

House Democrats Pass H.R. 1, Their Answer to Draining the Swamp

BY MIKE DEBONIS AND JOHN WAGNER | MARCH 8, 2019

The House approved a far-reaching elections and ethics bill Friday — one that would change the way congressional elections are funded, impose new voter-access mandates on states and, in one of several provisions targeting President Trump, force disclosure of presidential candidates' tax returns.

Democrats dubbed the bill H.R. 1, a designation meant to signal its place as a centerpiece of their congressional agenda. The measure, which has more than 500 pages, contains dozens of provisions favored by liberal advocacy groups, labor unions and other Democratic allies.

"It's a power grab, a power grab on behalf of the people," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said at an event on the Capitol steps ahead of the planned vote.

…

The bill is headed for a brick wall in the Republican-controlled Senate, where Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has made clear it will not get a vote. However, Democrats and their allies said the bill's passage would build momentum for action in coming years if and when Democrats solidify control in Washington.

"If Mitch McConnell is the immovable object, H.R. 1 is the unstoppable force," said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the lead author of the bill. "We'll keep pushing on it."

House Passes Extensive Election and Campaign Finance Overhaul Bill

BY MILES PARKS | MARCH 8, 2019

The House passed an extensive bill Friday that would overhaul the way Americans vote and take aim at the money currently flowing through the U.S. political system.

The bill was dubbed the "For The People Act" by House Democrats who want election accessibility and weeding out corruption to be core tenets of their majority agenda the next two years. The bill passed along straight party lines, 234-193.

"For months, for years, really for decades, millions of Americans have been looking at Washington and feeling like they've been left behind," said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., the lead author of the bill. "Too many Americans have faced this challenge where getting to the ballot box every two years is like getting through an obstacle course."

House Democrats gathered on the Capitol steps moments before the vote to celebrate the impending passage.

House Democrats Just Passed a Slate of Significant Reforms to Get Money Out of Politics

BY ELLA NILSEN | MARCH 8, 2019

House Democrats officially passed their massive anti-corruption and pro-democracy reform bill known as H.R. 1 on Friday. The bill passed on a final vote of 234 to 193.

The sweeping bill is aimed at getting money out of politics and increasing transparency around donors, cracking down on lobbying, and expanding voting rights for Americans by implementing provisions like automatic voter registration.

As they passed the bill that was their first priority of the year, Democrats were in a celebratory mood.

“H.R. 1 restores the people’s faith that government works for the public interest, the people’s interest, not the special interest,” said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. “It is fundamental to our democracy that people believe that actions taken here will be in their interest. That is what this legislation will help to restore.”

…

H.R. 1 covers three main planks: campaign finance reform, strengthening the government’s ethics laws, and expanding voting rights. Here’s the important part of each section, briefly explained.

Establishing public financing of campaigns, powered by small donations. Under the vision of the bill's main sponsor, Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD), the federal government would provide a voluntary 6-1 match for candidates for president and Congress, which means for every dollar a candidate raises from small donations, the federal government would match it six times over. The maximum small donation that could be matched would be capped at $200. The most substantial change to HR 1 is this program now won't be funded by taxpayer dollars as originally planned; instead, it will come from adding a 2.75 percent fee on criminal and civil fines, fees, penalties, or settlements with banks and corporations that commit corporate malfeasance (think Wells Fargo). Democrats are using this idea to push back on Republican attacks that taxpayers shouldn't be subsidizing campaigns.

"You're saying look, these big industries that lean on our democracy and are also breaking the law — it's very appropriate to take a tiny little piece, put it into a fund and say, 'That's how we'll give more power back to everyday Americans,'" Sarbanes told Vox. "We've got some big corporations out there who are probably going to keep getting in trouble and having to settle cases, so I think it will be an ongoing and sustainable source."

HUFFPOST

House Democrats Pass Landmark Campaign Finance and Voting Rights Reform Bill

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | MARCH 8, 2019

Democrats' landmark campaign finance, voting rights and ethics reform bill passed the House of Representatives on Friday.

The For The People Act, which passed 234-193, was Democrats' top priority upon winning control of the House in the 2018 elections. It would dramatically expand voting access, create publicly funded House elections, enhance the transparency of money in politics, restore voting rights to millions of ex-felons, strengthen executive branch ethics law and end partisan gerrymandering.

"This is a historic day, a pivotal day, a day that will make a difference," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said.

The bill aims to answer rising attacks on voting rights from courts and politicians across the country, and also to stem the increasing inequality of campaign funding by empowering small donors with matching contributions from public funds, among many other things.

The For The People Act "takes power from the elites, special interests and the 1 percent and gives it to the American people," Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.) said.

"This vote is an opportunity to be on the right side of history," Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) said. "If not us, then who? If not now, then when?"

House passage of the legislation is the result of a long collaborative process by the Democratic Party to prioritize campaign finance and voting rights reforms.

The party's Democracy Reform Task Force, endorsed by Pelosi and led by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), worked with lawmakers both old and new to bring together legislative ideas and craft them into a coherent package.

Much of this work was begun while Democrats languished in the House minority. As a possible victory in the 2018 elections loomed, they made it clear that the reforms would be their No. 1 priority. This mission was driven not just by party leaders, but also by the candidates who would ultimately deliver Democrats their first majority in the House in eight years.

…

Democrats believe that the reform package is popular and plan to vote on individual pieces of it to keep the issues of corruption and voting rights front and center. They are already pursuing a reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act in a separate bill. And Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said on Thursday that he would like to mandate automatic voter registration across the country.

The House bill "is just the first step in our efforts to change politics in this country — to change politics in this town," freshman Rep. Max Rose (D-N.Y.) said on Thursday ahead of the vote.

"This is a fight that will not end until we win it," Pelosi said.

Mother Jones

House Passes the Most Significant Democracy Reform Bill in a Generation

BY ARI BERMAN | MARCH 8, 2019

The House of Representatives on Friday passed the most significant democracy reform bill introduced in Congress since the Watergate era by a vote of 234 to 193. The sweeping bill, known as H.R. 1: the For the People Act, would massively expand voting rights, crack down on gerrymandering, reduce the influence of big money in politics, and require sitting presidents and presidential candidates to release 10 years of tax returns.

“It’s one of the most comprehensive packages of democracy reform we’ve seen in a generation,” Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the chief sponsor of the bill, told Mother Jones.

…

The 622-page bill, the first introduced by House Democrats in early January, would establish nationwide automatic voter registration, Election Day registration, and two weeks of early voting in every state. It would curb gerrymandering by requiring independent commissions, instead of partisan state legislatures, to draw congressional maps. To reduce the influence of megadonors on elections, it would create a small-donor matching system to publicly finance congressional campaigns and require dark-money groups to disclose their donors. Finally, it would enact new ethics reforms, among them requiring the president and vice president, along with future candidates for those offices, to release 10 years of personal and business tax returns.

While these ideas have been introduced in different pieces of legislation, H.R. 1 is the first bill to combine a broad array of reforms aimed at expanding access to—and fairness in—elections. “The public wants to see reform in all of these areas,” says Sarbanes. “It’s not enough if you enhance their opportunities at the ballot box, but they feel like the people they elect get to Washington and don’t behave or get captured by big money. And it’s not enough to fix the influence that money has if it’s still too hard to vote.”

…

Even though the bill will not pass the Senate anytime soon, Sarbanes thinks Democratic support for it will only increase if McConnell becomes the face of opposition to it. He said House Democrats will now “take H.R. 1 on tour,” using it to build public support for a democratic reform agenda and lay the groundwork for its passage when there’s a Senate and president more amenable to it, possibly after 2020.

For now, it’s telling that House Democrats made H.R. 1 the first bill they introduced and one of the first they passed. It shows how once-marginalized “good government” issues have become a top priority for Democrats.

House Passes H.R. 1, A Sweeping Anti-Corruption and Voting Rights Bill

BY BRIAN PASCUS | MARCH 8, 2019

Democrats passed House Resolution 1 (H.R. 1) Friday, a bill which could be the most sweeping anti-corruption measure passed by the House of Representatives in a generation, by a vote of 234 to 193. The bill focuses on voting rights, campaign finance, and government ethics. But it appears to have no chance in the Senate.

Sponsored by Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Maryland, H.R. 1, or the "For the People Act," is a wide-ranging piece of legislation that in its words seeks "to expand Americans' access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, and strengthen ethics rules for public servants and for other purposes." The Washington Post called it "perhaps the most comprehensive political-reform proposal ever considered by our elected representatives."

At a press conference Friday morning hailing the forthcoming passage of the bill, Speaker Pelosi said, "Yes it is a 'power grab,' a power grab on behalf of the people."

"It ends the dominance of big dark special interest money in politics and it empowers small donors and the grassroots. It ensures clean fair elections and fighting voter suppression. It cleans up corruption returning integrity to Washington D.C," she said.

TIME

How Democrats Will Use 'Drain the Swamp' Against Trump in 2020

BY ALANA ABRAMSON | MARCH 8, 2019

Donald Trump used arguments about a “rigged system” and pledges to “drain the swamp” in Washington to win the presidency in 2016. But Democrats signaled strongly this week that they’ll use the same lines against him in the next election.

On Friday, House Democrats unanimously voted to pass a broad package of reforms on voting rights, campaign finance, election security and gerrymandering, among other topics, that would be the biggest changes to elections and anti-corruption statutes in years.

The bill is dead on arrival in the Republican-controlled Senate, where Majority Leader Mitch McConnell criticized it as a “Democrat Politician Protection Act” and said he would not bring it up for a vote.

But the ideas in it are almost certainly headed to the next Democratic presidential nominee’s platform, and, if the party is successful in 2020, could be one of the first issues Congress takes up.

…

“[Candidates] will all be able to point to this kind of baseline standard of what strong pro democracy reform looks like which is H.R.1,” said Sarbanes. “The fact that when Democrats got the gavel back the first thing we did was put these reforms out there and say this is what we stand for? I think that will be a huge driver of the election narrative.”

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

House Passes Election Overhaul Package

BY JOSH JAMERSON | MARCH 8, 2019

The House passed along party lines legislation to overhaul election rules that is likely to stall in the Senate, setting up the bill itself to be a key issue in the 2020 campaign battle between Democrats and Republicans.

The bill, known as H.R. 1, includes a range of measures concerning voting rights, election security and campaign finance. Many Democrats see it as the marquee legislation of their new majority in the chamber. “It’s about money in politics and how that destroys the confidence people have in the political process,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) said on Thursday.

…

Democrats, likewise, see H.R. 1’s passage in the House—even if it doesn’t become law—as helping them in future elections, pointing to polling that shows voters think there is too much money in politics. Several new House Democrats were backed in 2018 by End Citizens United, a liberal political action committee that supported midterm candidates who vowed to revamp campaign-finance law.

…

“The bill is exactly in line with what the people in my district in Colorado are expecting,” said Rep. Jason Crow (D., Colo.), who was endorsed by ECU and ousted a Republican in the Denver suburbs last year.

Roll Call

House Passes H.R. 1 Government Overhaul, Sending It Back to Campaign Trail

BY KATE ACKLEY | MARCH 8, 2019

With passage of H.R. 1, House Democrats' political money, ethics and voting overhaul, the mammoth proposal now heads exclusively to the 2020 campaign trail, where candidates in both parties say they believe their message will woo voters.

The House passed the measure 234-193 Friday morning. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, the bill's foe in chief, has assured his side he plans to officially ignore it in his chamber, refusing to bring it for a vote even as the Kentucky Republican said Wednesday that he believed his party could win elections against people who support it.

Despite its expected doom in the Senate, Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said he is planning to unroll his version of the package Wednesday and will seek Democratic and Republican co-sponsors. Even if it somehow were to pass the Senate, President Donald Trump has threatened to veto it, and business and conservative interests have mobilized against it en masse.

…

Millions of Americans across the country have been looking at Washington and feeling like they've been left out and left behind. They see the influence that big money and special interests have up here in Washington, and they feel like their voice doesn't matter," said Rep. John Sarbanes, the Maryland Democrat who

was the chief sponsor of the measure, during a pep-rally-themed press conference on the Capitol steps just minutes before the vote.

…

Sarbanes added that his bill was designed “to restore ethics and accountability to fight back against the interests of big money in our politics and to make it easier not harder to register and vote in America.”

…

Rep. Tom Malinowski, D-N.J., said he was 100 percent confident that “the Senate will pass HR 1, and if it doesn’t happen with the current leadership, it’ll happen with the leadership we elect by running on this agenda.”

His fellow freshman Democrat, New Yorker Max Rose, who like Malinowski and Davids, flipped a Republican seat to get to Congress, said he was eager to hear what Republicans’ counterproposal to the overhaul is.

“We’re going to take a victory lap after this, obviously. But this is just the opening salvo,” he said. “We’re going to put a very simple question before the Republicans in the Senate: Are you on the side of your own voters or are you on the side of special interests? I am eager to hear what their answer is, and I know that those who are going to go to the polls in 2020 are equally eager as well.”

POLITICO

House Passes Sweeping Election Reform Bill

BY ZACH MONTELLARO | MARCH 8, 2019

The House on Friday passed a massive voting rights, campaign-finance and ethics reform package — a centerpiece of the new Democratic majority's agenda.

The bill, known as H.R. 1 and dubbed the For the People Act by Democrats, was approved on a party-line 234-193 vote.

The measure makes far-reaching changes to the country's electoral and campaign-finance system, along with ethics reforms that target President Donald Trump and his administration.

"H.R. 1 restores the people's faith that government works for the public interest, the people's interests, not the special interests," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said at a news conference before the vote.

House Passes Sweeping Electoral Reform Bill

BY JULIEGRACE BRUFKE | MARCH 8, 2019

House Democrats passed a sweeping electoral reform bill in a 234-193 party-line vote on Friday.

The For The People Act, better known as H.R. 1 — spearheaded by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) — aims to expand voting rights, implement new ethics rules and increase transparency in elections, according to its proponents.

…

Democrats unveiled the legislation shortly after the start of the 116th Congress, underscoring its importance in their agenda. Supporters of the bill argued it's necessary in order to tackle corruption and dark money in politics.

…

Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said Friday that enactment of the package is vital if Congress is to restore the voters' trust in the idea that Congress is working in the public interest.

"It is fundamental to our democracy that people believe — they believe — that actions taken here will be in their interest," she said. "That is what this legislation will help to restore."

House Passes Sweeping Bill Reducing Role of Big Money in Politics

BY MATTHEW LEE | MARCH 8, 2019

The Democratic-controlled House on Friday approved legislation aimed at reducing the role of big money in politics, ensuring fair elections and strengthening ethics standards. But it stands little chance in the Republican-run Senate, where the GOP leader has pledged it will not come up for a vote, and the White House issued a veto threat.

The House measure would make it easier to register and vote, and would tighten election security and require presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns.

Republicans called the bill a Democratic power grab that amounts to a federal takeover of elections. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said the proposal was dead on arrival in that chamber.

The White House said in a statement that the Democrats' plan would "micromanage" elections that now are run largely by states and would establish "costly and unnecessary program to finance political campaigns."

But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said the bill "restores the people's faith that government works for the public interest, the people's interest, not the special interests."

Trying to turn Republicans' words against them, Pelosi said, "Yes it is a power grab — a power grab on behalf of the people."

House GOP leader Kevin McCarthy of California said the legislation would undermine the integrity of elections by allowing convicted felons to vote, and would apply a one-size-fits-all standard to elections now run by states and local governments.

Democrats called that a mischaracterization.

To Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., the bill "grabs power away from the elites and the power brokers and gives it to the people."

She and other Democrats disputed the claim that taxpayers will pay for campaigns, noting that money for political campaigns would come from a surcharge on federal settlements made with banks and corporations that run afoul of the law.

This bill would allow "everyday Americans to become power brokers" with small contributions of $50 or $75 that would be matched at a 6-to-1 rate by the government, said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., the bill's main author.

ESSENCE

H.R. 1 and the Fight to Save Voters' Rights

BY BREANNA EDWARDS | MARCH 8, 2019

On Friday House Democrats used their majority to pass their landmark "For the People Act", better known as HR1 aimed at reforming government by addressing issues in voting, campaign finance, redistricting and ethics.

The bill predictably passed by a 234-193 party-line vote and will now be headed to the Senate, controlled by the Republicans, where it is not likely to pass. Sen. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) had already penned an op-ed in the Washington Post earlier this year calling the bill the "Democrat Politician Protection Act."

That being said, Democrats are prepared to battle it out.

"If Mitch McConnell is the immovable object, H.R. 1 is the unstoppable force," Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the lead author of the bill told the Post. "We'll keep pushing on it."

According to Rep. Marc Veasey (D-Texas), the historic vote couldn't have happened on a better day.

"Today, we're restoring equality into our elections. With the passage of H.R.1, Democrats in the House countered Republicans toxic, racist culture of voter intimidation, and said to the American public: your vote matters. I can't thinking of a more fitting day, than International Women's Day, to stand up for every Americans' right to vote and to work to restore our free and fair elections," Veasey told ESSENCE.

The Guardian

Democrats Target Big Money in Politics with Ethics Reform Package

BY LAUREN GAMBINO | MARCH 8, 2019

Congressional Democrats passed a sweeping elections and ethics reform package on Friday morning that aims to reduce the role of big money in politics, expand voting rights – and require presidents to disclose their tax returns.

The House package, called the For the People Act, or H.R. 1, is the first major piece of legislation offered by the Democratic-controlled House, and aims to fulfill the promises lawmakers made on the campaign trail to make government more transparent and more accountable.

The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, celebrating the vote and confronting critics, said on Friday: “This is a historic day, a pivotal day. A day that will make a difference as we go forward. And to those – as Mr. Phillips, congressman Phillips said: yes, it is a power grab. A power grab on behalf of the people.”

…

During the midterms, Democrats ran on a message of government ethics and elections reform. By promising to strengthen ethics laws, restore integrity to the voting systems and reduce the influence of big money, Democrats sought to draw a sharp contrast with Donald Trump and his administration.

Polling shows broad, bipartisan public support for campaign finance reform as voters grow increasingly frustrated with the role of big money in politics.

RAWSTORY

Republicans Freak Out Over H.R. 1: They Don't Want America to Have Fair Elections

BY AMANDA MARCOTTE | MARCH 8, 2019

Friday, the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives passed a hefty, but badly needed, omnibus bill aimed at restoring American democracy after the beating it's taken lately from big money and authoritarian interests. HR1, also called the "For the People Act," has a series of provisions aimed at protecting the right to vote, muting the impact of big money spending on politics and strengthening ethics requirements for political candidates.

This bill's aims are broadly popular with Americans. Its provisions to make voter registration essentially automatic -- you can opt out, but you won't have to opt in -- are supported by 65 percent of Americans. Provisions to make voting easier enjoy similarly high levels of support. Campaign finance reform is also wildly popular, with healthy majorities supporting it. And when it comes to the power of lobbyists, well, they come last in polls where Americans ranks professions by ethical standards.

But while the public very much likes the provisions in this bill, Republican politicians and conservative activists very much don't. The reason is simple: Conservatives know they're not likely to win a fair fight, and so they want a system that makes it easy for them to cheat.

New York Intelligencer

House Democrats Pass Landmark Voting Rights Bill on a Party-Line Vote

BY ED KILGORE | MARCH 8, 2019

Sometimes legislation that's not destined to be signed into law can send some pretty strong messages. Both major political parties arguably sent messages about their values in the House vote on H.R. 1, the For the People Act.

This signature legislation had three major components: (1) tax credits and vouchers for voluntary donations to congressional candidates, and matching funds for candidates accepting spending limits, as one of the few avenues for campaign-finance reform left open after Citizens United; (2) lobbying and ethics reforms; and (3) the most extensive set of voting-rights guarantees in decades.

Aside from its scope, what's most remarkable about H.R. 1 is that every single House Democrat voted for it.

And every Republicans voted against it, which means the GOP is determined to use barriers to full participation in elections — along with related abuses like partisan gerrymandering and unregulated campaign spending — to maintain its competitive position, regardless of public opinion.

House Approves Sweeping Dem Election Reform Bill, Amid First Amendment Concerns

BY ALEX PAPPAS AND CHAD PERGRAM | MARCH 8, 2019

The House of Representatives on Friday approved a sweeping election reform bill that serves as the touchstone to the House Democratic agenda but has been criticized by civil libertarians and Republicans over First Amendment concerns.

The so-called “H.R. 1” measure embraced by House Democrats aims to curb big money in politics, make it easier to vote and bolster election security. It institutes a public financing system for congressional campaigns, requires presidential candidates to disclose tax returns and makes Election Day a federal holiday.

…

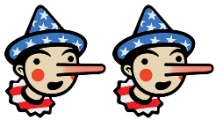
To Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., the bill "grabs power away from the elites and the power brokers and gives it to the people."

She and other Democrats disputed the claim that taxpayers will pay for campaigns, noting that money for political campaigns would come from a surcharge on federal settlements made with banks and corporations that run afoul of the law.

The Washington Post

Would 'Every Small Dollar Donated' Be Matched 6 to 1 Under the House Democratic Plan?

BY GLENN KESSLER | MARCH 8, 2019



The House of Representatives will be voting on H.R. 1, dubbed "For the People Act of 2019," a complex, 622-page bill that aims to overhaul laws regarding voter registration, campaign finance and political ethics.

For purposes of this fact check, we're going to focus on the first issue that McCarthy addresses in a video attack on the legislation. It's a point that has been echoed by other Republican lawmakers.

"H.R. 1 creates public subsidies for campaigns through a six-to-one taxpayer match on small-donor campaign contributions of up to $200," wrote Rep. Rodney Davis (R-Ill.), in the Hill on March 7. "For every $200, the federal government will pay $1,200 of taxpayer dollars to a congressional or presidential campaign. Meaning regardless of whether you support my bid for reelection, $1 million in public funds would have been to get me reelected last cycle had H.R. 1 been enacted."

Is this really the case?

The Facts

Public funding of campaigns is intended to minimize the impact of big donors and super PACs, what House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the principal sponsor of the matching provision, say is the "grievous error" of Citizens United, the Supreme Court case that gave rise to super PACs.

…

The House bill would provide a 6-to-1 match for donations of $200 or less, as McCarthy and Davis said, but with significant caveats that are missing in the GOP talking points.

For instance, candidates must meet a certain threshold: They must raise at least $50,000 in small-dollar contributions from at least 1,000 individuals during the qualifying period.

Moreover, while individuals can currently contribute as much as $2,700 a cycle to congressional candidates, participants must agree to accept no contributions larger than $1,000.

…

Both McCarthy and Davis also claimed that the matching funds were taxpayer money. As the bill is now structured, that's not correct. The money for the matching donations would come from a 2.75 percent fee assessed on civil and criminal financial penalties with the government, which then would be earmarked for a "Freedom From Influence Fund."

…

“Fines will not be close enough to cover the 600 percent match rate,” said Erin Perrine, spokeswoman for McCarthy. “Since there will be an anticipated funding gap, the remaining funds for campaigns would come from general funds (also known as taxpayer dollars).”

The bill, however, explicitly says payments will be reduced if there is insufficient money in the fund and no money can be used from other sources: “In any case in which the Commission determines that there are insufficient moneys in the Fund to make payments to participating candidates under this title, moneys shall not be made available from any other source for the purpose of making such payments.”

…

In any case, if the bill became law, a future Congress can always change how the program is funded. The current arrangement — essentially a tax on people and corporations caught in malfeasance — appears designed to avoid having the money being tagged as coming from taxpayer dollars.

NBC NEWS

The House's 'For the People Act' Proves Democrats Are Delivering on Our Midterm Promises

BY STENY HOYER (OP-ED) | MARCH 8, 2019

Elections have consequences. Last September, I delivered a speech outlining House Democrats' plans to make government work for the people again by making our institutions more ethical, transparent and accountable. Democrats won the House, in part, on that pledge, and on the very first day of our new majority Democrats began implementing reforms to House rules to honor it. Today, we take the next major step in the process when we bring to the House floor landmark legislation that we think will renew Americans' faith in government.

Our legislation, the For the People Act, numbered H.R. 1 and introduced by Maryland's Rep. John Sarbanes, will restore public trust in Congress and the federal government in several critical ways. From redistricting reforms to campaign finance reforms, from strengthening Americans' access to the ballot box, to higher ethical standards for our nation's leaders, the For the People Act will protect our democracy and put power back in the hands of the American people.

…

The House is trying to look past partisanship and politics and embrace major reforms that benefit not one party but our country and our democratic system. Together, we want to renew Americans' faith that our democracy is indeed a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" and can be a force for progress that benefits all of our people and helps them get ahead.

StarTribune

Campaign Reform Bill Needs Your Support

BY DEAN PHILLIPS (OP-ED) | MARCH 8, 2019

A campaign check should not be your ticket to representation. Our politicians should be listening to the folks who really matter, the ones who work hard to make ends meet, to provide for their families and give their children a future of possibilities.

That's why the first bill introduced by our new House Majority — and the first bill I co-sponsored — was H.R. 1, the For The People Act. It passed the House last Friday and represents the first step in our mission to make government more transparent and accountable to you.

Mitch McConnell has refused to bring it up for a vote in the Senate, attacking it as a "power grab." Well, it is a power grab — a power grab for you.

Our new Democratic Majority was ushered in with a promise to put power into your hands and earn back your trust by working for the common interest, not special interests.

…

H.R. 1 lays the foundation for Congress to level the political playing field and create a path to addressing the important issues we should be focused on. So whatever your number one priority might be, I ask that you make ethics, election and campaign finance reform your number two priority. Because we can never truly get to work on the issues that matter to you unless we unrig the system and invite you to the room where it all happens.

MARYLAND MATTERS

House Democrats Pass Sarbanes' Voting Rights, Ethics Legislation

BY ROBIN BRAVENDER | MARCH 8, 2019

U.S. House Democrats on Friday passed a broad election reform and ethics bill that they've made their top legislative priority this Congress.

The legislation, referred to as H.R. 1, passed the House on a vote of 234-193 on Friday along party lines. Its passage marks a symbolic win for Democrats, who seized control of the chamber this year after eight years in the minority. But the measure is unlikely to get a vote in the GOP-controlled Senate or make it to President Trump's desk.

The House Democrats' massive bill aims to — among other things — curb the influence of money in politics, increase public financing of campaigns, expand voting rights, end partisan gerrymandering, and force the disclosure of presidential candidates' tax returns.

"For months, for years, really for decades, millions of Americans across the country have been looking at Washington and feeling like they've been left out and left behind," Rep. John P. Sarbanes (D-Md.), the lead sponsor of the bill, said Friday outside the U.S. Capitol.

H.R. 1, Sarbanes said, seeks to "restore ethics and accountability, to fight back against the interests of big money in our politics, and to make it easier, not harder, to register and vote in America."

Portland Press Herald

Maine's Rep. Jared Golden Clashes with House Republican Leader

BY STEVE COLLINS | MARCH 8, 2019

U.S. Rep. Jared Golden of Maine's 2nd District went toe-to-toe on the floor of the House with the Republican leader of the U.S. House on Friday over a Democratic proposal to ease voting and promote public financing of campaigns.

…

Golden, serving in his first term after winning a tight race last year, said he favored the For the People Act as a "comprehensive, good-government bill that goes a long way in wresting power away from elites who abuse our political system for narrow self-interests."

He said it would "return power where it belongs: in the hands of working people" because "as long as corporations and mega-donors finance campaigns, well-connected insiders will continue to call the shots."

…

Golden's amendment, which secured a majority votes, would prevent candidates who have violated campaign finance laws from participating in a federal matching program aimed at encouraging political hopefuls to rely on small-dollar donations.

Golden said Mainers "have made it clear they want to take big money out of politics and return our government to the people."

The Detroit News

House Passes Democrats' Campaign Finance, Voting Rights Bill

BY MELISSA NANN BURKE | MARCH 8, 2019

The Democrat-controlled House split along party lines Friday to approve a sweeping campaign finance, voting rights and ethics reform bill that will be dead on arrival in the U.S. Senate.

The For the People Act, which passed by a vote 234-193, aims to weaken the influence of wealthy political donors, reduce government corruption and impose electoral reforms.

…

The legislation is still a top priority for freshman Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Holly, who campaigned on government reform and refused donations from corporate political action committees.

Slotkin has championed elements of the bill, including requiring the disclosure of all political spending and ensuring foreign money may not influence U.S. elections.

Last fall, she helped lead a group of over 100 Democratic candidates asking House leaders to make the legislation the new Congress' first order of business.

…

"The overwhelming message I heard for a long time on the campaign trail was Washington's broken. Both parties are broken. The system is off because money in politics is what's driving everybody in D.C.," Slotkin said.

Rep. Elissa Slotkin Votes for Ethics Reform

BY MIKE HOLZMAN | MARCH 8, 2019

House Democrats Friday passed a sweeping legislative proposal they are calling the "For the People Act."

House Resolution 1 is hundreds of pages long and covers a wide range of topics mostly related to money in Washington.

It includes banning lawmakers from sitting on corporate boards and applying a code of ethics for Supreme Court justices.

The bill would also require President Donald Trump to disclose 10 years' worth of his tax returns.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says it puts the power of government back in the people's hands.

Among the resolution's supporters is Michigan Democrat Elissa Slotkin, who made good on a campaign promise to tackle campaign finance reform.

Slotkin also authored an amendment attached to HR1, which helps keep foreign influence out of U.S. political campaigns.

It would do so by prohibiting foreign governments, entities and organization from buying ad time on TV or social media that are for or against a candidate.

Axne Lauds House Passage of Campaign Finance Reform Bill

BY BRENT BARNETT | MARCH 8, 2019

Iowa Congresswoman Cindy Axne is among those praising the passage of House Resolution 1 by the U.S. House Friday.

By a 234-to-193 vote, the Democrat-controlled House passed the For the People Act, a historic reform package that focuses on voting rights, campaign finance, and government ethics. Axne tells KMA News she feels the legislation will "help end the culture of corruption" in Washington.

"First, it bring ethics back to Congress," Axne said. "It makes sure that we look at the opportunity for every voter in this country to have a voice by making sure that we protect voter integrity, and then of course ensures that every taxpayer dollar that we look at is spent wisely and so it holds government accountable to spending those taxpayer dollars well."

Axne is unsure if the bill will be taken up in the Republican-controlled Senate.

"I would hope that no matter if it’s a democratic controlled house or republican controlled senate that we would always want to look at ways to save taxpayer dollars, hold government accountable to ensure that every person in this country has a voice with their vote, and that Congress acts ethically," Axne said. "So, I hope that they can find a place to come to the floor of the senate and decide this is an important agenda to move forward."

U.S. House Advances Dem Priorities, Mass. Lawmakers Laud Move

BY SHANNON YOUNG | MARCH 8, 2019

Massachusetts lawmakers touted the U.S. House of Representative's Friday approval of a wide-ranging and high-priority bill to address voting rights, campaign finance and government ethics-related issues.

All nine members of the state's U.S. House delegation joined other Democrats in passing the sweeping legislation -- known as H.R. 1, or the "For the People Act" -- on a 234 to 193 vote.

The bill contains several top priority measures for House Democrats, including language mandating that presidents publicly disclose tax information, encouraging elected officials to rely on small donors instead of large corporate contributions and expanding early voting options, among other things.

U.S. Rep. Katherine Clark, the Democratic Caucus' vice chair, said the bill seeks to put power "back in the hands of the people" and called its passage "a win for democracy."

The Melrose Democrat noted that the measure includes two of her proposals that would require presidents and vice presidents to divest from their conflicts of interest and to release their tax returns before taking office.

"We're bringing accountability back to politics," she tweeted.

Congressman Richard Neal, a Springfield Democrat and chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, said the legislation will help bring more transparency to America's campaign finance system and "safeguard every citizen's right to vote, including those who complete prison sentences for felonies."

"The passage of H.R. 1 is a major step in the right direction. ... Democrats have worked hard to ensure that they keep their promises to stand up to corporations, make sure the government works for everyday Americans and guarantees that all voices are heard," he said in a statement.

U.S. Rep. Lori Trahan, D-Westford, called the House's vote "a big step forward in the fight to preserve and expand the right to vote and for the integrity of our elections."

"I am also pleased that the legislation contained two of my amendments that were aimed at protecting the voting rights and access of the families of our brave service members in uniform, as well as making sure that agents of foreign governments are not able to exercise influence over the drawing of new congressional districts," she said in a statement. "Like so many of my colleagues I campaigned on the issue of making government more open, transparent and fair for the people we represent. This legislation represents a promise kept."

Congressman Stephen Lynch, D-South Boston, said he was proud to see the House pass "a bold ethics reform package created to end the culture of corruption that has overtaken our nation's capital."

"We promised to restore our democracy and bring transparency and accountability to Washington, and this is a first step," he tweeted.

Lynch also touted the bill's inclusion of his "White House Ethics Transparency Act," which would require presidential administrations to disclose waivers of executive branch ethics rules to the independent Office of Government Ethics.

He argued that the measure, if signed into law, will "ensure the American people know who is working behind closed doors in their government and will stop federal agencies from being flooded with former lobbyists and consultants whose previous work presents serious conflicts of interest."

U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley, D-Boston, thanked her colleagues for supporting the legislation, offering that it's needed as the political system "has become increasingly focused on the privileged and powerful, drowning out the voices, experiences and needs of everyday Americans and their families."

The bill now heads to the GOP-led U.S. Senate, where it not expected to see any action.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, has said he will not bring the measure up for a vote on his chamber's floor, according to various news outlets.

U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat and 2020 presidential hopeful, however, urged supporters to join her in demanding that the GOP leader take action on the House-passed legislation.

"Good news: The House just passed the For The People Act, which includes key elements from my 'End Corruption Now' bill, to start cleaning up corruption in Washington," she tweeted. "I'm joining (End Citizens United) to demand that (the majority leader) give the bill a vote on the Senate floor. Are you with us?"

Norcross, Sherrill, Malinowski Laud Voting Rights Bill

BY NIKITA BIRYUKOV | MARCH 8, 2019

Reps. Donald Norcross, Mikie Sherrill and Tom Malinowski lauded the House's passage of a bill that would increase ballot access, limit dark money and pump up oversight of federal officials.

"I've always supported making voting easier, not harder – and it's a good thing we finally have the opportunity to give more Americans the ability to have their voices heard, to implement campaign finance reform and to restore trust in our public institutions," Norcross said.

The bill, which Republicans on the hill have attacked as a Democratic power grab, also institutes an automatic voter registration system similar to the one New Jersey enacted last year.

It's unlikely the bill will be passed into law, as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said he will keep it from reaching the Senate floor.

"This landmark bill will help strengthen our democracy. It addresses so many of the issues my community sent me to Washington to tackle, from access to the ballot box, to improving the very machinery of our democracy," Sherrill said. "New Jersey consistently receives low marks from national election-security experts on our election infrastructure, and this bill gives our state access to grant money to improve and maintain those systems."

The disclosure requirements the bill would place on dark money groups was a focus for Malinowski.

“I was proud to be one of the first original co-sponsors on H.R. 1. In my district, I have not met a single person, Republican or Democrat, who thinks it’s a good idea to let anonymous donors spend millions of untraceable dollars on political attack ads, or to have a campaign finance system so opaque that Russian oligarchs can easily channel money into it to influence our elections, or to allow blatantly partisan gerrymandering,” Malinowski said. “These are not partisan issues among the American people.

These N.J. Freshmen Used Ethics Reform As Key Issue When Winning Their Seats in the Fall. The House Just Passed Their Bill.

BY JONATHAN D. SALANT | MARCH 8, 2019

Democratic candidates Andy Kim and Tom Malinowski promised to clean up government when they ran for the House last fall. They wound up sweeping out two Republican incumbents.

On Friday, the Democratic-controlled House approved major campaign finance and ethics legislation in an effort to fulfill promises made during the midterms. The vote, solely along party lines, was 234-193.

“There was no single issue that was more resonant with the voters of the 7th District than this,” said Malinowski, D-7th Dist. “I look forward to being able to say we passed this in the House because voters in the 7th District flipped the House. We can do the same thing in the Senate if the voters of the United States make the change that New Jersey helped make to the House in 2018.”

The For the People Act was given the bill number H.R. 1 indicating its importance to the new majority. During the midterms, Kim and Malinowski helped lead an effort among more than 100 Democratic candidates to pledge that a top priority would be a bill to make changes to election rules and campaign finance regulations.

The Turlock Journal

House Passes Dems' Election Reform Bill

BY ANGELINA MARTIN | MARCH 8, 2019

House Democrats on Friday officially passed their sweeping anti-corruption, pro-democracy reform bill known as H.R. 1, or the For the People Act, which included an amendment authored by Rep. Josh Harder that strengthens lobbying disclosures.

The massive piece of legislation aims to get money out of politics and increase transparency around donors, keep a closer watch on lobbying and expand voting rights by implementing aspects like automatic voter registration.

The bill has been described as one meant to restore the public's trust in the government — something Harder believes has been lost throughout the years of American democracy.

"Most folks believe that special interests and big corporations have far too much influence in Washington, and I think they're completely correct to think that," Harder said during a phone call to the Journal from Washington, D.C. after the vote on the bill.

He reflected on one of his first days in D.C., when he was invited to a dinner with his other freshman colleagues which was advertised as policy discussion. But, rather than talking about issues that matter, like affordable healthcare, the creation of jobs and immigration, the group was ambushed by lobbyists who wanted to talk about their own priorities.

“We were obviously at odds,” Harder said. “This is an everyday occurrence in Washington.”

…

According to Harder, D.C. is home to 11,000 registered lobbyists who take part in organized attempts to influence legislators through monetary means. Harder’s amendment in HR 1 takes a simple approach to ensuring lobbying transparency, requiring that lobbyists who reach out to members of Congress must identify themselves as lobbyists and make it clear who their clients are, or who pays them.

“We’re not going to be able to eliminate the role of lobbyists, but we can make sure that no member of Congress ever has a conversation with a lobbyist without knowing they’re a lobbyist and who is paying for the work they’re doing,” Harder said. “We want to shine a light on some of this behavior.”

There are three main components to HR 1 as a whole, which was the Democrats’ first priority of the year: campaign finance reform, strengthening the government’s ethics laws and expanding voter rights.

The bill establishes public funding of campaigns through small donations by providing a voluntary 6-1 match for candidates for president and Congress, meaning that for every dollar a candidate raises from small donations, the government would match it six times over. This maximum small donation that can be matched would be capped at $200.

This program wouldn’t be funded by taxpayer dollars, but instead via a new, 2.75 percent fee on criminal and civil fines, fees, penalties or settlements with banks and corporations that commit corporate malfeasance.

Pennsylvania Capital-Star

‘This Bill Is Revolutionary:’ Pa.’s Congressional Dems Get Behind Sweeping Voting Rights, Ethics Bill

BY ROBIN BRAVENDER | MARCH 8, 2019

Majority Democrats in the U.S. House on Friday pushed through a broad election reform and ethics bill that they’ve made their top legislative priority this Congress.

The legislation, referred to as H.R. 1, passed the House on a vote of 234-193 on Friday along party lines. Its passage marks a symbolic win for Democrats, who seized control of the chamber this year after eight years in the minority. But the measure is unlikely to get a vote in the GOP-controlled Senate or make it to President Donald Trump’s desk.

Pennsylvania U.S. Rep. Dwight Evans, D-3rd District, called the bill “revolutionary,” in a statement posted to Twitter, because it “[takes] huuuge (sic) money out of politics; [cleans] up corruption and [ensures] fair elections.”

The bill will “will [make] it easier for Americans to vote and ensuring that dark money no longer dominates,” U.S. Rep. Madeleine Dean, D-4th District, said.

Rep. TJ Cox on the Passage of H.R. 1

BY KELLY BRODERICK | MARCH 8, 2019

TJ Cox released a statement on Friday about the passage of HR1, a bill that will overhaul the federal elections system.

“I’m an engineer. I fix things that are broken. But it doesn’t take an engineer to tell you that our politics is broken - for too long, our policies have been dictated by special interests and deep-pocketed corporate donors, drowning out the voices of hard-working families.

“Our pay-to-play politics is why today we pay the most of any nation for prescription drugs. This is why we cannot, as the wealthiest nation in the world, deliver quality, affordable healthcare to every American family. This is why we are behind in the fight for renewable, sustainable technologies of the future. This is why many in the Central Valley still lack clean drinking water, and why our children breathe poisonous air.

“Today this legislation is the first step towards bringing the voices and the priorities of the people back to Congress. I’m proud to have voted today for HR1, the For the People Act.

“This bill will hold our politicians accountable to the people once again. I want to thank the people of the Central Valley for making their voices heard and pushing our elected representatives to finally do right by them.”

Ben McAdams Stands Alone Among Utah GOP Peers in Support of Ethics Reform, Voter Rights Bill

BY DENNIS ROMBOY | MARCH 8, 2019

The state's only Democrat in Congress voted for a campaign finance and ethics reform package Friday that one of his Utah colleagues calls the worst bill he has seen since his time in office.

Rep. Ben McAdams, D-Utah, joined House Democrats in passing the "For the People Act," which addresses campaign finance, ethics, accountability and voter rights. Utah's three congressional Republicans voted against the measure.

The House passed the bill 234-193, but it is dead on arrival in the Senate where Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., does not plan to allow a vote.

The measure calls for states to provide automatic voter registration, makes Election Day a federal holiday and creates independent redistricting commissions to draw congressional boundaries as a way to end partisan gerrymandering.

…

The bill, which includes an amendment McAdams advanced to shine more light on lobbying activities, curbs the power of special interest groups and puts the public back in the driver's seat of government, he said.

The New York Times

House Democrats Will Vote on Sweeping Anti-Corruption Legislation. Here's What's in It

BY CATIE EDMONSON | MARCH 7, 2019

The House will vote on Friday on the Democrats' signature piece of legislation, a sprawling compendium of ballot access, campaign-finance transparency and anti-corruption proposals devised to restore public trust in government.

The sweeping measure — as much a campaign platform as an actual piece of legislation — is intended to show the voters who catapulted Democrats into the majority that they are following through on their campaign pledges. The bill, nearly 700 pages, aims to dismantle barriers to voting, end big money in politics and impose stricter ethics rules on federal officials.

"This is about instilling the confidence of the American people in the political process, in what happens in government, that it is the people's interests that are being served," Speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

…

Democrats are standing by their legislative handiwork. Now they have to sell it.

"It's going to become, I believe, a marker of what the Democratic brand is," Representative John Sarbanes, Democrat of Maryland and the lead sponsor of the legislation, said in an interview. "We stand for reform, we stand for democracy, we stand for cleaning up our politics."

THINKPROGRESS

Here's Why Conservative Groups Are So Desperate to Kill Democrats' Sweeping H.R. 1 Legislation

BY LUKE BARNES | MARCH 7, 2019

The House of Representatives is set to vote Friday on legislation that would enact a series of electoral reforms, including national automatic voter registration, making Election Day a federal holiday, and requiring dark money groups to disclose their donors. But the Republican-controlled Senate, with the backing of dozens of right-wing groups, looks almost certain to kill the bill.

The "For the People Act" (or H.R. 1) is a sweeping set of transparency and anti-corruption measures that aims to transform the American political system "in the face of a torrent of special-interest dark money, partisan gerrymandering and devious vote-suppression schemes," as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD) wrote in the Washington Post last November.

"We're in an agenda-setting moment right now," Daniel Weiner, senior counsel for the Brennan Center for Justice's Democracy Program, told ThinkProgress. "For the first time in decades, Congress — or at least one house — is making an overhaul of our legislative process a top Democratic priority."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), however, has already made it clear that he won't even allow a vote on the legislation. On Tuesday, McConnell described the bill as a "radical, half-baked socialist proposal," and nicknamed it the "Democrat Politician Protection Act."

McConnell's opposition to H.R. 1 is bolstered by dozens of conservative groups, former Republican members of Congress, and some groups associated with the far-right, such as Eagle Forum, the American Family Association, and Tea Party Nation.

Several of the groups that signed an open letter, published by the Conservative Action Project, supporting Republican opposition to H.R. 1 are funded by individuals with extensive track records of voter suppression. Last year, for instance, signatory Fair Lines America donated $50,000 to Citizens Protecting Michigan's Constitution, which filed a lawsuit to keep the proposal for an independent redistricting commission off the ballot. Signatory American Encore is also funded by the Koch brothers, who have a long and storied history of funding voter suppression efforts.

The wide array of groups speaking out against H.R. 1, however, underscores the extent to which Republican establishment and the broader right-wing — including elements of the far right — are opposed to changing the status quo. Other signatories to the open letter include Phyllis Schlafly Eagles and branches of the Eagle Forum, hard-line religious right organizations created by the late Phyllis Schlafly. Even after her death in 2016, a conference sponsored in her name continues to attract far-right attendees from all over the world.

THE BALTIMORE SUN

Mitch McConnell's Election Reform Freak-Out

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 7, 2019

Imagine legislation that would require big-time political campaign organizations like super PACs to disclose the names of major donors. Or what about if this same measure before Congress made Election Day a federal holiday? Or created a mechanism wherein citizens were automatically registered to vote? And what if, to top it all off, that bill required candidates for the nation's highest office to release at least 10 years of tax returns?

Well, you don't have to imagine. The bill in question is H.R. 1 and it's headed for approval this week in the U.S. House of Representatives. And Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell knows exactly what to make of such new-fangled ideas touted by House Democrats, like encouraging average people to vote and revealing so-called "dark money" sources that give special interests an out-sized advantage in deciding who holds political office. He made it clear at a press conference this week that there is no way such ideas were going to find their way to the Senate floor. Not while he was in charge. "What is the problem we're trying to solve here?" Mr. McConnell observed to reporters. "People are flooding to the polls."

…

But Mr. McConnell isn't interested in having that debate. He's interested in cutting off the Democrats' top priority at the knees and preserving such current irregularities as voter-roll purges that have traditionally hurt minorities who don't necessarily show up to vote in every election.

The Washington Post

How Will We Repair Our Democracy After Trump? H.R. 1 Offers a Clue.

BY E.J. DIONNE (OPINION) | MARCH 6, 2019

So here's a challenge to citizens and the media alike: Pay attention this week to the House debate over H.R. 1, perhaps the most comprehensive political-reform proposal ever considered by our elected representatives.

Perhaps it's inevitable that Trump and his antics will always get more attention than any bill that includes lots of provisions. Legislation makes us work our brains a lot harder than Trump does.

But let's not hear the excuse that there's no point spending much time on legislation that, while likely to pass a Democratic House, has no chance in the Senate. That less representative body — always remember that Wyoming has as many senators as California — is controlled by Republicans and led by Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), who hated campaign finance reforms when they were proposed in the early 2000s by his late GOP colleague John McCain and despises them still.

…

The House proposal, sniff the cognoscenti, is merely a "messaging bill."

Actually, no. It's a marker, a bill worth fighting for in the future. Recall that versions of Medicare, the Tennessee Valley Authority and more expansive civil rights proposals all languished in Congress or were defeated before they passed.

What commends H.R. 1 is its comprehensiveness. It brings together traditional reformers (with strong incentives encouraging candidates to rely on small rather than large contributions, and tougher disclosure requirements of who is paying for what ads) and civil rights advocates (with provisions for automatic voter registration, expanded early voting, a ban on unjustified voter purges and re-enfranchisement of those who have served felony sentences). It also lays the groundwork for renewing the Voting Rights Act's effectiveness.

H.R. 1 has a battery of measures to deal with ethical lapses specific to Trump. These include tough provisions on presidential conflicts of interest and a requirement that presidential and vice- presidential candidates disclose their income tax returns. And it confronts core problems our democracy faces by banning gerrymandering and calling for the use of paper ballots in federal elections to protect against hacked voting machines.

There's more there, but you get the drift. For all the talk of Democrats being divided between "the left" and "the moderates," this bill has support from all wings of the party. The left and center both worry about the undue influence of corporate money and billionaires on our politics. And, needless to say, political corruption is not particularly popular in any ideological camp.

…

But we must also ponder what our democracy will be like after Trump, and begin tending to what is in such desperate need of repair.

As for the opponents of H.R. 1, they need to tell us if they think our politics are working just splendidly. I'd love to hear them try to make that case. And if they don't, what exactly would they do to drain the swamp?

H.R. 1 'Respects the Voters, Gives Them Their Voices Back,' Rep. Sarbanes Says

MARCH 6, 2019

The first big-ticket legislation from House Democrats heads to the floor this week. Its champion? Maryland Democratic Rep. John Sarbanes.

House Resolution 1. The so-called "For the People Act." It includes proposals such as public financing of campaigns, ending Citizens United, requiring presidential candidates to disclose tax returns, automatic voter registration, making Election Day a federal holiday and ending partisan gerrymandering.

…

Sarbanes: "What we're trying to accomplish is responding to the appetite we've seen out in the electorate and among the public for real change in Washington. People really want us to clean up politics. They want to fight corruption. They want to unrig this system. This is the message that's been coming through loud and clear over the last few years, but particularly coming off the 2018 election, the public, the voters out there were really sending a powerful message that they want to see things change here. They want to be respected again. They want to feel like their voice matters. And so we've put together a very comprehensive package of democracy reforms that, if you distill it down to what it really is saying on behalf of the voters, is, 'Let's make it possible for us to register and vote in America without that being difficult.'

"We don't want to have to run an obstacle course to get to the ballot box so let's strengthen registration and voting opportunities all across the country. The second thing is when lawmakers come to Washington, it's reasonable for the public to expect them to behave themselves, so we want to make sure there's good ethics and transparency and accountability in the way things operate in Washington. And, lastly, people don't want their representatives getting tangled up in the money, and big money has way too much influence in Washington. Secret money pours into our politics in ways that really diminishes the voices of everyday citizens. So we push back against that influence of big money in HR 1. You put all that together and this is a very comprehensive set of reforms that respects the voters, respects the public, gives them their voices back. And that's responding to a promise we made to the voters in 2018 that this would be the first order of business."

Sarbanes: "Frankly, to have Mitch McConnell standing up against this bill, it seems to me as a badge of honor for HR 1, because he's been — for decades — he's been really trying to hide democracy behind a curtain, opened up the democracy to the influence of special interests and big money and so forth. I'm not surprised that he's leaning in against this. I think he's wrong. It's a miscalculation on his part to suggest that this is a Democratic power grab, which is how he's painted it. This is a power grab on behalf of the people. Everything in here comes from everyday citizens, the priorities that they've put forward. Why is it a Democratic power grab, for example, to just make it more possible for people to register and vote in America? That benefits everybody: Republicans, Democrats and independents. Why is it a Democratic power grab to insist on ethics and accountability in Washington that respects every voter and every citizen across the political spectrum? And I can tell you that it doesn't matter what party people belong to. When they look at Washington and feel that big money and special interests have too much influence, they want that to change. They want power to come back to them, the people, so this is the people standing up, and HR 1 is the vehicle that we've crafted listening carefully to our constituents and to folks all across the country to make sure that they get their voice back."

Associated Press

Democrats Flex Power By Taking Aim at Money in Politics

BY MATTHEW DALY | MARCH 6, 2019

Flexing their new majority, Democrats are moving to push through the House a comprehensive elections and ethics reform package they say will reduce the role of big money in politics, ensure fair elections and restore ethics and integrity to Washington.

The legislation, called H.R. 1 to signify its importance, would make it easier to register and vote, tighten election security and require presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns.

…

“The public is smart enough to know that where you get your money, that’s where you get your marching orders,” said Rep. John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat who is the bill’s main author.

“The public is saying, ‘Build a system of financing campaigns that we own and we’re in charge of,’ not the insiders and the lobbyists,” Sarbanes said in an interview. “We want to set it up so the public gives us our marching orders.”

Lawmakers began debate on the bill Wednesday, with passage expected Friday.

Election Reform Package Will Help Limit the Dominance of Big Money in Politics

BY JASON CROW AND JARED GOLDEN (OP-ED) | MARCH 6, 2019

When we decided to serve our country in the military, we took an oath to protect and defend our Constitution and American values. If there's anything that years of service to our country taught us, it's that honor and integrity are critical to being a servant leader.

So when we launched our campaigns for Congress, we made a promise to voters: when we got to Washington, our only priority would be to represent the people of our districts in Maine and Colorado, without special favors to big donors and special interests. To demonstrate our seriousness, very early in our campaigns, we announced that we would not accept corporate PAC money to finance our elections.

Americans fear that Washington is corrupt. They see that politicians receive big checks and then pass tax breaks for the super wealthy, followed by proposals to cut programs like Medicare and Social Security. In turn, trust in government is at an all-time low. By rejecting corporate PAC money, our constituents know that when we make decisions and advocate for specific policies, we do it because we believe it's the right thing to do, not to curry favor with big-monied special interests.

We’re not alone. Today, 36 of our freshmen colleagues are rejecting corporate PAC money, and that number continues to grow. Since winning our elections, we have both been asked a cynical question: “OK, now that you won, you’ll start taking those corporate PAC checks now, right?”

For us, the answer is easy: no.

…

Importantly, our voluntary decision to reject corporate money won’t on its own address the structural inequities in our democracy. That’s why we’re proud to support H.R. 1, a robust package of reforms that will make it easier to vote, start to curb the dominance of big money in politics, and ensure our elected officials are working in the public interest. These are key reforms that we’re excited to help lead on, and we hope the Senate will pass and the president will sign this legislation into law. We are mindful of the challenges ahead, but we also know that we’re on the right side of history.

Just like serving our country in the military was an incredible honor, so too is serving in Congress. And this week, when we vote to pass H.R. 1, it is to once again help protect and strengthen the country that we love so dearly.

Roll Call

H.R. 1 Debate Gets Under Way As GOP Sharpens Attacks

BY KATE ACKLEY | MARCH 6, 2019

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell — who has led opposition to House Democrats' campaign finance, elections and ethics overhaul, H.R. 1 — said Wednesday he believed lawmakers who support the measure may imperil their re-election chances.

Yet, the Kentucky Republican again pledged to give the measure, which the House is expected to pass along party lines on Friday, zero floor time in his chamber, declining then to give senators an opportunity to test his theory.

…

But when asked why he intends to bring a climate-change measure known as the Green New Deal to the Senate floor, but not the campaign finance and ethics overhaul, the Kentucky Republican was glib.

"Because I get to decide what we vote on," he said during a news conference Wednesday with House GOP leaders, who are on the front lines of attacking the measure.

…

Supporters of the overhaul, which was a signature messaging point along the campaign trail during the 2018 midterm elections, say they believe some embattled GOP senators would not want to take a vote because numerous polls show that voters on both sides of the aisle believe the political system favors big donors and business interests at the expense of ordinary people.

ESSENCE

H.R. 1 and the Fight to Save Voters' Rights

BY BREANNA EDWARDS | MARCH 6, 2019

At the beginning of the year, House Democrats unveiled their "For The People Act", better known as H.R. 1, a sweeping political anti-corruption bill meant to address perceived issues in voting, campaign finance, redistricting and ethics.

Since being introduced in the House, Democrats have steadily pushed the agenda, meant to be the hallmark of the 116th Congress. Last Tuesday, there was some breakthrough, with the House Administration approving the bill by a 6-3 party-line vote. The bill is expected to come to the House floor on Friday morning for a vote.

Rep. Marc Veasey (D-Texas), the founder and co-chair of the Voting Rights Caucus within Congress, has played an integral role in the voting rights reforms that have been proposed in H.R. 1.

"I'm really excited about being a part of H.R. 1, which is obviously a huge priority for Democrats. We've been trying to clean up a lot of the issues dealing with dark money in politics, and other parts of our electoral system to restore confidence back into our electoral system," Veasey recently told ESSENCE.

…

Democracy Reform Task Force Chair Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), who is also the principal author of H.R. 1, spoke to ESSENCE as well, pointing out the importance of these measures.

“The evidence is that the super PACs, these various 501C organizations that had become a vehicle for big donors, millionaires, corporations to funnel money into campaigns and into the political space, put a huge amount of influence over the way policy gets made,” he explained. “If you’re a legislator and you’re trying to make smart tax policy that’s supposed to help a broad cross-section of Americans, but there’s a super PAC out there that’s acting on behalf of Wall Street and the big backed banks and they’re threatening to spend a lot of money against you, it’s going to affect how you vote potentially. When you mix money and dependency on money or fear of money being spent against you in large amounts, if you mix that up with human nature, it can distort the way policy decisions get made.”

These sorts of influences can certainly negatively impact minority communities at worst, or just cause them to be overlooked.

“Minority voters, minority communities can really suffer when policy decisions in Washington are being made by these well-heeled interests. And the reason is, I think oftentimes those interests and those special interests are largely out of touch with the situation faced by many Americans,” Sarbanes said. “They can’t relate to it. They’re never going to translate policy proposals in the same way that you would have grassroots, community-based representatives do.”

That is why, according to Sarbanes, it is so important to put the importance back into smaller donors, the regular Americans who want their interests to be heard.

“If you build a system that allows small donors to have their contributions matched – in the case that we’ve presented as part of HR1, a six to one matching fund so that if someone gives $25 and there’s $150 match comes in behind that – what that does is instantly transform the small-donor everyday-citizen universe into a place that the lawmaker wants to be, because they can actually power their campaign and be competitive,” Sarbanes stressed.

Roll Call

10 Things You Might Not Know about H.R. 1

BY LINDSEY MCPHERSON | MARCH 6, 2019

As the House begins debate Wednesday on H.R. 1 — the Democratic majority's package overhauling voting, campaign finance and ethics law — some parts of the bill will likely get more attention than others, but several under-the-radar provisions in the 622-page legislation would nevertheless have sweeping impacts.

Here are 10 provisions that have not received much attention as the legislation advanced through committee hearings and markups on its way to the floor.

1) Support for D.C. statehood
2) Presidential transitions and inaugural committees
3) Allowing campaign funds for certain personal expenses
4) Registering kids to vote
5) Paper ballots
6) Prepaid postage for absentee ballots
7) Crime to mislead voters
8) Clamping down on foreign influence
9) Large websites to record political advertisers
10) Posting congressional reports online

Bloomberg

Corporate Fines Targeted to Help Foot Bill for Campaign Spending

BY KEN DOYLE | MARCH 5, 2019

House Democrats say they will counter criticism of a costly new public campaign financing proposal by making changes that would require corporations, not individual taxpayers, to foot the bill.

The House this week is scheduled to consider an election and ethics overhaul package (H.R. 1) that includes the campaign financing provision. House sponsors said that bill would be altered to earmark money from corporate criminal fines to match small-dollar campaign contributions to pay for campaigns. The measure originally called for the matching funds program to be financed through appropriations.

The public financing language would be part of a manager's amendment that the Rules Committee is set to consider Tuesday ahead of floor consideration, according to a Democratic aide familiar with the bill.

"No taxpayer money will be used" to fund a special account created by H.R. 1 for public financing of elections, House Administration Committee Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.) said Feb. 26 during a committee markup of the bill. Republicans opposed the bill during the markup, saying it would waste money and force taxpayers to support candidates they didn't back.

Lofgren said her panel removed a provision of the bill that would have provided for funding through the appropriations process but didn't have jurisdiction to create a new funding mechanism. She said one would be provided before the bill is brought to the floor.

The bill's provision would be paid for entirely from a minimal assessment on federal fines, penalties, and settlements for certain tax crimes and corporate malfeasance, said Fred Wertheimer, a veteran activist supporting the Democrats' legislation who heads the nonprofit Democracy 21. "The small donor, matching funds system for congressional and Presidential candidates will come from lawbreakers, not taxpayers."

The bill's provision would be paid for entirely from a minimal assessment on federal fines, penalties, and settlements for certain tax crimes and corporate malfeasance, said Fred Wertheimer, a veteran activist supporting the Democrats' legislation who heads the nonprofit Democracy 21.

"The small donor, matching funds system for congressional and Presidential candidates will come from lawbreakers, not taxpayers," said Wertheimer in a statement.

CROOKED

Why We Need H.R. 1

BY MARC VEASEY (OP-ED) | MARCH 5, 2019

As a direct result of Democrats' success in 2018, Republicans are working even harder to limit Americans' participation in their own democracy. They are reviving extreme identification requirements and purging voter rolls. If Democrats fail to act, we run the real risk of backsliding into voting restrictions that resemble the Jim Crow era.

Cue House Resolution 1 – the "For the People Act."

H.R. 1 will increase access to the ballot box, end gerrymandering, and limit the influence of big money in politics. This omnibus package is Democrats' promise to the American public to create real lasting voting reform, to eliminate discriminatory voting laws, and make critical investments in election infrastructure and technology.

Burlington County Times

H.R. 1 Takes Action on Campaign Financing

BY ANDY KIM (OP-ED) | MARCH 5, 2019

I decided to run for Congress in 2017 because I saw so many things worth fighting for. From my two baby boys, whose futures I worry about every day, to my parents, whose access to affordable, quality health care I vowed to fight for, I knew there were real issues I could make a difference on.

But when I arrived in Washington, what I found was a system built to protect the status quo and stop those who want to make a difference in their tracks. New members of Congress like myself aren't met with fresh solutions, but with hallways and reception rooms filled with a lot of people looking to exchange the same old failed ideas for corporate PAC money.

If we're going to change our system, if we're going to restore faith in our Congress and if we're going to make change for working New Jersey families, we need to end the dominance of big money in politics. In short, for Congress to work, it needs to work for us and not them.

Because of this, the very first bill I co-sponsored as a member of Congress was H.R. 1, the For the People Act. This legislation would take real steps to drain the swamp, empower voters, and put forth serious solutions where rhetoric has failed.

For far too long, our campaign finance system has been driven by billionaire donors and dark money, and it is getting worse and worse every day. While your television sets and Facebook feeds are flooded with political messages, the big donors behind those ads are hiding behind outdated laws and lax enforcement.

This is fueling the hyperpartisanship and tribalism that are preventing real progress. This legislation aims to change things by shining a bright light on that dark money and making sure that laws in place are enforced and violators are punished.

Dirty money often leads to dirty politicians. Dirty politicians lead to policies bought by the highest bidder. That's why H.R. 1 aims to strengthen our ethics laws by making sure no members of Congress use their office as a way to enrich themselves instead of standing up for their constituents.

It's why H.R. 1 slows down the revolving door of Washington and closes loopholes that allow corporate lobbyists to hide their efforts to influence your government.

Let's be clear: There will be losers in this bill. Big corporate interests won't have as much say. Billionaire donors won't have as much sway. But average voters will have more rights and a greater voice in our democracy.

H.R. 1 tears down barriers to the ballot box by updating our antiquated voter registration system, enhancing voting security to protect against foreign influence, and ending partisan gerrymandering so voters choose their representatives instead of politicians choosing their voters.

This change isn't theoretical, it's not idealistic and it's not far-fetched. This week, the House of Representatives will vote on H.R. 1, and when we do, I will proudly vote for it and call on my colleagues to do the same.

When I come back home to New Jersey, I look forward to doing so as a member of a Congress that took real action to fight back against the big corporate interests that have dominated our politics for far too long and finally create a Congress that is truly of, by and for the people.

How H.R. 1 Could Help More Women Make History

BY VIRGINIA KASE (OP-ED) | MARCH 5, 2019

In the 2018 midterm elections we saw more women and people of diverse backgrounds run for office and win elections than ever before. As a result, we are starting to see a government that looks more like the people it represents. To continue building a democracy that better reflects our country, more everyday Americans should have the opportunity to run for office. But time and time again we see the candidates with the deepest pockets win elections.

Right now, there is sweeping legislation moving through the House of Representatives that stands to change that. The For the People Act, also known as H.R. 1, includes a public financing system for elections that will level the playing field for all candidates.

This alternative system for political fundraising will create small donor, public matching funds for congressional and presidential candidates—rebalancing our system so 'big money' doesn't decide who gets a seat at the table. That means more people from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds—women, people of color, and low-wage earners—could find it easier to run for office.

For many female candidates, fundraising continues to be a challenge, and the idea of raising money deters them from running in the first place. While male candidates overwhelmingly possess networks of moneyed connections or the means to self-fund their campaigns, women often must rely on small donations.

Small donor, public matching funds provide an opportunity for candidates to consider running for office who otherwise might not. Under the proposed system, candidates who participate in the program receive a six-to-one match on qualifying funds. This means that a $20 donation to a campaign becomes $120 with the matching funds. This public support releases candidates from dependence on special interests and large dollar funders, allowing them to run without strings attached.

This fund matching concept isn't a new idea. Maine has had volunteer public funding for gubernatorial and state legislature candidates since 1996, when the League of Women Voters of Maine led a coalition effort to pass the Maine Clean Election Act.

In 2015, the League of Women Voters Seattle championed and Seattle voters passed an initiative that created a voucher program for local elections. The Honest Elections Seattle law provides each registered voter with a $25 Democracy Voucher, which Seattle residents can use to support participating candidates running for city office.

…

Elections shouldn't be about money. Elections must be about the issues that are important to American voters. No one should be sidelined from running for office because they don't have millionaire friends, and connections to corporate interests shouldn't be a prerequisite for elected office.

The small donor, matching funds provision of the For the People Act will empower more diverse dedicated and passionate citizens to run for office and work on behalf of all Americans. This provision is critical to ensuring our elections are open to candidates of all types – not just those with deep pockets.

Roll Call

K Street Mounts Offensive to H.R. 1

BY KATE ACKLEY | MARCH 5, 2019

The nation's business and lobbying interests began publicly mobilizing Tuesday in a coordinated attack against House Democrats' signature campaign finance, lobbying, ethics and voting overhaul, which the full chamber plans to vote on Friday morning.

More than 300 groups including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce — the top spending organization on federal lobbying — and numerous other state, federal and conservative-leaning organizations wrote to lawmakers attacking the bill for "pushing certain voices, representing large segments of the electorate and our economy, out of the political process altogether."

The letter came days after one of the bill's chief foes, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who has crusaded against the measure, urged outside allies in a Capitol Hill meeting to heighten their opposition — even though the Kentucky Republican has already said he will not bring the measure for a vote in his chamber.

And the White House, adding more weight to the onslaught, issued a veto threat — even though McConnell pledged to block even a vote on the measure.

KVUE abc

Nancy Pelosi Speaks in Austin about Voting Rights

BY REBECCA FLORES | MARCH 5, 2019

Nancy Pelosi spoke about voting rights in Austin during a press conference Tuesday morning.

Congressman Lloyd Dogget, as well as other Texas voting rights advocates, were in attendance.

The speakers addressed the importance of improving voter rights, specifically the For the People Act, which will be considered in the House this week.

The For the People Act, also known as H.R. 1, would make it easier for people to vote and make it harder for lawmakers to gerrymander.

…

Pelosi went on to say the act is about giving the American people a stronger voice.

“It’s about the American people saying we want the American people to choose our politicians, we don’t want our politicians to choose our American people.”

Congressman Lloyd Doggett spoke after Pelosi, saying he is confident the bill will pass.

“This is a 600-page bill and I believe that this week, under her (Pelosi) leadership, it will be approved.” Doggett said**.**

Nancy Pelosi Speaks in Austin about H.R. 1, Combating Voter Suppression

BY CASEY CLAIBORNE | MARCH 5, 2019

U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi received a standing ovation in Austin Tuesday morning.

Prior to boarding a plane back to D.C., the Speaker along with Congressman Lloyd Doggett talked with Austinites about House Resolution 1, the "For The People Act of 2019."

Doggett calls it an expansion of voter rights.

"To remove the obstacles like purges to let people register right up through election day so that more people can feel their power and hold every one of their elected officials from whichever party they may come accountable to the people," Doggett said.

…

According to the bill, HR 1 would reduce the influence of big money in politics and strengthen ethics rules for public servants.

Bloomberg

Repairing the Machinery of U.S. Democracy

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | MARCH 4, 2019

H.R. 1, the legislation that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi introduced in the first hours of the 116th Congress, is ambitious and remarkably wide-ranging. It proposes numerous electoral and public-ethics reforms. In most cases, these changes are both needed and long overdue. The vast scope of this law is itself an indictment of the corrosion afflicting the machinery of American government.

The bill isn't headed for the statute book — not with this Congress and this president — but this or something like it certainly ought to be. The 571-page omnibus promises to make voting easier, strengthen ethics laws for government officials, and reduce the influence of money in politics. The last of those would need the cooperation of the U.S. Supreme Court, but a competent and responsible legislature and executive could do most of the rest if they chose to.

…

Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland, the lead sponsor of HR 1, says the bill will be broken into pieces and sent to relevant committees for hearings and markups. Then the elements will be reconstituted, voted on as a single reform package and presented to the Senate. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has already castigated the plan as the "Democrat Politician Protection Act." That is an unworthy and unacceptable response.

The machinery of American government is sorely in need of repair, and putting that right should not be a partisan endeavor. This bill deserves serious consideration.

Bloomberg

Repairing the Machinery of U.S. Democracy

BY FRANCIS WILKINSON | MARCH 4, 2019

The infrastructure of American democracy needs renewal. Faith in the system is shaky. During the past several years, citizens have had frequent confirmation that something has gone dangerously awry.

HR 1 is so vast that only a portion of its provisions are listed here, but its breadth is not excessive. Its range speaks to the need for reforms across every branch of government, and to the failure of Congress and the executive over many years to plug the holes — some of them gaping — that let corruption and self-dealing distort the system.

The effort to strengthen the electoral system is especially important. If democracy is still the creed of this land — and one hopes it is — then elections must be secure from sabotage. Voters must be able to register and vote without obstruction. And the candidates and parties that get the most votes should exercise the power that the people have granted them.

Despite brutal fits and starts, the machinery of democracy in the U.S. has always moved toward the enfranchisement of greater numbers of citizens. This impulse has never been proved wrong, and it has built a great democracy. It needs to guide the nation once more.

Roll Call

House Democrats Ready Ethics Overhaul for Floor Vote This Week

BY KATE ACKLEY | MARCH 4, 2019

House Democrats, barely nine weeks into a majority they won in part with promises of an anti-corruption legislative agenda, will turn the spotlight this week to their signature campaign finance, ethics, voting and lobbying overhaul.

The House Rules Committee will take up the package Tuesday, setting the parameters for consideration on the floor. Lawmakers then will debate the measure on the House floor over the following days, with an expected vote on final passage Friday morning. Democrats and outside advocates pushing for the bill say they'll be on high alert for GOP attempts, including amendments and motions to recommit, that could tank the overhaul.

…

Every House Democrat has signed on as a co-sponsor of the 622-page bill. Senate Democrats, meanwhile, are preparing their version, to be introduced by Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico. Even though the GOP-led Senate is unlikely to take it up, Democrats say House consideration is the start of a multi-year effort with the bill serving as a starting point for debate during the 2020 congressional and presidential campaigns. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., in particular, has led his party's charge against the measure.

YAHOO! NEWS

Democrats Push to Make Voting Rights a 2020 Issue

BY JON WARD | MARCH 4, 2019

With an eye toward making the reinstatement of the 1965 Voting Rights Act an issue in the 2020 election, Democrats are pushing ambitious new legislation they hope will lay the groundwork for increased voter participation.

House Democrats plan to pass House Resolution 1 this week, a mammoth proposal with three main planks: campaign finance, ethics and voting rights. But even if the measure succeeds, the Republican-controlled Senate is not expected to take it up for a vote.

H.R. 1's voting rights components — which aim to increase voter registration and access to the polls — have so far received more attention than its other provisions, but the details of the bill have less to do with reinstating the VRA than a subsequent bill, HR 4, which was introduced last week.

In its 2013 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, the U.S. Supreme Court weakened the Voting Rights Act, and H.R. 4 aims to lay the foundation for a new VRA standard that will withstand legal challenges once it becomes law.

"Getting the Voting Rights Act updated and strengthened again is key," said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., a key proponent of H.R. 4, which was introduced last week by Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Ala.

House to Vote on Sweeping Anti-Corruption Package

BY ALAYNA TREENE | MARCH 3, 2019

The House will vote on a sweeping 571-page bill this week that would strengthen federal ethics laws, expand voting rights and require presidential nominees to release their tax returns.

The big picture: Several Democratic House candidates made the For The People Act, also known has H.R. 1, a hallmark of their 2018 midterm campaigns, and the legislation was formally introduced on the first day of the new Congress.

Why it matters: "We have a broken political system and a corrupt finance system today," Fred Wertheimer, president of Democracy 21 and a longtime proponent of campaign finance reform, told Axios. "H.R. 1 is the most important reform legislation to repair our democracy since the post-Watergate reforms. ... There has never been a bill as broad in its scope and coverage as this bill, and we will work from here."

The bill's key provisions:

- **Campaign finance**: Create a small donor, matching-fund system for congressional and presidential candidates; expand the prohibition of foreign political donations; require super PACs and "dark money" political groups to make their donors public; and restructure the Federal Election Commission.

- **Ethics**: Mandate that presidents and vice presidents release 10 years of their tax returns; create an ethics code for the Supreme Court; and bar members of Congress from serving on corporate boards.

- **Voting rights**: Allow citizens to register to vote online and be registered automatically; require paper ballots in federal elections; make Election Day a federal holiday; prohibit voter roll purging; and end partisan gerrymandering by having independent commissions redraw congressional districts.

  The state of play: The bill is expected to easily pass in the House — it's already secured 234 co-sponsors, in addition to Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) who is leading the effort — but it will likely die in the Senate.

  Yes, but: Those who have championed the bill are under no illusion that the legislation will pass this year, Wertheimer said.

- "We're not operating in any short time frame. We understand these battles are hard and take time, but we also believe that the flow of history is running in our direction," he said. "We know we start out without Republican support, but we will work to build that support."

  …

  The bottom line: In a September WSJ/NBC poll, 77% of surveyed registered voters said "reducing the influence of special interests and corruption in Washington" is either the most important or a very important issue facing the country.

USA TODAY

Democratic Anti-Corruption Bill Is A Power Grab in Congress — For the People

BY ALYSSA MILANO (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 28, 2019

Whether it's giving men who are credibly accused of sexual assault the benefit of the doubt without regard to the dignity of survivors, prioritizing the profits of Big Pharma over patients desperately in need of prescriptions they can't afford, or giving massive tax cuts to the wealthy while hard-working families struggle to make ends meet, the root of all these problems is an imbalance of power designed to protect the wealthy and corporations that bankroll our elected officials.

With the help of good government groups such as End Citizens United, which encourages candidates to run on a platform of fighting corruption and ending the outsize power of special interests, Democrats took back the House and introduced a transformative piece of legislation that ensures everyone has a voice in our system — no matter the size of their bank account.

That bill, the For the People Act, has been dubbed HR 1 to signify its prominence as the first priority of the House, thanks in part to the commitment of this Democratic freshman class. It's once-in-a-generation reform that hasn't been seen since Watergate.

This bill will change the dynamics in Washington by protecting the right to vote for every eligible American, ending the undue and outsize influence of big money in politics by requiring disclosure, and strengthening ethics laws to ensure that politicians aren't trading the public trust for personal profit.

Roll Call

Liberal Outside Groups Lobby for Campaign Finance Overhaul

BY KATE ACKLEY | FEBRUARY 28, 2019

A coalition of 71 mostly liberal organizations is mobilizing to persuade House members to approve a sweeping overhaul of the nation's campaign finance, ethics, lobbying and election laws.

…

The outside groups — which include campaign finance overhaul organizations such as Common Cause, Democracy 21, Public Citizen and the End Citizens United Action Fund — not only urged all House members to vote for the bill but also to vote against any amendments viewed as "weakening" the measure and "any motion to recommit to weaken or remove any provision in the Act," according to the letter.

…

"Spurious and misleading arguments are being made against H.R. 1 by opponents who want to keep in place the unjustifiable status quo," the outside groups said in their letter. "The American people and our organizations will be watching your votes on H.R. 1, including the motion to recommit, which will be judged by history."

In addition to campaign finance-focused organizations, numerous other liberal-leaning groups signed on to the letter, including the Center for American Progress, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, Planned Parenthood Federation of America and People For the American Way.

The Intercept_

Conservative Expert Privately Warned GOP Donors That a Voting Rights Bill Would Help Democrats

BY LEE FANG AND NICK SURGEY | FEBRUARY 28, 2019

On the first day the new Congress was in session in January, Rep. John Sarbanes, a Democrat from Maryland, introduced the For the People Act, known in the House of Representatives as H.R.1. The sweeping bill seeks to revamp lobbyist registration, campaign financing, and voting rights. The Brennan Center for Justice said it "would create a more responsive and representative government by making it easier for voters to cast a ballot and harder for lawmakers to gerrymander."

By the end of the month, hearings were held on Capitol Hill. One of the witnesses before the House Judiciary Committee hearings was Hans von Spakovsky, a former Federal Election Commission member who is now a senior legal fellow at the Heritage Foundation. Von Spakovsky used high-minded and principled language to oppose the bill. In his prepared testimony, he wrote that H.R.1 is "clearly unconstitutional," complaining that its provisions "come at the expense of federalism."

At a private gathering of conservatives, von Spakovsky was candid about his reason for opposing the bill: It would be bad for Republicans.

Just two weeks later, however, as von Spakovsky addressed a private gathering of conservatives, he was considerably more candid about his reason for opposing the bill: It would be bad for Republicans.

That’s the message this scholar delivered when he traveled to Orlando, Florida, to brief a Council for National Policy-sponsored meeting of Republican donors and Christian right leaders on the bill. Sitting in the Ritz-Carlton Grande Lakes Ballroom, von Spakovsky explained that expanded voting rights and nonpartisan redistricting could imperil GOP political power.

…

Von Spakovsky cuts a controversial figure in the voting rights arena. In 2017, President Donald Trump appointed him to the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, a short-lived panel that was unveiled as an effort to study voter fraud. The following year, after failing to produce any evidence of systemic illegal voting, the panel was disbanded.

When von Spakovsky was appointed, a number of election observers pointed to frequent cases in which he exaggerated claims of voter fraud. University of California, Irvine law professor Rick Hasen, an expert on legal issues around elections, has challenged von Spakovsky’s false claims about voter fraud. “Von Spakovsky is not a credible person on issues of election reform,” Hasen wrote on his blog.

POLITICO

House Democrats Forge Ahead on Electoral Reform Bill

BY ZACH MONTELLARO | FEBRUARY 26, 2019

House Democrats on Tuesday took a big step in fulfilling one of their major campaign promises of last year's midterms, advancing a sweeping voting rights, campaign finance and ethics reform package.

The House Administration Committee approved the bill — known as H.R. 1, or the "For the People Act" — by a 6-3, party-line vote.

“H.R. 1 makes it easier, not harder, to vote,” Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.), the committee chair, said at the hearing. “It ends the dominance of big money in our politics. It ensures public officials work in the public interest.”

It is expected to come to the House floor in the coming weeks, according to a Democratic aide familiar with the proceedings and End Citizens United Executive Director Tiffany Muller, whose organization has been strongly pushing the legislation. The Democratic aide spoke on the condition of anonymity because the floor schedule for next week has not been finalized.

The bill will likely pass the House, having already secured 227 co-sponsors, all Democrats.

UTAHPOLICY.COM
WHERE POLITICAL JUNKIES GET THEIR DAILY FIX

More Americans Voting Is Not a Democratic 'Power Grab'

BY CHASE THOMAS (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 26, 2018

Last month, Mitch McConnell took to the floor of the U.S. Senate to denounce the recently released bill designated by the new Democratic House majority as its priority legislation for the session.

Attacking the idea of making Election Day a public holiday, a proposal supported by a large majority of Americans, McConnell called the “For the People Act of 2019,” or H.R. 1, a “power grab” by Democrats. Well, over the past few months, Utahns have learned a thing or two about power grabs and H.R. 1 is not a power grab.

…

H.R. 1 would begin the process of returning the power to the people; power that has been gradually siphoned off by self-interested politicians, lobbyists, and corporations. Not only would it establish a paid holiday solely dedicated to allowing the people to participate in their government, the bill would also modernize voter registration through automatic registration. It would increase election security while restoring the Voting Rights Act, both aimed at protecting the integrity of each individual's vote. It would overturn the much-maligned Citizens United decision, provide for the public financing of campaigns, and shine a light on dark money. It would strengthen ethics requirements to rid D.C. of the sludge that has been uncovered while “draining the swamp,” and end gerrymandering across the country.

The “For the People Act of 2019” is about bringing democracy back into our democratic republic. It’s about ensuring that everyone’s voice has equal value when we say “we the people.” It’s about protecting our freedom through responsible, responsive government that helps us along in our pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

My hope is that each of the members of Utah’s Congressional delegation support the “For the People Act of 2019” because, ultimately, this is a power grab for the people.

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI) Pushing for Sweeping Elections Reform Bill

BY DAVID ADE | FEBRUARY 25, 2019

House Democrats want to make sweeping reforms to elections, campaign finance, and ethics laws.

The bill calls for things like making it easier to register to vote by telling states to allow same-day voting registration, and allowing people to register online.

The bill would also make it harder for states to take voters off voting rolls while making it easier for felons to get voting rights back.

Congressman Mark Pocan (D-WI) said, "I think it's something, if we really want to make sure the government is working best for the people and not special interests, we should pass."

EAST BAY TIMES

Election Reform Is Essential for Future of Democracy

BY EDITORIAL BOARD | FEBRUARY 19, 2019

In 2020, American voters will decide what political experts are saying will be one of the most consequential elections in U.S. history.

It's infuriating that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell isn't interested in assuring the voting rights of all eligible Americans and doing everything possible to limit foreign interference in the election.

House Democrats' colossal election reform bill, HR 1, would do that and more.

McConnell calls it "a power grab for American voters." As if there is something wrong with making sure the voices of all eligible voters, rich and poor, young and old, are heard on Election Day.

San Jose Rep. Zoe Lofgren, the chairwoman of the Committee on House Administration, opened hearings Thursday on the legislation and is pushing for a House floor vote on the comprehensive reforms by the end of March.

"Cutbacks to early voting, shutting down polling places, and purging eligible voters from the rolls all put barriers to participation in our elections," Lofgren said last week. "There is hope that we can work to restore our democratic promise, and HR 1 is the beginning of that."

The legislation has 226 co-sponsors, a virtual who's who of Democrats in the House of Representatives. The 571-page bill covers everything from voter registration to campaign financing to setting higher ethical standards for members of Congress.

…

It’s inconceivable that President Trump would sign any bill requiring him to release his tax returns. McConnell’s opposition makes it equally unlikely that the legislation will get to Trump’s desk. But it’s important to call out the extent to which voters’ rights are being suppressed. Forcing a House and Senate vote on the legislation will bring the issue into the spotlight. It’s also possible that some elements of the bill — ending the practice of gerrymandering, for example — could find enough bipartisan support to pass Congress.

Voter frustration is at an all-time high because of a growing lack of faith in the democratic process. HR 1 is a critical step toward giving power back to the American people.

CQ

Some States Look to Address Concerns About Money in Politics

BY KATE ACKLEY | FEBRUARY 19, 2019

Democrats in the nation's capital have made an overhaul of campaign finance, ethics and political laws a top priority, but movement may well come first in statehouses from Albany, N.Y., to Salem, Ore.

State lawmakers around the country are taking up a range of measures aimed at restoring voters' confidence in a democracy that many view as tilted in favor of big donors and corporate influences, especially since the 2010 landmark Citizens United Supreme Court decision that paved the way for super political action committees with their millions of dollars in donations.

Legislators are eyeing proposals to usher in public financing systems to fill the coffers of state candidates, and they're looking at imposing new limits on donations as well as rules requiring the disclosure of donors to nonprofit organizations that get involved in political debates.

…

Rep. John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat and chief sponsor of the House Democrats' overhaul package, says he's been tracking state and local efforts, including New York City's longtime public matching program for people running for city offices, parts of which are reflected in HR 1. Additionally, activists in New York are pointing to HR 1 to buoy their own effort to make the program statewide.

“We have this opportunity to create a positive feedback loop where the states are informing what we’re putting forward at the federal level,” Sarbanes says. “People are rising up around the country and making their states and localities laboratories of empowerment and reform.”

…

The attention on the House Democrats’ bill in Washington, D.C., will ripple to the states, says Common Cause’s Harrison, who is based in Albuquerque, N.M., near her state’s capital of Santa Fe, which is re-examining its own political money efforts.

“Having HR 1 introduced is changing the conversation across the country,” she says. “HR 1 has been the best thing to happen to state politics, or Congress, in a decade. . . . It is everything we want.”

Another group pushing for political overhaul efforts on Capitol Hill and across the states is End Citizens United, which takes its name from the Supreme Court case.

Rajan Narang, who leads the group’s state and local efforts, says he’s noted an “upsurge” in interest in campaign finance and political overhauls as state legislatures have come into session.

The activity in New York, he says, serves as a model for similar campaigns around the nation. “The problem of dark money and secret donations is something quite a few states are tackling,” Narang says, noting that among them are Colorado, New Jersey and New Mexico as well as New York.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Identified the Problem. Here's the Solution.

BY MICHAEL WALDMAN (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 19, 2019

U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's withering viral takedown of just how easily deep-pocketed donors dominate politics was like watching a prosecutor lay into a campaign finance system that has no defense.

So far, that exchange (during a hearing on House Democrats' sweeping democracy reform bill) has garnered an astounding 38 million views. It's not hard to see why. But what the viral video leaves out is that the reform bill includes a solution to curb the power of big money in politics: a voluntary public financing system for congressional races.

Here's how it would work. Small contributions would receive public matching funds, at a ratio of 6-to-1. If you give a candidate $100, for example, that becomes $700. Participating candidates would agree to curb the size of contributions they receive. They could now fund their races by amassing small contributions, rather than those from big donors and special interests. This shift could transform politics and policymaking.

Voters long have seethed over big money's role. But the US Supreme Court has made matters far worse. Thanks to Citizens United and other rulings, billionaires (sorry, "people of means" ... well lots of means) now can fund campaigns effectively without limit, and without public disclosure. A big donor system tilts policymaking. Just one recent example: According to the Center for Public Integrity, a small group of wealthy donors suddenly poured funds into Republican campaigns and political committees as the tax cut bill was being shaped.

Incumbents must spend hours a day raising funds, trooping to call centers near the Capitol that resemble nothing less than the skeezy boiler room in "Sorry to Bother You."

Public financing has long been understood to offer a better way to fund campaigns. Theodore Roosevelt first proposed it in his 1907 State of the Union. It was enacted for presidential campaigns in 1974 when the Watergate scandal revealed tales such as the Cabinet official who had to handle a briefcase crammed with $200,000 in cash from a donor. The system worked well enough for several decades. Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush participated. In fact, in the first five elections presidential public financing was used, three challengers unseated incumbents, a far more competitive record than nearly any congressional district. Eventually that system fell, mostly because it simply did not provide enough money.

The issue of campaign finance receded. Sure, big money mattered, but what could anyone do about it? That notion was exploded in the 2018 election. Nearly 120 House challengers shunned corporate PAC money and vowed reform. Forty or so now serve in the freshman class, part of the most diverse Congress in history. That's a bloc as big as the "Watergate Babies" elected in 1974 who pushed House changes. This new version of reform reflects the realities of today's digital politics.

A small donor system doesn't try to end all private money in politics, a futile goal sought by earlier plans. Rather, it aims to bolster one of the most encouraging trends in political life. In 2018, individuals giving less than $200 gave $381 million to general election federal candidates.

The federal proposal is based on a successful approach used in New York City for three decades. The city's matching fund system is considered the country's best set of campaign rules. The vast majority of candidates from both parties

participate. It's led to a far more diverse set of officeholders and has helped ensure that several candidates compete for each seat with enough funds. Above all it has helped curb corruption. Some smaller incidents notwithstanding, compared with recent decades, New York politicians are seldom brought down by campaign finance-related scandals or prosecutions.

Because it aims to amplify rather than squelch speech, the general constitutionality of public financing has been reaffirmed by the US Supreme Court, even in the current deregulatory era.

Today the loudest attacks come from Republicans. Why, they worry, help Democrats raise small funds? But other years, Republicans have benefited more. As Freedom Caucus chair Mark Meadows noted, he might receive millions in public funding. That's a feature, not a bug in the proposal. It would incentivize lawmakers of both parties to turn to grassroots fundraising. Critics also warn against wasting taxpayer money on politics. The plan would cost taxpayers about $1 each but would save far more by avoiding unjustified tax and regulatory policies.

Many Democrats whisper opposition, too, when caucus doors close. They don't want to bite the hand that funds them. They worry that voters might punish a plan that uses taxpayer money for politics. Since incumbents typically outraise challengers, they want to be able to build a cash wall to protect their seats. They would ignore the rumblings of public discontent at their peril. Today voters are enthusiastic about reform. If Democrats flinch, it will be public anger that goes viral.

Mitch McConnell's Dark Secret: He Used to Support Campaign Finance Reform

BY ELLA NILSEN | FEBRUARY 15, 2019

These days, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell regularly scoffs at Democrats' sweeping anti-corruption bill to set up more transparency around money in politics, and promote expanded voting rights.

But 46 years ago, he praised many of the ideas that the bill, known as HR 1, contains. He called money in politics a "cancer" in a 1973 Courier-Journal op-ed about a local campaign finance ordinance that he complained didn't go far enough to address the issue (Fred Wertheimer at Democracy 21 first published the McConnell op-ed).

"The lack of an overall limit on spending is an open invitation for special interests to circumvent this ordinance and lavishly finance future candidates, regardless of the limitations on amounts of individual contributions," McConnell wrote.

"With regard to a spending limitation, past events have shown how close we are to a 'bought' nation, state and city," he continued, complaining that the recent Louisville-Jefferson County Democratic primary cost more than $400,000 (an amount that would be $2.2 million today, adjusted for inflation).

McConnell wrote this many years before he entered the Senate, when he was the chair of the Republican Party of Jefferson County, Kentucky, and an attorney in Louisville. But even though he was critiquing a local elections ordinance, he was definitely thinking of the big picture. The then-young Republican offered

prescriptions to eradicate the “cancer” of money in politics that included calling for public financing of elections, publicly disclosing all political donors, and putting spending limits on elections.

“Realistically, this ordinance merely applies a Band-Aid to a cancer by controlling only a portion of the many corrupt — or potentially corrupt — campaign practices involving the raising and spending of money for electioneering,” he wrote.

The irony, of course, is that McConnell has become the face of money in politics, and by his own account — a fierce defender of special interests being able to spend unlimited amounts on elections. He’s repeatedly attacked HR 1 — House Democrats’ first bill of the year — as an attempt to turn America into a land of one-party rule.

The San Diego Union-Tribune

How Bill Puts American People Back in Control of Their Democracy

BY SUSAN DAVIS (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 14, 2019

In November, the American people voted for change and rejected the culture of corruption that is permeating Washington. Democrats have promised to change a system that is increasingly drowning out the voices of everyday Americans.

We are working to keep that promise.

The first piece of legislation Democrats introduced in the House — the For the People Act (H.R. 1) — is a comprehensive reform bill to expand voting rights, reduce the influence of money in politics, and modernize our elections.

As a cosponsor of H.R. 1, I am pleased the following long-standing election reform bills I have authored are in this groundbreaking bill.

The Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act would end restrictions currently in place in 21 states that make voting by mail more difficult. Those of us in California have enjoyed no-excuse absentee voting for years and our fellow Americans in other states should have that right.

BDN BANGOR DAILY NEWS

H.R. 1 Will Give Average Americans Tools to Counter Big Money in Politics

BY ANNA KELLAR (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 12, 2019

The 116th Congress could make history with HR 1, a bold set of reforms that would make it easier for Americans to vote, crack down on money-in-politics corruption, and shine a light on dark money in political campaigns.

We at Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, a grassroots organization working to ensure that Maine's campaign finance laws, elections and government serve the public interest, believe that HR 1 is the set of reforms our country needs and voters want.

HR 1 addresses a near complete lack of transparency about who funds political advertisements on the internet. The bill will better inform citizens of who's behind the ads they're seeing and help prevent foreign money from infiltrating our democracy.

HR 1 also shines a light on spending by 501(c)4 organizations like the AARP and NRA, which aren't currently required to disclose their donors and campaign spending. Special interests and the super rich exploit this loophole to hide their identities and skirt campaign finance laws meant to limit their political influence.

HR 1 also establishes a nationwide Clean Elections program that multiplies the small-dollar donations of everyday Americans with public funds and amplifies the voice of regular people, countering the influence of big money in our politics.

The New York Times

Sixty-Second Guide to … H.R. 1

BY LISA LERNER | FEBRUARY 11, 2019

The first major piece of legislation House Democrats unveiled in their new majority is an ambitious, 600-page bill that reads like an anthology of liberal anti-corruption proposals. Intended to show voters that they are following through on their campaign pledges, the bill, called H.R. 1, has three overarching goals: to dismantle barriers to the ballot box, end big money in politics, and impose stricter ethics rules on government officials.

It also, unsurprisingly, takes a few jabs at the president.

The bill is so sprawling that even the SparkNotes version put out by its lead sponsor, Representative John Sarbanes, Democrat of Maryland, is a whopping 22 pages, divided into sections including “Voting,” “Campaign Finance,” and “Ethics.” Here are a few of the highlights.

H.R. 1 would:

- Automatically register citizens to vote.
- Require states to allow voters to register on the day of a federal election.
- Make Election Day a federal employment holiday.
- Require presidents and candidates for the nation’s highest offices to release their tax returns.

- Create a matching system for small donations to campaigns.

- Ban campaign contributions from corporations with significant foreign ownership.

Opposing the bill has become a pet interest of Senator Mitch McConnell, the Republican majority leader. (He has dubbed it “the Democrat Politician Protection Act” and mused publicly that much of it is “probably” unconstitutional.) So it faces dim prospects in the Senate, making H.R. 1, as one of my colleagues put it, less a legislative vehicle than a political platform for the Democrats heading into 2020.

Even if little, or none, of it becomes law, Democrats will use it to draw a stark contrast between their values and the president’s — and to drive a wedge between the occupant in the Oval Office and voters.

THE NEW YORKER

The House Takes on America's Voting-Rights Problem

BY JELANI COBB | FEBRUARY 9, 2019

Last week, with these events in mind, a hearing on H.R. 1, the For the People Act, took place in the House of Representatives. Elijah Cummings, Democrat of Maryland, the new chair of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, referred to the bill, in his opening remarks, as “one of the boldest reform packages to be considered in the history of this body.” He added, “This sweeping legislation will clean up corruption in government, fight secret money in politics, and make it easier for American citizens across this great country to vote.” That statement was not partisan hyperbole. The bill is a broad, imaginative, and ambitious set of responses to the most pressing challenges facing American democracy, many of which preceded the 2016 election, but almost all of which were brought into sharper focus by it.

Implicit in the choice to take up an electoral-reform bill as the first act of the new Democratic majority in the House was the decision to confront not only these injustices but, more fundamentally, the forces that have allowed them to come into existence. The bill contains provisions to insure access to paper ballots, in order to verify the accuracy of voting results; to establish early voting in all states for federal elections; and to launch independent redistricting commissions, to address the problem of partisan gerrymandering.

A federal matching system for small-dollar political contributions would serve as a counterbalance to the sums that wealthy individuals and corporations pour into spending for political elections. Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates would be required to release their tax returns. The bill also includes provisions for mandating transparency in digital-ad spending, strengthening disclosure policies

regarding foreign gifts to officeholders, and strictly enforcing the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

A section focusing on voting rights is of particular interest. The Supreme Court's ruling in Shelby essentially held that the Voting Rights Act was outmoded, relying on presumptions about racism, especially in Southern states, which didn't reflect the progress that had been made since 1965, when the bill was signed. The Court, however, left open the possibility that Congress might bring it in line with more recent circumstances, if warranted. H.R. 1 could spur the creation of new formulas for determining which states should be subject to federal oversight. It might, for example, be possible to take into account recent voter-suppression efforts in Ohio, Wisconsin, North Dakota, and other states, thereby expanding the reach of the Act.

For those progressives who were wary of what the Democrats would do with their new majority in the House, H.R. 1 is as reassuring a start as anyone could have hoped for. But the civic fervor behind it has not been entirely welcomed on Capitol Hill. Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader, denounced H.R. 1 as "a power grab that's smelling more and more like exactly what it is." Setting aside the question of what a power grab smells like, McConnell's outrage was striking, even in a period as cynical as this one. Taking aim at a provision that would make Election Day a day off for federal employees (with the idea that private companies would follow suit for their employees), McConnell said, "Just what America needs—another paid holiday," then predicted that federal employees would use the time to volunteer for Democratic campaigns.

It's not uncommon for a single bill to encompass such a wide range of concerns. But the concerns presented in H.R. 1 point to another unanswered question. For the past twenty months, public attention has been focused on the special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into possible Russian interference in the 2016 election. Intelligence agencies, media outlets, and independent researchers have consistently pointed to Russian intentions to sway the electorate in Trump's

favor. Possible motivations for these efforts—from belated score-settling for the Cold War to alleviating sanctions—aren't hard to discern. But we've seldom asked about American motivations in creating the conditions that facilitated such meddling. Russian attempts to influence American voters—including ad purchases on social media intended to foment racial division—coexisted with and benefitted from domestic attempts to discourage people from casting a vote.

American democracy is threatened by a hydra of vulnerabilities, most of them of our own making, but none of them beyond the notice of our adversaries. H.R. 1 is the most cogent corrective to these matters which we have yet seen. The calculations around it will most certainly be partisan, but it is the best hope for ending the corrosive practices that subtract citizens from the electorate.

THE BALTIMORE SUN

In Forceful Committee Speech, Elijah Cummings Pledges to 'Fight Until the Death' for Voting Rights

BY LILLIAN REED | FEBRUARY 6, 2019

U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings delivered a fiery speech Wednesday in which he shared a promise his 92-year-old mother asked from him on her death bed a year ago.

Cummings, who chairs the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, delivered the heated speech during the committee's hearing on H.R.1 — a bill on voting rights, campaign finance and ethics rules. The legislation, called the "For the People Act," was introduced by U.S. Rep. John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat and a senior member of the committee.

"He has compiled one of the boldest reform packages to be considered in the history of this body," Cummings said of Sarbanes at the beginning of the hearing. "This sweeping legislation will clean up corruption in government, fight secret money in politics and make it easier for American citizens across this great country to vote."

…

After about an hour and half of testimony on the bill, Cummings brought up a North Carolina court case concerning voting districts, which federal judges found to be discriminatory toward black residents.

…

Cummings called the North Carolina voting districts “chilling” and recalled how his mother, a sharecropper, had witnessed Americans harmed and beaten while seeking the right to vote, he said. “Her last words were ‘Do not let them take our votes away from us,’ ” he said, punctuating each word.

Voting is crucial, and I don’t give a damn how you look at it,” Cummings said. “There are efforts to stop people from voting. That’s not right. This is not Russia. This is the United States of America.”

Cummings called voting the “essence” of democracy and pledged to “fight until the death” to make sure every citizen had access to the vote. Those without it, he said, cannot progress with the rest of society nor control their destiny.

HUFFPOST

House Democrats Say Their Reform Bill Would Solve the Trump Administration's Ethics Nightmare

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | FEBRUARY 6, 2019

President Donald Trump has presided over one of the most unethical administrations in recent memory, and new laws are needed to stop it from happening again, ethics experts told Congress on Wednesday.

Trump set the tone for the ethical quagmire of his administration from the day he won the 2016 presidential election. His transition team ignored ethics officials and refused to abide by any ethics guidelines. He waved away anti-nepotism laws in elevating his daughter Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner, to positions of power with no relevant experience. He attracted aides who could not pass security clearance background checks. And most important, he refused to divest from his multibillion-dollar real estate business, allowing foreign governments, lobbyists and corporations seeking government action to directly pay the president.

"They said they were going to drain the swamp," Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.) said. "They moved into the swamp. They built a hotel on it, and they started renting out rooms to foreign princes and kings and governments."

This situation upended decades of thinking about presidential ethics. It necessitates the enactment of stricter laws governing the executive branch, according to the ethics experts testifying at a Wednesday hearing on executive ethics provisions in H.R. 1, House Democrats' top priority government reform bill.

Roll Call

Anti-Corruption, Campaign Finance Overhaul Bills Preview Likely 2020 Campaign Theme

BY KATE ACKLEY | FEBRUARY 5, 2019

Even as House Democrats have made a political overhaul a top priority, numerous lawmakers, including freshman members, have filed their own campaign finance and anti-corruption bills, a sign the topic will dominate into the 2020 campaigns.

Rep. Jason Crow, a Colorado Democrat who unseated Republican Mike Coffman last November, introduced his first bill last week: a measure that could lead to disclosures of donors to 501(c)(4) "social welfare" tax-exempt groups that play in politics.

...

Along those same lines, another freshman, New York Democrat Max Rose, has also introduced legislation aimed at the K Street lobbying corridor.

…

Rep. John Sarbanes, the Maryland Democrat who is the chief sponsor of House Democrats' overhaul, said the stand-alone bills, some of which are also included in the H.R. 1 package, allow individual members to highlight specific proposals as well as offer some pieces a chance for bipartisan support. "They know the kind of things that resonate and wanted to take a leadership role in showcasing these individual components," Sarbanes said. "I think it's all part of a strategy of bringing attention to these important democracy reforms."

Why I'm No Longer Accepting Corporate PAC Money

BY JIM MCGOVERN (OP-ED) | FEBRUARY 2, 2019

This is not the political system our founders envisioned. Of course it takes money to win elections. But the never-ending fundraising required to win an election takes too much of our attention away from the real work of serving our constituents and our country. It also makes individuals who are not well off or well-connected think twice before running for office.

That's why I'm proud that the new Democratic majority in the House proposed, as one of our first items of business, H.R. 1 – a sweeping elections and campaign reform bill that will remove the roadblocks many eligible Americans face on their way to the ballot box and help end the dominance of big money in politics. As the new chairman of the House Rules Committee, I look forward to bringing H.R. 1 to the floor for debate.

But I've also come to believe that I must do more than just support legislation to end the dominance of big money in politics. I need to change the way I run my own campaign fundraising.

Over the past year, I've been asked by my constituents whether I would stop taking corporate PAC money for my campaign. I'll be honest – at first, I was reluctant to consider such a big change. And It's important to state that I've never let a donation from anyone influence my vote. If corporate PACs have tried to buy my vote by cutting me a campaign check, they've ended up with a low return on their so-called investment. My voting record speaks for itself. Still, I was hesitant that I would put myself at a disadvantage against a well-funded opponent.

But our country is in trouble. Our system is rigged to favor those at the top. And I believe the perception of corruption, even where it doesn't exist, must be addressed if we're going to restore faith in our government. My constituents want me to lead by example -- and I will.

I will no longer take corporate PAC money for my campaign. It's what the people of Massachusetts' 2nd Congressional District want. And it's the right thing to do.

The New York Times

Republicans Rewrote Voting Laws for 8 Years. Now Democrats Say It's Their Turn.

BY MICHAEL WINES | FEBRUARY 1, 2019

In the years after Republicans swept state and congressional elections in 2010, legislatures in 25 states — all but a handful of them dominated by the party — enacted laws that made it harder to register and vote, from imposing ID requirements and curbing voter registration drives to rolling back early voting periods.

In November, Democrats reclaimed some of the ground they lost eight years ago. And now the rules for casting a ballot are moving fast in the opposite direction.

The signal example is in New York, where Democrats last month enacted a series of measures expanding access to the ballot box, just two months after taking full control of both the State House and Senate. But that state is far from the only one: Legislatures in New Jersey and Virginia are set to consider even more expansive packages. Delaware, New Hampshire, Minnesota and New Mexico are also set to take up voting rights measures.

…

And in the House of Representatives, they are pressing a sweeping overhaul of election and ethics laws — titled H.R. 1 to underscore its importance — that would, among many other things, end partisan gerrymanders, disclose anonymous donors to political causes and reinstate crucial parts of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that the Supreme Court invalidated in 2013.

In an op-ed in The Washington Post last week, Mr. McConnell branded [H.R. 1] “the Democrat Politician Protection Act.” “From the First Amendment to your ballot box,” he wrote, “Democrats want to rewrite the rules to favor themselves and their friends.”

That does not faze Democrats, who are betting that Republicans are on the wrong side of an issue that has finally gained traction with the public. Even if they lose to Republicans in Congress, Democrats say, they will win with voters.

Should Republicans block the bill, “it becomes a marker by which we start measuring McConnell, the Senate and anybody else who stands in the way,” Representative John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat who is the House bill’s principal sponsor, said in an interview. “I think it’ll be increasingly difficult for him to resist this as a narrative.”

What's Mitch McConnell So Afraid Of?

BY JOSHUA A. DOUGLAS (OP-ED) | JANUARY 31, 2019

Dear Sen. Mitch McConnell,

As a professor of election law and voting rights at the University of Kentucky College of Law -- your state's flagship institution and your alma mater -- I invite you to come sit in on my election law class. Given your recent commentary on the subject, it might teach you a lot.

For instance, you can learn about the true merits of H.R. 1, the For the People Act, a proposed law that Democrats in Congress have introduced to completely revamp our elections. Yes, it would include a provision to make Election Day a federal holiday as part of a suite of reforms to improve voter turnout.

You mocked the holiday idea on the Senate floor this week (and in your recent Washington Post op-ed) while ignoring the comprehensive nature of the election reform package. You claim it's all part of a Democratic "power grab." Senator, are you really afraid of more eligible people going to the polls?

The law includes many reforms -- like automatic voter registration, felon re-enfranchisement, improved election security, and methods to make voting more convenient -- that all amount to one thing: modernizing our election system for everyone.

….

In sum, H.R. 1 would modernize America's election system for everyone. That should be the goal: let's make it easy for all eligible Americans to participate and allow the best candidates and best ideas -- and not election rules -- dictate the outcomes.

Sen. McConnell, I promise that my election law class presents a fair, unbiased overview of our election system and the numerous laws and regulations involved. We can debate the merits of some of the proposals in H.R. 1, but one thing is clear: States and localities are already seeing success with many of these ideas, modernizing their elections and bringing more people into the political process.

Isn't that something that all sides should want? Shouldn't everyone champion improved voter participation?

Los Feliz Ledger

The For The People Act: Sweeping Reforms

BY ADAM SCHIFF (OP-ED) | JANUARY 31, 2019

The ideals of American democracy are under attack through a combination of dark money, gerrymandered districts and voter suppression.

With the new Democratic Majority, we are taking immediate action to reform and fix our broken political system, from voting rights to campaign finance transparency to requiring disclosure of political online advertising.

If we're actually going to solve the problems facing our nation, like affordable health care or climate change or creating good paying jobs, we need to make sure our political system works for all Americans, not just the wealthy and powerful.

Upon our return to Congress this January, our first order of business was introducing legislation to combat big money in politics, strengthen our ethics laws and protect the right of all American citizens to vote.

On January 3rd, my Democratic colleagues and I introduced "H.R. 1," the "For the People Act " a sweeping anti-corruption and democracy reform package that will help ensure the government is working for ordinary Americans, not special interests.

….

There’s a reason we’re prioritizing substantive reforms to strengthen our democracy. Everything else we want to do for the American people—reducing health costs and prescription drug prices, creating better-paying jobs, preventing gun violence and combatting climate change—all follow from a democracy that puts people first.

As we begin our work in the new legislative session, House Democrats will work to restore trust and transparency in our government and give back to the American people their voice and their power.

To End Washington Corruption, Officeholders and Candidates Must Have a New Way to Finance Their Campaigns

BY FRED WERTHEIMER (OP-ED) | JANUARY 30, 2019

If federal officeholders and candidates are not provided with an alternative way to finance their campaigns, influence-money corruption in Washington will not stop – it will grow far worse.

H.R. 1, the comprehensive democracy reform legislation introduced by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) and sponsored by 227 House Democrats will soon be on the House floor. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), is leading this historic effort to address fundamental campaign finance, voting rights, redistricting and government ethics problems.

….

As long as Citizens United remains the law of the land, we cannot stop unlimited contributions from flowing into federal elections through Super PACs and nonprofit groups.

What we can do, however, is provide federal candidates with an alternative way to finance their campaigns in order to run for office free from dependency on corrupting contributions and the policy demands that follow them. This system is provided in H.R. 1.

Lobbyists Are Already Mounting an Opposition Strategy to Democrats' Anti-Corruption Bill

BY ELLA NILSEN | JANUARY 29, 2019

As House Democrats' sweeping anti-corruption bill had its first hearing Tuesday in the House Judiciary Committee, a different meeting about the bill was taking place on K Street.

The National Association of Business Political Action Committees and its members met at the law offices of their legal counsel Wiley Rein on Tuesday to discuss the bill's impact. The group is calling the anti-corruption bill, commonly known on the Hill as H.R. 1, "potentially onerous legislation," and told its members to "immediately begin engaging on this topic with your donors, senior executives and Hill allies." (Vox attempted to attend the lunch meeting, but our registration was rescinded).

This isn't the only group concerned about Democrats making H.R. 1 their first priority in the new Congress. The wide-ranging bill would require Super PACs to make their donors public, enact lobbying registration requirements with more oversight of foreign agents, set up nonpartisan redistricting commissions to end partisan gerrymandering, and create national automatic voter registration, among other actions.

The Conservative Action Project released a memo on Monday calling the bill "the ultimate fantasy of the left," which was signed by Republican figures including former Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore, Ronald Reagan's attorney general, Edwin Meese III, and former House Majority Leader Tom Delay. (Delay

resigned from Congress in 2006 after questions about his ties to infamous DC lobbyist Jack Abramoff, and was convicted of campaign money laundering in 2010.)

Conservative and libertarian group FreedomWorks has been circulating a form letter to members for the past two weeks, calling H.R. 1 a “dangerous bill” and saying it would restrict free speech and open up the country to one-party rule by Democrats.

Washington’s lobbyist and influence industries seem nervous, but they can rest easy for at least two more years; there’s absolutely no chance that H.R. 1 will become law under the current Congress. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell outlined his staunch opposition to the bill in detail in a Washington Post op-ed a few weeks ago — all but guaranteeing it won’t see the light of day in the Senate.

But perhaps anticipating an era similar to the post-Watergate reforms, pro-business and lobbying organizations are starting to worry.

HeraldNet
EVERETT, WASHINGTON

Democrats' H.R. 1 Offers Boost for Accountability

BY RICK LARSEN (OP-ED) | JANUARY 22, 2019

This November, the American people went to the polls and resoundingly rejected the culture of corruption in Washington, D.C.

A new Democratic-controlled House began Jan. 3, with the promise to clean up corruption and ensure public officials work for the people.

To make good on this promise, Democrats introduced House Resolution 1, the For the People Act, focused on restoring accountability in government. The comprehensive reforms in this bill will do three important things: make voting easier, end dark money and ensure integrity of public officials.

….

I started off the 116th Congress by cosponsoring H.R. 1 to end corruption, strengthen democracy and voting rights and remove dark money from politics. This long-overdue legislation will restore faith in government. I look forward to passing this bill so Congress can turn its attention to other important issues affecting families across the 2nd District such as addressing Washington's $190 billion in infrastructure needs, ensuring Northwest Washington continues to be a leader in renewable energy and helping Washington students better compete in a global economy.

The GRUNION
Long Beach's Favorite Community News Source

Time for Fair Electoral Districts

BY ALAN LOWENTHAL (OP-ED) | JANUARY 18, 2019

Voters are losing faith in their elected officials and their system of government, and who can blame them? In many states across the country, candidates are flooded with special interest dark money in elections that are held in districts drawn by politicians, all while fearful that our voting machines may be hacked or sabotaged. Our republic cannot survive if the voters feel like the system doesn't work.

This loss of faith is why, on the first day of the new Congress, Democrats introduced the For The People Act, also known as H.R. 1. This sweeping legislation takes bold, comprehensive action to protect voting rights, secure our elections, and root out corruption.

One of my priorities over the last two decades is at the core of this legislation — ending partisan gerrymandering.

…

For far too long, politicians have used gerrymandering to draw their own districts, choosing who will be voting for them. Independent redistricting commissions and an open process make politicians more accountable to the voters and go a long way to restoring citizens' voice in the process.

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Here's How I'm Spending My First Year in Congress

BY MIKE LEVIN (OP-ED) | JANUARY 18, 2019

I know that Democrats, Republicans and independents are all frustrated with the current state of politics and campaigns. That's why I joined my colleagues in introducing H.R. 1, the For The People Act, a comprehensive bill to end the culture of corruption in Washington and bring more transparency to our political process. It will limit the unchecked influence of wealthy donors, prevent foreign money from manipulating America's elections and strengthen ethics laws to prevent politicians from enriching themselves.

Roll Call

Democrats Try to Meet People Where They Are: Mired in Cynicism

BY KATE ACKLEY | JANUARY 16, 2019

It's tempting, and deliciously smug, to dismiss House Democrats' everything-but-the-kitchen-sink campaign finance, lobbying, ethics and voting overhaul bill as an overtly partisan political messaging stunt that's doomed in the Senate and too unpolished for enactment.

The measure is all of those. But ignoring this effort outright means waving off voters' very real perception that their democracy has been sold out to the highest campaign donors.

The clean-up-government-and-elections theme of H.R. 1, as House Democrats have dubbed their bill to show its priority status, will play a dominant role in the 2019-20 election cycle, as well as in this Congress, harnessing voters' growing angst with big money in politics and perceived corporate influence over government.

Democrats' Small-Donor Campaign Finance Proposal Is a Great Deal for Taxpayers

BY LEE DRUTMAN | JANUARY 14, 2019

As we begin to debate the House Democrats' landmark "For the People Act" (H.R. 1), here's one pushback we might expect to see: The small-donor public matching system in the bill costs too much public money.

It's a standard argument that campaign finance reform opponents often make. But it only focuses only on the costs. It doesn't take into account the benefits. A publicly funded campaign finance system will save taxpayers far more money than it costs them. It will pay for itself in more responsive and smarter public policy.

…

Small donor matching will cost about $1/year. It's an incredible deal for taxpayers.

The small-donor matching system in H.R. 1 creates a 6-to-1 public match for every dollar raised in small-dollar contributions (under $200). No doubt, this will cost some money. A reasonable estimate might be about $3 billion over 10 years (under $1 per year per citizen), but a lot will depend on how widely it gets used.

The news system would fundamentally change how money gets raised. rather than spending their time calling rich people and attending fundraisers on K Street, individual members would have a greater incentive to do fundraising

events back in their districts. As a result, they'd get a very different sense of the most important problems facing the country.

Anything that takes members of Congress away from the gamut of lobbyist-sponsored fundraisers and cold-calling wealthy people and puts them in the living rooms of more representative groups of constituents would be a major game changer for the kinds of concerns that filter up to lawmakers as top priorities. This could significantly alter the premium parties now put on big-donor fundraising prowess in their candidate recruitment strategies. It could also pave the way for a new winning politics of economic fairness.

And let's say it helps pave the way for tax reform that benefits middle-class Americans. This will almost certainly benefit Americans by more than $1 per year. If it frees lawmakers from dependence on the pharmaceutical industry and helps reduce the costs of prescription drugs, it will save taxpayers more than $1 per year. If it frees lawmakers from dependence on Wall Street, and paves the way for lawmakers to regulate exploitative consumer fees and penalties, it will save taxpayers more than $1 per year.

SLATE

The House Democrats' Colossal Election Reform Bill Could Save American Democracy

BY RICHARD HASEN (OP-ED) | JANUARY 14, 2019

The Democrats' first order of business as they took control of the 116th Congress was introducing H.R. 1, the colossal "For the People Act." This 571-page behemoth of a bill covering voting rights, campaign finance reform, ethics improvements, and more was a perfect reminder of just how much power the Constitution gives Congress to make elections better in this country and, sadly, of how partisan the question of election reform has become.

By beginning with election reform as "H.R. 1," Democrats signaled their priorities as they took over control of the House of Representatives. The bill now has 221 co-sponsors, all Democrats, including almost every Democrat in the House. It's disheartening that bipartisan movement on election reform is no longer possible and that few of the significant improvements in the bill stand a chance of becoming law until Democrats have control of the Senate and the presidency. Even then some of its provisions could be blocked by a conservative-leaning Supreme Court. But if and when Democrats ever do return to full power in Washington, H.R. 1 should remain the top priority. Though there is room for some improvements, the "For the People Act" would go an enormous way toward repairing our badly broken democracy.

There's a lot packed into the introductory version of the bill, much of it a wish list for voting rights advocates and election reformers. The summary put out by the office of Rep. John Sarbanes, one of the lead proponents of the bill, goes on for 22 pages. Among the provisions affecting voting and voting rights are those requiring online voter registration, automatic voter registration, and same-day registration for voting in federal elections; a requirement to use independent

redistricting commissions to draw congressional districts in each state; limitations on voter purges; an end to felon disenfranchisement for federal elections; protection against intimidation and false information surrounding elections; improved access to voting by persons with disabilities; a set of improved cybersecurity standards around voting and voting systems, including a requirement that all voting systems produce a paper trail for auditing and checking results; and a ban on a state's chief election officer engaging in political activities connected to federal offices.

HUFFPOST

States And Cities Have Already Shown Democrats' Election Reforms Will Work

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | JANUARY 10, 2019

A sweeping reform bill that House Democrats say will be their first priority after ending the partial government shutdown is filled with policies that would fundamentally alter the nation's voting and campaign finance systems. These policies are not coming out of nowhere. Most of them have been implemented and tested in cities and states across the country.

"Within the last five or six years, you just got more and more of these solutions happening at the state and local level," said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the bill's chief sponsor. "It's not a unicorn. It's not like we're talking about something that exists in the atmosphere of Jupiter. This is happening in America."

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, in a famous dissenting opinion from 1932, asserted the freedom of a state or local government to "serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country." This "laboratories of democracy" concept holds that state and local governments are the proper place to test policies before they move to the national stage.

That is exactly what has happened with the sweeping policies in Democrats' H.R. 1, which they're calling the For the People Act. The bill's campaign finance provisions on public election financing, dark money disclosure and democracy vouchers have all been field tested. The same is true of automatic voter registration, felon re-enfranchisement and the use of independent, nonpartisan redistricting commissions.

…

The For the People Act's main campaign finance reform is the creation of a small-donor matching system to publicly finance congressional elections. It is based on the decades-old public financing program run for New York City elections.

…

New York City's system has enabled candidates — especially those from less affluent neighborhoods — to more consistently rely on small donors in their districts. "The city's public financing system gives candidates an incentive to reach out to a broader and more diverse array of constituents to fund their campaigns," a 2012 study by the Brennan Center and the progressive think tank Demos found.

This small-donor matching system has also spread to other states, cities and municipalities. Some matching funds programs have existed for years, but in the past five years, adoption has spread rapidly to Washington, D.C.; Montgomery and Howard counties in Maryland; and Suffolk County, New York, among other places. New York state lawmakers are currently debating the statewide adoption of such a program.

TIMES UNION
We're Your Source

A Bill for All the People

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | JANUARY 9, 2019

It's quite likely that the first bill submitted by House Democrats to mark their reclaimed majority will never become law, not in its entirety at least. But it's nonetheless a good blueprint for building a better government of the people.

Sponsored by John Sarbanes, D-Maryland, and co-sponsored by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, HR 1 calls for sweeping reforms in the areas of voting, money in politics, redistricting and ethics. It's a broad attempt to address many of the problems we've seen across the country in both national and state elections.

The bill, for starters, would begin to address the voter suppression efforts blatantly used in a number of states. It would make it easier for people to register to vote, or to be registered automatically. It requires states to allow same-day registration and early voting. It would stop people from being unwittingly purged from voter rolls.

The legislation calls for more disclosure on the part of 501(c)(4) "social welfare" organizations, which have long been abused as conduits for dark money — donations hidden from public view. It seeks to rein in super PACs, which spent billions in recent years, and to establish a system of public financing of campaigns for candidates who agree to rely on small contributions.

It would have independent boards rather than state legislatures draw political districts, curtailing if not ending gerrymandering. And it would create some new ethics rules, among them requirements that presidents and vice presidents would

have to release their tax returns — which President Donald Trump has not done — and follow the same conflict-of-interest laws as other officials.

…

Of course, few politicians would admit they're for voter suppression and big money. They'll couch the arguments against HR 1 instead in lofty rhetoric — that giving politicians lots of money is an expression of free speech, and that would-be voters should jump through hoops in order to guard against all that voter fraud that no one can seem to find, not even a commission appointed by Mr. Trump to try to prove he didn't really lose the popular vote.

But let's have this debate nonetheless. Let Americans hear and see whether their representatives try to feed them tortured arguments against fair elections and ethical government, or side with the people — not just the people they think will vote for them, but the people this government is supposed to be of, by, and for.

CAPITAL GAZETTE

H.R. 1 Would Help Restore the Promise of Our Democracy

BY JOHN SARBANES (OP-ED) | JANUARY 8, 2019

People are desperate to reclaim their democracy. So it was gratifying on the first day of the 116th Congress to lead the new Democratic majority in unveiling and introducing H.R. 1, the For the People Act — a bold and transformative reform bill that will return power to the people by making it easier, not harder, to vote; breaking the grip of big money on our politics; and strengthening ethics laws so that the public officials serve the public, not themselves.

First, H.R. 1 guarantees every America citizens' right to vote. It expands access to the ballot box by implementing automatic voter registration, mandatory early voting, no-excuse absentee ballots and by cracking down on restrictive voter ID laws. It restores the integrity of our democratic system by committing Congress to the process of restoring the Voting Rights Act and by requiring independent redistricting commissions to end partisan gerrymandering.

It also strengthens the security of election systems in Maryland and across the country by increasing federal assistance for state voting systems — including funding for paper ballots — and enhancing federal-state information sharing to counter threats.

Second, H.R. 1 breaks the influence of big money and special interests in Washington by establishing a revolutionary matching system for citizen-owned elections. By matching small donations and encouraging Congressional candidates to accept voluntary restrictions on PAC money and large contributions, this new system empowers the American people to take back their democracy from wealthy and well-connected special interests.

H.R. 1 will also bring more transparency to political spending by shining a light on secret money in our politics and requiring large digital platforms to maintain databases of political ads. It prevents foreign money from entering our political system and revamps the Federal Election Commission to ensure there's an effective cop on the beat to enforce our nation's campaign finance laws.

Third, H.R. 1 enhances our nation's ethics laws to ensure that public servants work for the public, not for their own personal financial gain. It applies conflict of interest laws to the president and vice president and requires major party nominees to release their tax returns.

It prevents members of Congress from using taxpayer dollars to settle discrimination settlements and establishes a code of conduct for the Supreme Court. With passage of H.R. 1, the Office of Government Ethics would gain enhanced enforcement powers and there would be an end to the revolving door between industry lobbyists and government agencies.

These are not reforms for reform's sake. They are carefully designed to unrig the system so everyday citizens can set the agenda in Washington and make progress on the issues that matter most, whether it's lowering prescription drugs prices, building a fair economy, reducing gun violence or combating climate change and rising sea levels that threaten coastal communities, including right here in Annapolis.

Democratic candidates across the country ran on these reforms during the last election. We promised to clean up the culture of corruption in Washington and return power to the American people. Now, we are ready to keep that promise by passing H.R. 1 and returning to a government of, by and for the people.

POLITICO

How to Fix America's Broken Political System

BY NORM EISEN AND FRED WERTHEIMER (OP-ED) | JANUARY 7, 2019

Much attention has focused on H.R. 1, the comprehensive package of democracy reforms introduced on Thursday by Representative John Sarbanes (D-Md.) on behalf of the new Democratic House majority. The unprecedented legislation is perhaps the most important domestic initiative of the new Congress. But it also has the capacity to begin fixing what has been broken in our foreign relations, reassuring our allies that America is on the way back to restoring our democracy, and with it our global leadership.

Since 2016, the United States' friends around the world have been faced with a dual shock: Russia's multi-pronged attack on our elections that year and the ascension of President Donald Trump, who has criticized our longtime partners while embracing authoritarians like Russian President Vladimir Putin—despite his assault on our democracy

…

H.R. 1 reforms our broken political system but it also addresses the concerns of Americans and allies alike who are anxious that our elections are vulnerable to future foreign attacks. The bill incorporates election security reforms that are long overdue. It would establish standards for election vendors, provide significant assistance to states to improve and protect their election systems, and bolster federal efforts to assess and respond to threats to election systems.

The Washington Post

This Is What Democracy Looks Like

BY E.J. DIONNE JR. (OPINION) | JANUARY 6, 2019

The electoral rebuke to President Trump (measured by the Democratic advantage in House races of nearly 10 million votes) showed that those who marched and demonstrated understood that peaceful assembly was only the first step toward achieving their goals. In cities and towns, red and blue, large and small, they met in church basements, coffee shops, living rooms and libraries. There, they planned how to persuade their neighbors to elect a majority that would stand up to the president and his pliant congressional allies. Then they executed the hard work of door knocks, phone calls, social media conversations, fundraising and texts. And they prevailed.

It is thus appropriate that the new majority gave the hallowed designation H.R. 1 to the bill they presented Friday with the purpose of expanding democracy while pushing back against corruption. The headline aspects of the legislation took aim at Trump-era sleaze, including a requirement that presidential candidates release their tax returns and tightening of White House ethics rules.
But the guts of the bill are all about making our system more democratic: automatic voter registration along with limits on voter purges and other methods that states use to block access to the ballot box, especially for minorities and the young. It would also ban contributions from corporations controlled by foreign entities.

Central to the proposal is a new campaign finance system designed to limit big money's power in elections. It would create a series of incentives, including matching funds for donations of $200 or less, to encourage candidates to rely on small donors rather than the typically self-interested generosity of the wealthy. Creating a better way to pay for politics is central to a democratic egalitarianism

that was well described by the political philosopher Michael Walzer: “a society free from domination ” where there would be “no more bowing and scraping, fawning and toadying.”

H.R. 1 would be accompanied by a new Voting Rights Act restoring the federal government’s ability to end discriminatory voter suppression, ripped away by the Supreme Court’s misguided 2013 ruling in Shelby County v. Holder .

Leaders of the Republican Senate dismissed the House effort and said they’d ignore it. But this doesn’t reduce its importance. Democracy is a long game. It involves pressuring those who resist reform (see: peaceable assembly above) and offering proposals future electorates can eventually endorse (see: the New Deal, which brought to life many ideas first floated by progressives in the 1920s).

Protecting and enhancing democracy should be the central cause of the new House majority. Democracy is, after all, what allowed it to come into being, and Trump’s hostility to democratic norms must be challenged at every turn.

At this moment of trial for all who treasure democratic institutions, the world could use an example of politicians whose solutions to our problems involve more democracy, not less.

House Democrats Introduce Anti-Corruption Bill As Symbolic 1st Act

BY PETER OVERBY | JANUARY 5, 2019

It isn't your usual bill, the For The People Act introduced Friday by House Democrats. Also known as H.R. 1, symbolically their first legislation, it is a 571-page compendium of existing problems and proposed solutions in four political hot zones: voting, political money, redistricting and ethics.

A pledge to pass the bill was a common theme among Democratic House candidates last year.

"We heard loud and clear from the American people," Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., told reporters Friday. "They feel left out and locked out from their own democracy."

Newsweek

Democrats Begin Pushing Bill That Demands Trump's Tax Returns, New Ethics and Nepotism Rules

BY RAMSEY TOUCHBERRY | JANUARY 5, 2019

The resolution, officially known as “The For the People Act,” has been touted by House Democrats for months. Pledging it will “restore our Democracy,” the sweeping reform bill would amend campaign finance, voting and ethics laws.

As promised, it was one of the party’s first major bills introduced Friday after retaking control of the chamber for the first time in nine years.

“We are introducing H.R. 1 to hold legislation, to clean up corruption and restore integrity to government,” Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi said Friday at the bill’s official unveiling, flanked by senior and high-ranking Democrats. “We put power back into the hands of the people.”

One of the Democrats heading H.R. 1, Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland, said Friday it will "set the table” for the type of legislative action that’s to come from Democrats.

The New York Times

Aiming at Trump, Democrats Lay Out Agenda for a Post-Shutdown Congress

BY NICHOLAS FANDOS | JANUARY 4, 2019

House Democrats unveiled on Friday the details of ambitious legislation devised to lower barriers to the ballot box, tighten ethics and lobbying restrictions and, in a swipe at President Trump, require presidents and candidates for the nation's highest offices to release their tax returns.

Singling out Mr. Trump and his administration, Democrats said that they were making good on promises to voters across the country who vaulted them into the majority with demands to clean up corruption and influence-peddling in Republican-controlled Washington.

…

Democratic leaders view the voting and ethics measure — named the For the People Act — as the opening salvo in a two-year campaign to either make law or drive a wedge between Mr. Trump and the voters who supported him.

…

The legislation unites veteran Democratic lawmakers with many of the party's newest elected members who captured Republican seats by promising to clean up the influence of big-money donors and lobbyists in Congress and the White House. It quickly won praise from advocacy groups focused on limiting money and influence-peddling in politics.

But Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, called much of it “probably” unconstitutional. He has been one of the Senate’s fiercest opponents of tightening campaign finance laws and forcing donor disclosures, and has generally opposed federal intervention in elections. After the Supreme Court struck down the heart of the enforcement provisions within the Voting Rights Act in 2013, Mr. McConnell said it was not necessary to offer an alternative.

At a Wall Street Journal event in early December, he predicted that the House bill was “not going to go anywhere in the Senate.”

Conceding the majority leader’s view could be a death knell for now, Representative John Sarbanes, Democrat of Maryland, who oversaw the drafting of the legislation, predicted that Republicans would lose in the court of public opinion.

“If he wants to ultimately stand with his arms folded between the American people and their democracy, then he should go right ahead,” Mr. Sarbanes said. “But I think he is going to get knocked over by the sentiment of the country right now.”

The Washington Post

The Democratic House Wants to Reform Democracy. It's Not a Panacea — But It's a Start.

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | JANUARY 4, 2019

The new Democratic majority House gaveled in on Thursday with reform on its agenda — not so much of policy but of democracy itself. Admirably, the majority aims both to repair House rules and to improve the functioning of democratic institutions more broadly. Given the coarsening discourse and widening polarization, the challenge is immense.

House Democrats will release H.R. 1 on Friday, and it will be a sprawling package — addressing campaign financing, voting rights, election cybersecurity and more. The bill reportedly will mandate that political action committees report their donors. It would mend the big hole that the Supreme Court ripped in the Voting Rights Act, which had guaranteed access to the voting booth to generations of minority Americans. It would help states replace old election equipment, curb extreme partisan gerrymandering and encourage small-dollar campaign donations.

…

None of this is a panacea. H.R. 1 will be dead on arrival in Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's (R-Ky.) Senate. Many of the House rule changes are incremental, leaving mostly untouched the power of leaders to ignore the middle of the chamber if they so please. But all are worthwhile first steps — toward persuading the Senate to accept some of the House's ideas, tightening ethics standards and encouraging bipartisan groups to exert more pressure when House leaders suppress majority bills. Especially measured against the last House's early drive to destroy Obamacare and recklessly cut taxes, this is a welcome beginning.

Associated Press

House Dems Urge Sweeping Reforms to Boost Voting, Ethics

BY MATTHEW DALY | JANUARY 4, 2019

House Democrats on Friday unveiled a comprehensive elections and ethics reform package that targets what they call a “culture of corruption in Washington” and aims to reduce the role of money in politics.

The bill, among the first to be considered as Democrats take control of the House after eight years, would make it easier for citizens to register and vote, tighten election security and require presidents to disclose their tax returns.

Dubbed the “For the People Act,” the legislation marks an effort by Democrats to set a tone of good government as they take the majority following historic gains in the midterm elections.

Democrats used the full force of their new majority as they announced the plan Friday at a packed news conference that included dozens of new and returning lawmakers.

…

Rep. John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat who is leading the reform effort, said Democrats were “responding directly to the American people and what they want to see in our democracy,” as shown by the election results.

Calling the bill “transformative,” Sarbanes said it will “strengthen our democracy and return political power to the people by making it easier, not harder, to vote, ending the dominance of big money in our politics and ensuring that public officials actually serve the public.”

The Washington Post

House Democrats Unveil Bill Targeting Trump on Tax Returns and Transparency

BY MIKE DEBONIS | JANUARY 4, 2019

House Democrats are set to pursue legislation that squarely targets President Trump by requiring presidential candidates to disclose 10 years of tax returns, mandating more transparency for presidential inaugural and transition committees and tightening White House ethics standards.

Those provisions are only a small part of a broad reform bill — titled the “For the People Act” — that encompasses campaign finance, election integrity and security, congressional ethics and more. But they are clear signals that Democrats intend to take an aggressive approach to Trump and his administration.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and other Democrats unveiled an outline of the legislation Friday in the Capitol, which will move through several House committees over the coming weeks and is tentatively set for floor consideration early this year.

“It’s important for the confidence it gives people that their voices and their concerns are heard,” Pelosi said. “Restoring the people’s faith in government is really our agenda.”

Democrats Take Aim at Presidential Tax Returns, Conflicts of Interest in New Ethics Proposal

BY BENJAMIN SIEGEL | JANUARY 4, 2019

As one of their first big-ticket legislative proposals of the new Congress, House Democrats on Friday unveiled a sweeping anti-corruption, campaign finance and ethics reform package that takes aim at long-simmering concerns about President Donald Trump's possible conflicts of interest between his actions as president and his family business.

The massive proposal, known as "The For the People Act" and designated as "House Resolution 1," also includes dozens of measures from Democrats on ethics and campaign finance reform, voting rights and election security. It would also require presidential and vice presidential candidates to release 10 years of their personal tax returns and require sitting presidents and vice presidents to do the same.

"It's important for what it does, it's important for the confidence it gives people that their voices, their concerns, are heard," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Friday at a news conference unveiling the legislation.

The Washington Post

The Democrats' Big Rollout Begins Now. It Must Include a Real Bid for Trump's Tax Returns.

BY GREG SARGENT (OPINION) | JANUARY 4, 2019

On Friday, the new House Democratic majority will roll out its first big contrast with President Trump, offering a major package of anti-corruption reforms that will showcase what the Democratic version of swamp-drainage looks like.

After winning a sweeping electoral victory in part on promises to clean up the Trump-era GOP's Washington, Democrats hope to establish an ambitious blueprint for clean government in the face of Trump's personal corruption and degradation of our institutions, and the GOP enabling of it all.

…

First, let's note that the new reform package is impressive in scope. There are three main pillars to it. The first facilitates participation and protects voters, by expanding protections for voting rights, making voting easier and requiring nonpartisan commissions to replace partisan gerrymanders that dilute the power of voters.

The second seeks to defend our elections against torrents of outside cash, foreign interference and social media disinformation via limits on dark money and stricter disclosure rules on donations and ads, including digital, among other things. The third aims to clean up government itself through stricter ethics and transparency rules and limits on lobbying.

The combination of all these three reform tracks into one major package is something new, and it's intentional.

Democrats Unveil First New Bill, with Requirement for Presidential Candidates Turning Over Their Tax Returns

BY LAUREN FOX | JANUARY 4, 2019

Democrats unveiled their first piece of legislation Friday, a collection of voting rights provisions, ethics reforms and a requirement that presidential candidates release 10 years of tax returns, an action aimed at President Donald Trump, who has defied decades of precedent by refusing to release his tax returns to the public.

The bill, which will become the first priority of many of the House's most high-profile committees, is expected to move swiftly through the House of Representatives, but won't pass in the Republican-controlled Senate or be signed by the President.

…

Democratic Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland told reporters that the bill was intended to "set the table" on what Democratic priorities in the new Congress look like even if Majority Leader Mitch McConnell won't take them up in the Senate.

House Democrats Officially Unveil Their First Bill in the Majority: A Sweeping Anti-Corruption Proposal

BY ELLA NILSEN | JANUARY 4, 2019

House Democrats will unveil full details of their first bill in the new Congress on Friday — sweeping anti-corruption measures aimed at stamping out the influence of money in politics and expanding voting rights.

This is HR 1, the first thing House Democrats will tackle now that a new Congress has been sworn in. To be clear, this legislation has little to no chance of passing the Republican-controlled Senate or being signed by President Donald Trump. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell already bluntly stated, “That’s not going to go anywhere.”

But by making anti-corruption their No. 1 priority, House Democrats are throwing down the gauntlet for Republicans. A vast majority of Americans want to get the influence of money out of politics, and want Congress to pass laws to do so. New polling from the PAC End Citizens United found 82 percent of all voters and 84 percent of independents said they support a bill of reforms to tackle corruption.

Given how popular the issue is, and Trump’s multitude of scandals, it looks bad for Republicans to be the party opposing campaign finance reform — especially going into 2020.

“Our best friend in this debate is the public,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters recently. “We believe it will have great support.”

HUFFPOST

House Democrats Introduce Their Sweeping New Reform Bill

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | JANUARY 4, 2019

House Democrats unveiled Friday the For the People Act, a comprehensive package of democratic reforms and the first major bill of the 116th Congress. The bill is a sweeping combination of election, campaign finance and ethics reforms designed to make voting easier, curb the power of big donors and reduce conflicts of interest in all three branches of government.

The For the People Act was the first major legislative action for Democrats after they voted to end the partial government shutdown initiated by President Donald Trump, a measure he is expected to veto.

The package of reforms was put together in a collaborative process initiated by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) in 2011 and overseen by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) since 2017. The party ran in the 2018 midterm elections on a promise to enact these reforms.

“We carried a message of reform, of fighting corruption, of cleaning up Washington,” Sarbanes said in introducing the bill on Friday. “We made a promise to the American people. The new members who’ve come made that promise and made it clear they wanted this to be the first order of business. [This bill] is delivering on that promise.”

MotherJones

Democrats' First Order of Business: Making It Easier to Vote and Harder to Buy Elections

BY ARI BERMAN | JANUARY 4, 2019

House Democrats introduced a sweeping bill on Friday as their first order of legislative business that would expand voting rights and curb the influence of money in politics, signaling their commitment to push back on Republican efforts to undermine the democratic process.

The legislation, known as HR 1: The For the People Act, would make it easier to vote, crack down on gerrymandering, and reduce the influence of big money in congressional races. It would also institute new ethics rules, including one requiring sitting presidents and presidential candidates to release their tax returns.

The bill has three major parts, beginning with a slew of measures designed to expand voting rights, which would counteract Republican voter suppression efforts. These include nationwide automatic voter registration, Election Day registration, two weeks of early voting in every state, an end to aggressive voter purging, funding for states to adopt paper ballots, the restoration of voting rights for ex-felons, and declaring Election Day a federal holiday. While states control their voting laws, Congress has the power to set voting procedures for federal elections.

The bill would also target partisan gerrymandering by requiring independent commissions instead of state legislatures to draw congressional maps. Furthermore, the bill calls on Congress to restore the full strength of the Voting Rights Act at a future date, after the Supreme Court gutted it in 2013. House Democrats are planning to hold a vote to expand the Voting Rights Act and

require the federal government to approve any voting changes in states with a well-documented history of recent voting discrimination, but first they'll convene hearings on the prevalence of voter suppression in GOP-controlled states.

The second section of the bill tackles campaign finance reform to address the skyrocketing costs of congressional campaigns and increasing influence of corporate money. This includes a new small-donor matching system to encourage congressional candidates to rely on public financing instead of large donors, so that every $100 raised would trigger $600 in matching public funds. The bill also requires dark-money groups to disclose their donors.

The third section would enact ethics and lobbying reforms. Most notable is the requirement that sitting presidents and vice presidents, along with candidates for those offices, release their tax returns from the past 10 years.

The bill represents the most far-reaching democracy reform plan introduced in Congress since the Watergate era.

…

Of course, the bill as a whole has little chance of being passed in the Republican-controlled Senate.

…

But HR 1 is as much a political document as a legislative one, laying down a marker of what Democrats stand for and drawing attention to often-overlooked "good government" issues. "In the face of a torrent of special-interest dark money, partisan gerrymandering and devious vote-suppression schemes, voters elected a House Democratic majority determined to bring real change to restore our democracy," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the legislation's lead sponsor, wrote in the Washington Post after the election.

RollingStone

Inside the Democrats' New Plan to Fight Dark Money and Voter Suppression

BY ANDY KROLL | JANUARY 4, 2019

Picture the 2020 elections but with a few, shall we say, tweaks to how politics work in this country.

Changes like: Anyone can easily register to vote online or on Election Day, which, by the way, is now a federal holiday. Want to cast your ballot early? Go for it — even if you live in a deep-red state — beginning two weeks before the election. Not to mention all early-voting sites are open four hours a day and are located near a bus stop or a subway station. Oh, and there's more incentive than ever to vote in those congressional elections because an independent commission wrestled the redistricting process out of the hands of partisan lawmakers, ripped up your state's old gerrymandered map and drew a new, saner one creating more competitive races.

As for the candidates, they go all-in to court $20- and $50-a-head donors because they'll get matching public funds for relying on small-dollar contributions. Child care, rent and health insurance can now be paid for with campaign funds, so that a candidate who isn't wealthy or doesn't have ready access to rich people can run for office without going broke. A new law, the DISCLOSE Act, will finally reveal who's behind those ominous dark-money-funded attack ads from a faceless group run out of a P.O. box with a bullshit name like Americans for an Awesome America.

This is obviously not the reality in which Americans currently live. But it is the world envisioned in H.R. 1, also known as the For the People Act, the first bill put forward by House Democrats after retaking the majority and returning Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to the speakership.

On Friday morning, a group of Democrats, led by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD), Pelosi as well as other senior members, unveiled new details about what's included in the For the People Act. It's arguably the most ambitious piece legislation put forward by the Democratic Party in the modern era when it comes to restoring the health of American democracy.

Democrats' Plan to Clean Up Washington Takes a Swipe at Corporate America

BY YLAN MUI | JANUARY 4, 2019

Democrats will unveil on Friday their sweeping effort to revamp the nation's campaign finance and voting rights laws, measures that could bring significant changes for corporate America and social media companies.

The House bill, titled The For the People Act, will be designated HR1, signifying its place at the top of the Democrats' agenda. Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., the bill's lead author and chairman of the Democracy Reform Task Force, said the proposal is designed to hold elected officials accountable and make government more responsive.

The bill is a "once-in-a-generation reform package that will end the dominance of big money in our politics, ensure that public servants actually serve the public and make it easier, not harder, to vote," Sarbanes said in a statement. "Once we clean up Washington and get special interests out of the way, we can get to work on a whole host of important issues that Americans care about."

POLITICO

House Democrats Unveil Bill to Obtain Trump's Tax Returns, Put Checks on White House

BY MAGGIE SEVERNS | JANUARY 4, 2019

A day after assuming the majority, House Democrats on Friday unveiled a sweeping ethics reform package that would put new checks on the White House and require President Donald Trump to release his tax returns.

House Democrats mostly presented the package — which contains numerous changes to campaign finance and ethics law — as a set of popular good-government reforms during a Friday press conference on Capitol Hill. But the bill's proposed checks on Trump also will make it a useful cudgel for the new majority, even though the legislation is unlikely to be approved by the Senate.

…

"The midterm elections were monumental and indeed historic. The American people gave Congress a mandate: to finally start conducting credible oversight and start enacting reforms. Over the last two years, President Trump set the tone from the top in his administration that behaving ethically and complying with the law is optional," Cummings said. "We're better than that."

…

The reforms proposed by House Democrats would also make sweeping changes to voting rights, election security, lobbying and campaign-finance law. It would significantly expand public financing for elections via a matching system for small donations, give authorities more resources to investigate foreign agents who lobby in the United States and create a new code of ethics for the Supreme Court.

Roll Call

America Is at a Midterm Crossroads. Let Us Count the Ways

BY LINDSEY MCPHERSON | JANUARY 4, 2019

The package is being introduced as H.R. 1 to show that it's the top priority of the new Democratic majority. Committees with jurisdiction over the measures will hold markups on the legislation before the package is brought to the floor sometime later this month or early in February.

H.R. 1 features a hodgepodge of policies Democrats have long promoted as solutions for protecting voters' rights and expanding access to the polls, reducing the role of so-called dark money in politics, and strengthening federal ethics laws.

The package includes several Democratic bills that have gone nowhere in previous Congresses where Republicans held the House majority. It has broad support of the Democratic Caucus and will provide the new majority, which is roughly split between moderate and progressive members, an opportunity to show they can unify around significant policy changes.

Democrats say making a massive government overhaul package the first major bill they advance will prove to voters who gave them the majority that they're willing to change Washington.

Passing H.R. 1 will "restore integrity to government, so that people can have confidence that government works for the people, not the special interests," Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a floor speech Thursday upon accepting the gavel.

House Dems Target Trump Tax Returns As Part of Lead-Off Ethics Package

BY BROOKE SINGMAN | JANUARY 4, 2019

The package as a whole aims to address voting to make registration and polling access easier for citizens, in addition to tightening election security. But specifically, the legislation requires presidents to disclose at least 10 years of their tax returns to the public, in an apparent swipe at Trump.

…

The reform package, H.R. 1, the "For the People Act," also aims to "end the dominance of big money" and "reduce the role of money" in politics, by requiring political organizations to disclose their big-money contributors and donors, introduces a multiple-matching system for small political donations to "break special interests'," and tightens rules of super PACs.

The bill also bans foreign contributions in campaigns and requires PACs and organizations to disclose the identities of their donors who contribute more than $10,000.

"We heard loud and clear the American people feel left out and want us to clean the culture of corruption, and they want it to be easy, not hard, to register to vote in America," Democracy Reform Task Force Chairman Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., said at a press conference Friday.

The Modesto Bee

Keeping Our Promise to the Valley, Starting Day 1

BY JOSH HARDER (OP-ED) | JANUARY 3, 2019

Last year, I promised that if elected to Congress, I'd put the needs of the Central Valley first.

It's why I committed to refusing all corporate PAC (political action committee) campaign donations. It's also why I helped lead a charge to make anti-corruption legislation a top priority in the new Congress.

I am proud that one of the first bills introduced in the new Congress will be the sweeping anti-corruption legislation we pushed for. There are a lot of issues we need to tackle in the new Congress, but year after year the corrupting influence of big money in politics has been the single biggest obstacle to getting things done.

…

This anti-corruption bill reins in money in politics by requiring Super-PACs and "dark money" groups to disclose their donors. It institutes stricter rules for lobbying and forbids members of Congress from spending public money on first-class airfare. It also stops members from using taxpayer money to pay judgments in sexual harassment cases.

This is an ambitious list, but it's what the moment calls for. It's what the Central Valley deserves. Because at the end of the day, our democracy should be open to every American, not just special interests.

The New York Times

The Watergate Class of ’74 Has Valuable Lessons for Freshman Democrats

BY MARK SCHMITT (OP-ED) | JANUARY 3, 2019

The Democratic caucus has announced plans to make a package of political reforms, including the provisions to encourage small donors long championed by John Sarbanes, Democrat of Maryland, their top priority, bearing the symbolic bill number H.R. 1. In addition to highlighting corruption and the corrosive consequences of the post-Citizens United era, such reforms, if they were ever to pass, could give elected officials a way to stay in better touch with their districts, spending more time with voters and that way keeping the vital, diverse local dimension of politics alive even in a time of deep national polarization.

Democrats Will Restore the Promise of Our Democracy

BY DAVID CICILLINE AND JOHN SARBANES (OP-ED) | JANUARY 3, 2019

Across the political spectrum, hardworking Americans are exasperated with a government that's out of touch with their needs. They watch from the bleachers as the Republican administration and Republican-controlled Congress reward wealthy donors and well-connected special interests, while leaving ordinary American families behind. Whether it's providing massive giveaways to the fossil fuel industry, blocking efforts to lower the costs of prescription drugs, eroding workers' rights or tearing down critical consumer protections, it's clear that our current political system does not put the public's interests first.

That's why heading into this year's midterm elections, Democrats made an important promise to the American people: If elected, we would clean up the chaos and corruption in Washington, fix this rigged system and fight for the people. Despite Republican-led efforts across the country to draw gerrymandered congressional districts, flood our politics with special-interest money and suppress the vote, the American people elected a wave of Democratic candidates who are committed to unrigging our broken political system and making it more responsive to the public. And in the early days of 2019, the new Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives will deliver on that promise. On Day 1, we will introduce H.R. 1 – a sweeping anti-corruption and democracy reform package that will return us to government of, by and for the people.

First, we will rein in the influence of big money in our politics. That means bringing more transparency to our campaign finance system and empowering everyday Americans with a powerful new system that rewards and amplifies small donors.

Second, we will make sure that public servants actually serve the public, not use their office for personal gain. That means strengthening ethics across all three branches of government, ending the revolving door in Washington and reining in lobbyists.

Third, we will protect every citizen's right to vote. That means promoting national automatic voter registration, expanding early and absentee voting, building the case to restore the Voting Rights Act, ending voter roll purging, safeguarding our election infrastructure from foreign attackers and cracking down on partisan gerrymandering.

These are the critical, systemic reforms that will revive our democracy, make it more fair, and importantly, make sure that it actually works for the people. Because when government works for the many, and not the money, we'll be able to deliver policy outcomes that most American want to see. That includes raising wages and creating millions of good-paying jobs; lowering prescription drug costs and improving access to world-class medical treatment; making real investments in our infrastructure; increasing pathways to high-quality education; ending LGBTQ discrimination and enshrining LGBTQ rights by passing the Equality Act, reforming our nation's immigration system and passing the Dream Act, giving rise to universal high-speed internet; and protecting American consumers – among a whole host of other issues.

The American people want real change – not talking points, not gimmicks, not false promises. Democrats get it. That's why we're determined to do whatever it takes to restore our democracy and give Americans their voice and their power back.

New Polling Shows Voters — Including Independents — Want Congress to Pass an Anti-Corruption Bill

BY ELLA NILSEN | JANUARY 3, 2019

Embracing anti-corruption and pro-democracy reforms are very good politics, and there's polling from End Citizens United, shared exclusively with Vox, to back that up. The organization's survey found that 75 percent of 2018 voters in battleground House districts said cracking down on Washington corruption was their top priority, followed by 71 percent who wanted to protect Social Security and Medicare, and 70 percent who listed growing the economy and jobs.

House Democrats are listening; Their first bill of the year is HR 1, a massive anti-corruption bill aimed at stamping out the influence of money in politics, curtailing Washington lobbying, and expanding voting rights.

"We designed it in response to what the public is demanding," said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD), who has been spearheading the legislation.

Intelligencer

Democrats' First Bill in New Congress Would Actually Drain the Swamp

BY SARAH JONES | JANUARY 3, 2018

H.R. 1 isn't just about Trump, or the well-established discrepancy between his campaign rhetoric and his actions as president. For Democrats, the bill is also an exercise in identity formation, a way to preview a corruption message that goes beyond superficial anti-Trumpism by incorporating a real critique of power in Washington. Public financing for elections would make candidates less reliant on major donors and corporate money, a problem that did not originate with Trump's fateful campaign announcement.

…

While anti-corruption rhetoric is popular, HR 1's future viability still depends on the party's commitment to it. But there's some basis for optimism. As the Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, 49 Democratic members of the incoming Congress signed a pledge against taking corporate PAC money, and 47 signed a letter promising to make campaign finance a priority. Two years after the left-wing, populist presidential campaign of U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders highlighted the power of small donors and popularized the rejection of corporate PAC funds, the broader issue of money in politics has become a key talking point for Democrats of various persuasions.

THINKPROGRESS

House Democrats Have a Plan to Actually Drain the Swamp. Senate Republicans Are Going to Hate It.

BY JOHN ISRAEL | JANUARY 3, 2018

House Democrats gained at least 40 seats in the November 2018 midterm elections, in part based on their promise to fight the culture of corruption that festered under the GOP's control. As they usher in the 116th Congress on Thursday, the new House Majority plans to hit the ground running with two packages to actually drain the swamp and take on the for-profit Trump administration. But with Republicans still controlling the Senate, one of those packages is likely going to run into the massive anti-reform roadblock that is Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

As promised, incoming Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and her new majority plan to kick off the new Congress with a major sweeping anti-corruption bill — designated as H.R. 1 — and a series of House rule changes (H. Res. 6) that will address weaknesses in the House's own operating policies.

The Boston Globe

First, Let's Fix the Political System

BY LORI TRAHAN (OP-ED) | JANUARY 2, 2019

Over the course of nearly a year on the campaign trail, I heard voters time and again express deep-seated frustration and cynicism with the way Washington works. What was holding up common-sense gun safety measures? Why do prescription drugs cost so much? Why are working families struggling to pay the mortgage, put their kids through school, and save for retirement? The American people rightly view Washington as perpetuating a rigged system that tilts for special interests over families. It's not surprising that voters' approval of Congress stands at an abysmal 21 percent. It's also not surprising that public trust in government remains at an all-time low, at a historic 18 percent. Before the 116th Congress can tackle the many problems facing working families, we need to fix our system and restore faith in democracy.

…

As part of the largest Democratic freshman class elected to the House since Watergate, this Congress — and particularly my freshmen colleagues — have a mandate to fix problems in our political system, to unrig our democracy, to unmoor the entrenched special interests in Washington, and to usher in a new standard of ethics and integrity that ensures that public servants serve the public, not line their own pockets.

My first act as a member of Congress will be to cosponsor H.R. 1, a comprehensive package of reforms to our system of government. I hope and expect that the House of Representatives will move quickly to pass this important legislation.

The New York Times

Cleaning the Congressional Stables

BY THE EDITORIAL BORAD | DECEMBER 31, 2018

From petty grifting to allegations of treason, the early Trump era has offered a survey course in how to diminish public faith in democratic institutions. All signs are that the coming years will prove even more instructive.

Which is why it's crucial for Democratic lawmakers to stay focused on and fired up about their emerging, much-hyped crusade to clean up Washington. Inspired by the rolling spectacle of Trumpian corruption, Democrats ran hard on a midterm message of reform. They pitched an overhaul of the nation's political system built around a trio of broad aims: improving access to and the integrity of the voting system, strengthening ethics laws and slashing the influence of big money.

It was a message for the moment. Americans are fed up with feeling that the system is rigged against them — to coin a phrase — and itching for leaders who will unrig it. In a September poll for NBC News and The Wall Street Journal, 77 percent of registered voters cited "reducing the influence of special interests and corruption in Washington" as either the "single most" or a "very important" factor in determining their vote for Congress. (Only "the economy" scored higher, with 78 percent.)

In October, 107 Democratic candidates delivered an open letter to Capitol Hill, calling for reform to be a top priority and vowing to make it one if elected. Dozens of those crusaders are set to take over the House on Thursday. Their voters expect them to get busy fulfilling that promise.

Enter H.R. 1, a comprehensive package of revisions to current political practice that House Democrats are looking to introduce in the opening weeks of the next Congress. While the details are still being hashed out, H.R. 1 will attempt to: establish nationwide automatic voter registration; promote early and online voting; end partisan gerrymandering; expand conflict-of-interest laws; increase oversight of lobbyists; require the disclosure of presidential tax returns; strengthen disclosure of campaign donations; set up a system of small-donor matching funds for congressional candidates; and revive the moribund matching-fund system for presidential campaigns. A plan for repairing the Voting Rights Act will move along a separate track.

The package is, by design, ambitious. Now is not the time to piddle with closing this loophole and improving that reporting rule, say reformers. Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland, the head of the caucus's Democracy Reform Task Force and the father of H.R. 1, said that House passage of such a package would be "the Big Bang moment for creating a new universe of empowerment."

Cheesy metaphors aside, central to realizing any new universe is one of the package's boldest measures: a voluntary matching-fund system to multiply the power of small donors. As this system is currently proposed, candidates would receive public matching funds at a six-to-one ratio for donations of up to $200 in exchange for abiding by a lower dollar limit on individual contributions — say, $1,000 rather than the current limit of $2,700.

Such a change wouldn't stem the flood of outside money deforming the political system, but it would give candidates an alternative way to run — and provide not-so-rich Americans a greater sense that their voices can be heard. It is the foundation on which other anti-corruption efforts rest, reformers say, with a warning that if lawmakers don't address this problem, their credibility will remain in the toilet.

The data suggest that the public has an appetite for taking on campaign finance. A Pew Research poll from May found that 77 percent of Americans favor "limits on the amount of money individuals and organizations" can spend on campaigns. (This includes 71 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents.) Sixty-five percent believe that new laws could effectively reduce the influence of money in politics.

At this point, the hunger for reform is so fierce among the Democratic base that the caucus will need to work to temper expectations. While H.R. 1 is near the top of incoming Speaker Nancy Pelosi's to-do list, the package will take a while to make its way to a floor vote. At least five committees have oversight of pieces of it, and even among Democrats there are competing visions for various provisions that must be worked through. Democratic House leaders are hoping to get a bill passed early in the year. And then it is likely to go nowhere fast.

One reason H.R. 1 can be so big and bold is that it is mostly an expression of what Democrats would like to do rather than what has any real shot at moving through this divided government. Even staunch fans of the measure expect the Republican majority leader, Mitch McConnell, to jam it up in the Senate. The phlegmatic Mr. McConnell may not get worked up about much, but over the years he has consistently displayed a fierce passion for strangling anything resembling campaign finance reform.

The package could prove awkward for Republican members in other areas as well. For instance, measures to make voting easier might be a hard sell in a party that appears to have so vigorously committed to curtailing voter access.

Realistically speaking, enacting even pieces of a bill like H.R. 1 is more of a medium- to longish-term legislative goal. But this does not diminish the urgency of passing the package in the House as a declaration of Democrats' commitment. Its champions seem to grasp this. Mr. Sarbanes expressed optimism that serious revisions could be achieved within a couple of election cycles — but only if Democrats move quickly to get people fired up and then "keep the pressure on."

Even the most ethically bankrupt politician can spout drivel about "draining the swamp." For the next couple of years, Democrats' challenge is to keep this issue hot enough to make life uncomfortable for reform foes like Mr. McConnell — and to make clear to voters what must be done if they want to take this crusade beyond one chamber of Congress.

USA TODAY

Democratic House Will Address Most Important Civil Rights Issue in Half Century

BY LAWRENCE LESSIG (OP-ED) | DECEMBER 19, 2018

In its first act next January, the new House is scheduled to take up the most important civil rights bill in half a century. The bill signals a profoundly comprehensive understanding of the flaws that have evolved within our democracy. That it is scheduled first screams a recognition that these flaws must be fixed first, if we're to have a Congress that is free to do the other critically important work that Congress must do. But that the bill is all but invisible to anyone outside the beltway signals the most important gap left in this most important fight to make representative democracy in America possible — if not again, then finally.

The bill — denominated H.R. 1 — is a radically comprehensive and practical fix to all but one of the critical failures of our evolved system of representative democracy. Crafted primarily by Representative John Sarbanes (D-MD), the bill recognizes that there are multiple flaws within our democracy and that these flaws must be addressed together.

The Washington Post

The Democratic House Is Taking on Ethics Reform First. We Need It.

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | DECEMBER 15, 2018

House Democrats won a majority in the next Congress not because they are unified behind Medicare-for-all — they are not — or because they favor an infrastructure plan — which President Trump does, too. They won in some previously GOP-friendly areas because they promised an alternative to Mr. Trump's undignified, cynical behavior.

They appear to have received voters' message. The first major action the new Democratic majority plans to take next year is not the embrace of a left-wing ideological hobby horse, but an ambitious plan to tighten up the nation's democratic procedures, combat big money in politics and enhance political ethics rules. Senate Republicans may balk at the bill, set to be the first filed in the House next year. But they will have a hard time explaining why.

The plan will be finalized over the coming weeks, but the outlines are becoming clear. Democrats will make the biggest push to fight money in politics since the early 2000s, finally adapting the nation's rules to the reality ushered in by the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling. The origins of the dark money sloshing around the political system would have to be disclosed.

If the early indications hold, there would also be a new public financing system for candidates that would amplify the power of small-value donations. Every dollar donated would be matched at a high rate — perhaps 6 to 1 — by public funds if candidates voluntarily submitted to the small-donor program. Local-level experiments with this sort of public financing program have shown promise. If

Democrats are to make a statement on how the political system should be working, this is a crucial element of the bill that must remain in the package.

Also important are elections reforms, which would make the process of voting safer and less of a hassle. Voter registration should be automatic unless individuals opt out, as is the case in California and Oregon. Early voting should be readily available. Election security should be bolstered well before the 2020 election. The nation must invest more money in better voting equipment. Congress has wide authority over how states conduct federal elections. It can require much more than it now does. Also well within its power is updating and repairing the Voting Rights Act to better protect minorities' access to the ballot box.

After two years of seemingly nonstop scandal, ethics reforms are badly needed. All presidents should be required to release their tax returns. Members of Congress should not be able to serve on corporate boards.

A proposal that reflects these priorities would not be some loony left-wing monstrosity. Most — if not all — of these reforms should be bipartisan. If "H.R. 1" turns out to be nothing more than a messaging bill, it will reflect more on the opponents who blocked it than on the new Democratic majority pushing it forward.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

From Day One, Democrats Will Fight to Restore Ethics to Politics

BY MARY GAY SCANLON AND JOHN SARBANES (OP-ED) | DECEMBER 14, 2018

As we speak with newly elected members of Congress from across the country, we hear one loud, clear, and consistent refrain — that many of them decided to run for office to restore faith in our democratic institutions and return us to a government of, by, and for the people.

Democratic leadership in Congress has heard this call too, and has stated unequivocally that the very first order of business in the 116th Congress will be to introduce and pass a comprehensive reform bill that will diminish the role of money in politics, restore ethics and integrity to our government, and make sure that every American has access to the ballot box.

On Election Day, Americans held a referendum on the kind of government they want to see. Voters here in Pennsylvania and across the country made clear they want to reestablish the shared ideals that have served as the bedrock of our democracy for more than two centuries. They want to end the corrosive influence of wealthy donors and well-connected special interests. They want public servants to serve the public, not strive for self-enrichment. And they want to make it easier, not harder, to vote.

…

To the people of Pennsylvania and all Americans, we have heard your calls for change, and Democrats stand ready to give you the government you deserve.

Big Washington Clean-Up Bill Leads House Democrats' List

BY DAIVD MORGAN | DECEMBER 14, 2018

When the Democrats take over the U.S. House of Representatives in three weeks, their first order of business is expected to be a wide-ranging bill about political corruption, voter disenfranchisement and cleaning up campaign finance.

…

H.R. 1 is about putting a positive set of reforms out there to fix some of the systemic problems we have," said Democratic Representative John Sarbanes, who is leading the effort.

…

The bill is expected to be introduced soon after the 2019-20 Congress convenes on Jan. 3, with hearings to follow. House committees will prepare separate segments of the bill for a House floor vote, due within the first 100 days of 2019.

THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

Republicans Who Slap Voters in the Face May Be in for a Nasty Surprise

BY ELIZA NEWLIN CARNEY | DECEMBER 13, 2018

Republicans in Michigan and Wisconsin who have moved aggressively to steamroll voters and strip power from incoming Democratic officials appear confident that they will pay no political price, and many analysts seem to concur.... But that assumption overlooks two powerful lessons from the recent midterms: One, that gerrymandering can backfire, particularly when the political winds shift dramatically. And two, that voters are increasingly fed up with assaults on democracy.

...

In the recent midterms, several Democrats won in strongly GOP districts gerrymandered for Republicans, including the Eighth and 11th Districts of Michigan, the First District of South Carolina, the Fifth District of Oklahoma, and the Seventh and 32nd Districts of Texas. House Democrats in part credit their anti-corruption platform, and have pledged to approve HR 1, a reform package built on voting rights, campaign finance, redistricting, and ethics changes, as their first order of business in January.

“It’s folks from across the political spectrum who are demanding this,” said Maryland Democrat John Sarbanes, who chairs the House’s Democracy Reform Task Force, at a Capitol Hill press conference last month. “It’s not just Democrats. It’s independents, it’s Republicans.”

USA TODAY

Republicans Are Rigging Democracy. We Will Fix It, With or Without Them

BY BEN RAY LUJÁN AND JOHN SARBANES (OP-ED) | DECEMBER 11, 2018

The first legislation that the new Democratic House majority will pass next year in the 116th Congress is a sweeping package of changes to our campaign finance, ethics and voting laws. We will shine a light on the dark money in our politics, and empower small donors to own elections and drive the agenda in Washington. We will demand that public servants work for the public interest, not the special interest. We will make it easier, not harder, to vote. Together, these bold reforms will restore and protect the voice of the American people in our democracy.

Democrats should not have to pass these reforms alone.

Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush all renewed and strengthened the Voting Rights Act. The late Republican Sen. John McCain joined with progressive Sen. Russ Feingold to pass the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act — the most significant update of campaign finance laws since Watergate. In response to the lobbying scandals of the mid-2000s, 411 bipartisan members of the House and 83 bipartisan senators passed an ethics reform bill that President George W. Bush signed into law.

Democrats in the House are ready to pass bold reforms. We sincerely hope that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle will come to the table to help us restore power to the American people. But if the Republican-led Senate and the

Republican president choose not to help fix our democracy, we will look to the American people to replace them with Democrats who will.

House Democrats' Big Democracy Reform Package Is Good Policy, and Smart Politics

BY LEE DRUTMAN (OPINION) | DECEMBER 10, 2018

There's a lot in the bill, including a number of ethics and disclosure and election security proposals that should be commonsense. But at heart, there are four big-ticket items that would be standalone news on their own: a small-donor matching system for campaign finance, mandatory independent redistricting commissions, automatic voter registration, and felon reenfranchisement. Collectively, this is the most transformative pro-democracy package in decades.

…

Certainly, a few of the more modest ethics and disclosure provisions in the package, as well as the election security provisions, could win enough bipartisan support to become law as standalone bills. This would be good.

But the bigger power of H.R. 1 is that it commits Democrats to being the democracy reform party, and gives them something credible and very popular to run on in 2020. Passing this legislation now puts democracy reform atop the Democrats' agenda. This is a very promising development.

NBC NEWS

House Democrats and Nancy Pelosi Waste No time, Announce Bill Tackling America's Corrupt Campaign Finance System

BY FRED WERTHEIMER (OP-ED) | DECEMBER 8, 2018

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has revealed that political reform will be the first order of business for the Democratic House of Representatives in January. On Nov. 30, she announced that House Democrats would begin the new congressional session with an unprecedented package of reforms designed to repair our broken political system and strength our democracy.

The coming legislation, already known as H.R. 1, involves a holistic approach — covering campaign finance, voting rights and government ethics reforms. One essential feature is a new way to finance campaigns that would combat big money's corrupting influence in American politics.

Wealthy donors and special interests now drown elections in an ocean of influence-seeking and dark money. We can greatly diminish their corrupting influence on government decisions by flooding elections with small contributions, bolstered by robust public matching funds.

…

A difficult battle lies ahead. We are dealing with power exercised by the super-rich and special interests through political donations. This is a fight that must be won to end the corrupt, rigged system in Washington — and protect the integrity and health of our democracy.

PBS NEWSHOUR

The House Democrats' Blueprint for Taking on Trump and Republicans

BY JESSICA YARVIN | DECEMBER 6, 2018

House Democrats' first order of business in the next Congress will be a wide-ranging reforms package aimed at increasing access to the ballot box, overhauling the country's campaign finance rules, and codifying several ethics rules into law.

The ambitious piece of legislation is unlikely to make it through the Senate, where Republicans will hold a comfortable majority in the incoming Congress.

But by backing the bill, numbered HR-1, as their first official legislative proposal of the new Congress, House Democrats have laid out a blueprint for how they plan to govern as the majority and some of the ways they plan to take on the GOP-controlled Senate and President Donald Trump.

"We've actually got a plan to try to restore the democracy and give people their voice back," Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., who is spearheading the effort, said in an interview. "That's the kind of the foundational thing before you can go do anything else."

Newsweek

How House Democrats Plan to Pressure Trump, GOP Into Passing Campaign Finance, Ethics Reforms

BY RAMSEY TOUCHBERRY | DECEMBER 6, 2018

On Thursday, Democrats revealed a strategy to sell the sweeping reform proposal to the American people and Republicans: introducing key sections piece-by-piece, convincing the American people to support it, then pressuring congressional Republicans to pass the whole package.

…

Democrats say the bill will be House Resolution 1, a designation typically reserved for the most important legislation the House majority party intends to pass.

…

Not all the details of the Democrats' H.R. 1 are yet known, since the party continues to work on it privately and won't file it until the new session. What is known is that the bill will consist of three main categories: campaign finance, ethics and voting laws.

…

The strategy to pass such a measure, said Democratic Representative John Sarbanes during a call with reporters Thursday, is to “come out strong” supporting the bill in January, creating momentum that puts "pressure on all members" on "both sides of the aisle."

HUFFPOST

Democrats Have Their Package of Reform Bills in Hand. Here's How It All Came Together.

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | DECEMBER 1, 2018

Flanked by newly elected freshman lawmakers Friday, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi revealed the Democratic Party's first piece of legislation for 2019: a package of voting rights, campaign finance and ethics reforms that is meant to help restore integrity in government, one of the party's key campaign promises in the 2018 midterm elections.

The story of how the bill came to life shows how Democrats have long prepared for this moment to push a new set of reforms to change the way Washington works.

…

That process has been led by Rep. John Sarbanes, a six-term congressman from Maryland who became a fierce advocate of campaign finance reform after growing frustrated with the way political candidates are pressured to raise money from big donors.

…

This successful advocacy within the caucus moved Pelosi to appoint him as head the party's Democracy Reform Task Force in February 2017. He set out to craft and build support for democracy reform legislation and respond to the endless stream of ethical malfeasance emanating from the Trump administration. Pelosi empowered Sarbanes and the task force by putting no limits on its work.

“She wasn’t prescriptive beyond saying, in a sense, collect the best evidence as to where and how our democratic system is failing and start assembling good ideas and proposals for how we can fix that,” Sarbanes said.

With the help of a diverse group of vice chairs, Sarbanes held town halls and roundtables around the country, meeting with pollsters and reform advocates and debating legislation with fellow lawmakers. This enabled the task force to build broad-based support and empower lawmakers from every part of the country.

…

The work of the task force was rolled into Democrats’ campaign messaging as the “Better Deal for Our Democracy” in May. Candidates had already adopted reformist postures on their own by rejecting corporate PAC contributions and endorsing broad reforms. These ideas were popular topics on the campaign trail, where voters held strong beliefs that nothing could be done in Washington because of the corrupting influence of money.

…

Sarbanes campaigned with candidates including Malinowski and Spanberger to push the party’s new democracy reform message with the aim of electing a new class dedicated to reform to help carry the legislation over the finish line once in office.

…

Sarbanes campaigned with candidates including Malinowski and Spanberger to push the party’s new democracy reform message with the aim of electing a new class dedicated to reform to help carry the legislation over the finish line once in office.

…

The incoming lawmakers will still have time to add to the bill in the coming months. Sarbanes and the task force's vice chairs are still meeting with members to discuss their ideas. He will address the Congressional Progressive Caucus about the bill next week. And the bill will go through three committees with jurisdiction: administration, judiciary, and oversight and government reform.

Democrats, both newly elected and long-serving, say they believe that these reforms must be done first to be able to tackle the other issues they care about, such as lowering pharmaceutical prices, reforming trade deals and enacting gun control.

…

Sarbanes says that even if Republicans torpedo their legislation, it's a winning issue for Democrats. The party, he says, must brand itself as the anti-corruption party not only because it's the right thing to do but because it's what the public demands.

"I'd love to live in a world where the right thing to do is also a political winner," Sarbanes said.

The Washington Post

Democrats to Unveil Political Reform Legislation As 'H.R. 1'

BY MIKE DEBONIS | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

House Democratic leaders on Friday unveiled the outline of a broad political overhaul bill that will include provisions for public financing of elections, voting rights reforms and new ethics strictures for federal officials.

The bill has been in the works for months as part of Democrats' "For the People" campaign platform, a framework that helped them win the House majority in this month's midterm elections.

Numerous outside groups aligned with Democrats have pushed the party's House leaders to schedule a reform bill as their first order of business, and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) announced before the election that the bill would be designated "H.R. 1" — a symbolic title meant to emphasize its importance, even if it is unlikely to be the first piece of legislation to get a House vote in the new Congress.

"It's folks from across the political spectrum that are demanding this," said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the principal author of the plan, who stood alongside Pelosi and several members of the incoming freshman class at a news conference.

Associated Press

House Democrats' 1st Bill Aims for Sweeping Reforms

BY LISA MASCARO | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

House Democrats on Friday unveiled more details of their first bill for the new Congress, a good-government package that would limit big money in politics, make it easier for citizens to vote and require presidents to disclose their tax returns.

The legislation, called H.R. 1, sets the tone for Democrats as they take the majority in January, though prospects for passage are murky. Republicans will still be in charge of the Senate and the White House, and it's unlikely they'll sign off on some of the proposals, which are still in the works.

Still, Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi voiced optimism about prospects for the legislation.

"Our best friend in this debate is the public," Pelosi said. "We believe that it will have great support and that message won't get lost on the Senate or on the president of the United States."

…

Several incoming Democratic representatives joined Pelosi and the bill's primary author, Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., in promoting the package. They said that tackling ethics and transparency out of the gate in 2019 could help with other priorities such as expanding access to affordable health care and immigration reform.

House Democrats Unveil Their First Bill in the Majority: A Sweeping Anti-Corruption Proposal

BY ELLA NILSEN | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

House Democrats unveiled details of their first bill in the new Congress on Friday — a sweeping anti-corruption bill aimed at stamping out the influence of money in politics and expanding voting rights.

This is House Resolution 1 — the first thing House Democrats will tackle after the speaker's vote in early January. To be clear, this legislation has little-to-no chance of passing the Republican-controlled Senate or being signed by President Donald Trump.

But by making anti-corruption their No. 1 priority, House Democrats are throwing down the gauntlet for Republicans. A vast majority of Americans want to get the influence of money out of politics, and want Congress to pass laws to do so, according to a 2018 Pew Research survey. Given Trump's multitude of scandals, it looks bad for Republicans to be the party opposing campaign finance reform — especially going into 2020.

House Democratic Priorities in New Congress: Trump Tax Returns and Tackling Corruption

BY LAUREN FOX AND CLARE FORAN | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

House Democrats on Friday unveiled the outline for their first legislative push in the new Congress -- a bill that would aimed at substantial government reforms on everything from voter rights to campaign finance to ethics requirements in Washington to the documents presidential candidates must hand over when they win the nomination.

…

Longtime House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, who is vying to reclaim the title of House speaker next year, said on Friday at a news conference on the legislative push that the new class of incoming House Democrats is focused on "integrity in government."

Pelosi added that it "will be transformative to Congress when we reduce the role of money, amplify the voice of everyday Americans so that they know that their voices matter."

…

Dean Phillips, an incoming Democratic lawmaker from Minnesota, said during the news conference that voters want House Democrats to "tackle the culture of corruption in Washington."

"It's time to elevate the common interest over special interests, time to return to a government that is of the people, by the people, and for the people. It's as simple as that," Phillips said.

A fact sheet on the legislation describes three main goals: improving voting access by making it easier to vote, pushing back on big money in politics through a variety of reforms and making sure that "public officials work for the public interest."

The effort to debut a legislative package even before the next Congress starts is an indication that House Democrats are already working to push a unified message to the American public about what they stand for, what they will do in power, and how they will deliver for voters.

POLITICO

First Bill for House Democratic Majority: Campaign Finance, Ethics Reform

BY MAGGIE SEVERNS | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

House Democrats on Friday unveiled a sweeping reform proposal that would create automatic voter registration and enact campaign finance and ethics changes, the first bill they plan to push when they take charge of the chamber next year.

The bill will receive the designation of H.R.1 in the next Congress, a sign of its importance to House leaders and to newly elected members who ran campaigns promising to clean up Washington. It is expected to receive early attention in the next Congress.

…

"There's a lot of people out there in the country who feel right now that Washington doesn't listen to them, their democracy doesn't work for them, and they're kind of left out and locked out," Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), who chairs the Democracy Reform Task Force and has been spearheading work on the bill, said at a press conference to unveil it.

"It's a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make a bold, proud declaration back to the American people that we get it, we hear you, we want to give you your voice back," he said.

THE NEW YORKER

With H.R. 1, Democrats Announce a New Program for Electoral Reform

BY OSITA NWANEVU | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

When the new Congress convenes in January, the very first item on its to-do list will be H.R. 1, a package of good-government and election reforms unveiled Friday by Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and a group of legislators led by John Sarbanes, of Maryland. Its contents haven't been fully composed yet, but Pelosi and Sarbanes previewed its three parts in a Washington Post op-ed earlier this week: a voting-rights plank that includes updates to the Voting Rights Act, measures to address gerrymandering, and automatic voter registration; an ethics plank that requires the President to disclose his or her tax returns and bans the use of taxpayer funds for congressional sexual-harassment settlements; and a campaign-finance plank that offers matching federal funds for small-dollar donations and requires super pacs to publicly disclose their donors.

…

H.R. 1 will be the culmination of years of anxiety and anger among Democrats about the impact that voter suppression, gerrymandering, and post Citizens-United campaign finance have had on their electoral prospects and on American democracy as a whole. But its proposals are already a step behind those of progressive activists, which include granting statehood to Puerto Rico and D.C.

…

H.R. 1 will not satisfy such demands, but it makes clear that reforming our democracy now resides near the top of the Party's agenda.

House Democrats' First Bill in Power to Focus on Political Reform

BY MIKE ALLEN | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

House Democratic leaders will announce a political reform bill symbolically named "H.R. 1" on Friday as their first order of business upon assuming power early next year, targeting election financing, voting rights reforms and more, per the Washington Post.

The big picture: The bill sets the tone for Democrats' priorities once they retake the House in the age of President Trump under presumptive Speaker Nancy Pelosi. It'll seek to expand voting access for Americans and grant more federal money to strengthen state election security, per the AP. And, in a broadside to some of Trump's most controversial actions, the bill would create a Supreme Court code of ethics and require presidents to release their tax returns.

UPI

House Democrats Promote Anti-Corruption Legislation

BY DANIELLE HAYNES | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

House Democrats unveiled an anti-corruption bill Friday, the group's first legislation since taking control of the chamber earlier this month.

Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi of California announced House Resolution 1 during a news conference at the Capitol. She called the legislation "transformative."

"One of the issues that emerged in the campaign ... is the integrity of government as part of our for-the-people agenda," she said. The legislation seeks to reduce the role of money in the government and protect voting rights. It will "amplify the voice of every American," Pelosi said.

A Pew poll released in May found that 77 percent of Americans believe there should be limits on the amount of money individuals and groups should spend on campaigns. Sixty-five percent said new laws could be effective in reducing the impact of money on politics. "Our best friend in this debate is the public," Pelosi said.

"We believe it will have great support. "Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., who joined Pelosi at the news conference, said the plan was to have a bill ready for a vote Jan. 3, the first day of the new session in Congress.

THE BALTIMORE SUN

Sarbanes, Fellow Democrats Say First Bill of New U.S. House Will Seek to 'Drain the Swamp' with Reforms

BY JEFF BARKER | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

Rep. John Sarbanes and other House Democrats announced plans Friday for their first bill of the new, Democratic-controlled House of Representatives — a political reform measure they say would "drain the swamp" in a way President Donald Trump has not.

The measure contains ethics reform, campaign finance reform and voting rights protections, and is designed "to make a powerful statement right out of the gate," said Sarbanes, the Baltimore County Democrat who is the measure's principal author. It is to be introduced when the new Congress convenes Jan. 3.

Sarbanes chairs a government reform task force whose principal concerns — including minimizing the influence of special interests and ensuring fair elections — are poised to receive more attention in the new Congress. Democratic leaders believe reform issues resonated with voters in the Nov. 6 midterm elections, and they are eager to pursue bills such as Sarbanes'.

"Our best friend in this debate is the public," said Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the California Democrat nominated by the party to be the next House speaker.

She appeared at a news conference with Sarbanes and said his legislation would be the "first order of business" in the new Congress.

SALON

House Dems Will Aim to Stunt the Influence of Big Money in Politics in First Vote of New Congress

BY SHIRA TARLO | NOVEMBER 30, 2018

House Democrats on Friday revealed the outline of a sweeping anti-corruption legislative package that aims to stunt the influence of big money in politics, expand voting rights and require presidential nominees to release their tax returns — a direct rebuke of President Donald Trump, who has so far refused to do just that.

The bill, which will receive the designation of H.R.1 in the next Congress, would require all political organizations to disclose their donors, call to "end partisan gerrymandering," push for national automatic voter registration and create a national strategy to protect voting systems from outside interference, the Washington Post reports. It is expected to be the first proposal Democrats plan to push in Congress when they seize control of the lower chamber this January.

"There's a lot of people out there in the country who feel right now that Washington doesn't listen to them – their democracy doesn't work for them – and they're kind of left out and locked out," Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), the principal author of the bill, said at a press conference unveiling the legislation, according to Politico. Sarbanes is a longtime advocate of campaign finance reform and has disavowed corporate PAC money.

The Washington Post

The Democratic Majority's First Order of Business: Restore Democracy

BY NANCY PELOSI AND JOHN SARBANES (OP-ED) | NOVEMBER 25, 2018

Earlier this month, Americans went to the polls and sent a powerful message: The election not only was a resounding verdict against Republicans' assault on Americans' health care and wages, but it also was a vote to rescue our broken democracy.

In the face of a torrent of special-interest dark money, partisan gerrymandering and devious vote-suppression schemes, voters elected a House Democratic majority determined to bring real change to restore our democracy.

During the campaign, Democrats declared unequivocally that we would clean up corruption to make Washington work for the people. We pledged to reduce the role of money in politics, to restore ethics and integrity to government, and to strengthen voting laws.

We now have our marching orders. The new Democratic House is ready to deliver with H.R. 1: a bold reform package to restore the promise of our democracy — a government of, by and for the people.

First, let's end the dominance of money in politics. For far too long, big-money and corporate special interests have undermined the will of the people and subverted policymaking in Washington — enabling soaring health-care costs and prescription drug prices, undermining clean air and clean water for our children, and blocking long-overdue wage increases for hard-working Americans.
So let's rein in the unaccountable "dark money" unleashed by the Supreme Court's Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission decision by requiring all

political organizations to disclose their donors and by shutting down the shell game of big-money donations to super PACs. We must also empower hard-working Americans in our democracy by building a 21st-century campaign-finance system — combining small-donor incentives and matching support — to increase and multiply the power of small donors. Wealthy special interests shouldn't be able to buy more influence than the workers, consumers and families who should be our priority in Washington.

Next, let's make sure that when public servants get to Washington, they serve the public. Restoring the public's trust means closing the revolving door between government and private industries, and imposing strong new ethics laws to stop officials from using their public office for personal gain. To do so, we will expand conflict-of-interest laws, ban members of Congress from serving on for-profit boards, revamp the oversight authority of the Office of Government Ethics and prohibit public servants from receiving bonus payments from their former employers to enter government. We'll curb the influence of high-powered Washington insiders by closing lobbyist registration loopholes that allow big-money power brokers and foreign actors to operate in the shadows. That way, well-connected special interests won't be able to steer the policy agenda away from the priorities of the American public.

Finally, let's make it easier, not harder, to vote. Since the Supreme Court took the teeth out of the Voting Rights Act, Republican political operatives have increasingly turned to blatant schemes to make it more difficult for the Americans left behind to participate in elections — a narrow agenda all too often targeted at communities of color.

We must renew the Voting Rights Act to protect every citizen's access to the ballot box and restore the vital safeguard of pre-clearance requirements for areas with a history of voter suppression. We will promote national automatic voter registration, bolster our critical election infrastructure against foreign attackers, and put an end to partisan gerrymandering once and for all by establishing

federal guidelines to outlaw the practice. No American should face hours-long lines, broken voting machines or rules rigged to keep their vote from being counted in our elections.

These are the reforms that will ultimately change the balance of power in Washington. When we get dark money out of politics, clean up corruption and ensure fair elections, we will dismantle the ability of special interests to stack the deck of our democracy and our economy against hard-working Americans.

And with a system that works for the people, we will deliver policy outcomes that make life better for all Americans: We will lower health-care costs and out-of-control prices for prescription drugs. We will rebuild the United States' infrastructure, raise the minimum wage and put leverage back in the hands of workers and consumers. We will finally advance common-sense, bipartisan solutions to prevent gun violence. We will confront discrimination with the Equality Act , pass the Dream Act to protect the patriotic young undocumented immigrants who came here as children, and take the first step toward comprehensive immigration reform.

We have a responsibility to honor the vision of our founders, the sacrifices made to expand the right to vote and our duty to the American people. With bold action to fix what is broken in our democracy, we can make progress for working families and renew Americans' trust in Congress to tackle the issues that matter most.

the Nation

Americans Not Only Favor Democrats, They Favor Democracy

BY ADAM EICHEN | NOVEMBER 20, 2018

House Democrats have pledged that the first bill introduced in the new Congress will be an omnibus pro-democracy package, which will reportedly include many of the policies voters favored on Tuesday: automatic voter registration, public financing for congressional elections, and independent redistricting commissions for congressional districts. The bill would also restore the Voting Rights Act, which was gutted by the Supreme Court's Shelby decision in 2013.

Democratic Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland, who authored the blueprint for this package, told The Nation that the Democrats plan to deliver on the "clear message" sent in this election to "make government more responsive to the people." This democracy omnibus bill, according to Sarbanes, will "end the dominance of big money in our politics, ensure that public servants behave in Washington and make it easier, not harder, to vote."

There's no doubt: progress was made this election cycle to unrig our democracy. But these wins didn't happen in a vacuum. Over the past few years, there has been a growing democracy movement to advocate for fundamental democracy reforms. Activists across the country, from North Carolina to Alaska, have organized across identities and partisan divisions, often in the face of tremendous opposition, to make sure all voters have a voice and can participate in our elections. The Democratic Party would do well to support this movement. After all, it's what the American people want.

Associated Press

How Democrats Will Rule: Roadmap Drafted for House Overhaul

BY LISA MASCARO | NOVEMBER 15, 2018

House Democrats unveiled a draft rules package Thursday for how they would govern the chamber when they take over the majority in the new Congress next year.

The changes are large and small, from a requirement to post legislation at least 72 hours before action is taken to restoring some floor rights for the resident commissioner from Puerto Rico and other nonvoting delegates.

…

The topics touch on several areas — budgeting, oversight, diversity and the legislative process, among others.

It ensures that the first bill of the new Congress, H.R. 1, will be a sweeping package of good-government reforms, with provisions on voting rights and campaign finance. It is being crafted by Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md.

Democrats Say Their First Bill Will Focus on Strengthening Democracy at Home

BY PETER OVERBY | NOVEMBER 12, 2018

Democrats will take control of the U.S. House in January with big items topping their legislative to-do list: Remove obstacles to voting, close loopholes in government ethics law and reduce the influence of political money.

Party leaders say the first legislative vote in the House will come on H.R. 1, a magnum opus of provisions that Democrats believe will strengthen U.S. democratic institutions and traditions.

"It's three very basic things that I think the public wants to see," said Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.), who spearheads campaign finance and government ethics efforts for the House Democratic Caucus. He said H.R. 1 will "demonstrate that we hear that message loud and clear."

Momentum Builds for Dems to Take on Campaign Finance Reform

BY MICHAEL BURKE | NOVEMBER 11, 2018

Momentum is building within the House Democratic Caucus to move aggressively on campaign finance reform next year after candidates promised the issue would be at the center of their agenda if they took back the majority.

Half of the new Democrats elected to Congress have refused to take corporate PAC money, according to the grass-roots organization End Citizens United, which advocates for campaign finance reform.

Separately, more than 100 Democratic House candidates signed a letter sent last month calling for sweeping reforms, including the disclosure of all political spending. At least 34 of those candidates won their elections, according to End Citizens United, with a few races remaining too close to call.

Members of the party's leadership also said that campaign finance reform would be at the top of the agenda, a pledge they've since doubled down upon.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said Wednesday the party would work to "reduce the role of dark, special interest money" as she talked about the new majority's workload and priorities.

RAWSTORY

Investigations Are Coming: Here's How Democrats Will Make Government Ethics the Priority in 2019

BY AMANDA MARCOTTE | NOVEMBER 10, 2018

There's a "desire of the everyday Americans to get their voice back," Rep. John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat, told me on the phone Thursday. He said the newly elected first-time congressional representatives report that their constituents want restoring democracy and accountability to government to be a top-line priority once the Democratic majority is gaveled in.

Sarbanes intends to lead the way by introducing a bill that would shore up the Voting Rights Act, closes some loopholes in ethics laws and regulate campaign finance more strictly. He says he has the support of Democratic leadership and plans for this bill to be the first one offered in the 2019 legislative session.

Bringing the bill up as HR1, denoting that it's the first bill of the year, will be a "big-bang, thunderclap statement back to the electorate," Sarbanes said, letting voters know the Democrats have put a priority on ending government corruption and protecting the right to vote.

Following House Win, Democrats Vow to Clean Up Capitol Hill and Trump Administration

BY PETER OVERBY | NOVEMBER 7, 2018

AILSA CHANG, HOST: Cleaning up Washington was a campaign rallying cry for Democrats. They promised to go after corruption in the Trump administration, and they vow that their first piece of legislation will aim to strengthen integrity in government.

…

PETER OVERBY, BYLINE: … But before the House Democrats investigate the administration, their first order of business in January will be a bill to fix some other problems. Leading the charge is Maryland Congressman John Sarbanes.

JOHN SARBANES: It's three very basic things that I think the public wants to see. Make it easy and not hard to vote in America. Serve with ethics and integrity. And don't get tangled up in the money.

OVERBY: By the money, he means political cash. This election, money came at campaigns from more places and in larger volumes than ever before. Super PACs and political nonprofits were prominent. But at the same time, small donors showered record sums on many of the Democratic candidates. The reform bill would promote more small-dollar giving. The other provisions of the bill would restore protections in the Voting Rights Act and close loopholes in ethics laws. Sarbanes said the midterms offer a launching pad for the bill.

TIME

Democrats Just Won the House. Here's What They Plan to Do First.

BY ALANA ABRAMSON | NOVEMBER 7, 2018

Although the exact margin has yet to be determined, Democrats are now projected to hold a majority, thanks to voters unhappy with the Trump Administration, and the first order of business will be highlighting transparency and accountability.

The first major legislative effort will be an ethics reform package that is expected to incorporate proposals for campaign finance reform, voting rights and ethics and accountability. The bill is still being drafted, but Democrats are expecting it to introduce it early in the new Congress. Other top priorities include infrastructure and reducing prescription drug prices. All of these topics theoretically have potential for bipartisan cooperation, although it remains to be seen whether that will actually come to fruition.

At the same time, the incoming chairs of 21 House committees will be looking for ways to hold the Trump Administration officials' feet to the fire, mainly by pressing forward on investigations they feel were ignored under the Republican majority.

Bloomberg

Enter the Democrats

THE EDITORIAL BOARD | NOVEMBER 7, 2018

In controlling the agenda, the new Democratic majority will be able to rebuild the House of Representatives' capacity to govern. Already high on the Democratic legislative agenda is election reform. A House resolution sponsored by Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland, backed by party leaders and dozens of Democratic House members, calls for ending partisan redistricting, enacting national automatic voter registration, restoring the Voting Rights Act (which was hobbled by a 2013 Supreme Court ruling), safeguarding election systems, and expanding and strengthening ethics laws covering both Congress and the executive.

…

All the while, Democrats must do what they can to elevate decency and the national interest over the partisan scrum. If they can demonstrate their ability to wield power responsibly, they'll make a convincing case that voters should give them more of it in 2020.

The New York Times

First Up if Democrats Win: Campaign and Ethics Changes, Infrastructure and Drug Prices

BY NICHOLAS FANDOS | OCTOBER 31, 2018

Democrats would use their first month in the House majority to advance sweeping changes to future campaign and ethics laws, requiring the disclosure of shadowy political donors, outlawing the gerrymandering of congressional districts and restoring key enforcement provisions to the Voting Rights Act, top Democratic leaders said on Tuesday.

If they win, they would then turn to infrastructure investment and the climbing costs of prescription drugs, answering voter demands and challenging President Trump's willingness to work on shared policy priorities with a party he has vilified. The idea, said Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, the Democratic leader, is to show voters that Democrats are a governing party, not the leftist mob that Mr. Trump describes — and to extend an arm of cooperation to the president after an electoral rebuke.

…

At least in theory, Democrats view election and ethics reform as another issue of potential collaboration. But their legislative package of more than a dozen bills, overseen by Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland, looks more like a retort to Mr. Trump's popular campaign claims that he would "drain the swamp" in Washington — a difference Democrats have weaponized on the campaign trail.

In an echo of actions they took in 2007, the last time they assumed House control, Democrats plan to use a package of rules governing the chamber prepared by Mr. McGovern to take unilateral steps that they say will tighten ethical standards, including in a nod to an ongoing ethics scandal roiling Republicans, a ban on House members sitting on corporate boards.

Together, Ms. Pelosi said, putting those efforts first would “caffeinate” the Democrats’ agenda, even if Republicans in the Senate do not take up the legislation.

“When people know the priority that we are giving to the integrity and government piece, it increases the confidence they have that we can do what we said,” Ms. Pelosi said.

Chief among the legislation’s provisions would be a measure by Representative Terri Sewell of Alabama that would amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to comply with a 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* that gutted the bill’s key enforcement provision. In issuing its 5-4 decision, the court urged Congress to replace the scheme under which the federal government had overseen changes to election laws in states with a history of voting rights abuses.

Republicans in control of Congress at the time took a pass, and Democrats believe Ms. Sewell’s bill could help counteract a new wave of election laws across the South that have limited access to the polls.

Another measure, written by Representative David Cicilline of Rhode Island, would require political nonprofit 501(c)(4)s to disclose the identity of most of their donors for the first time. Democrats would like to go further, passing a constitutional amendment to overturn the *Citizens United* decision and restore to Congress the power to limit money in politics, but those political prospects appear slim.

Yet another provision, written by Representative Zoe Lofgren of California, would require all states to establish independent commissions to draw congressional districts. Several states already employ such bodies, but gerrymandering of political boundaries is the norm in most states, allowing the party in control of state government to create the most favorable jurisdictions for its congressional elections every decade, distorting the will of voters, Democrats argue.

Also included are a series of bills tightening restrictions on federal lobbyists, beefing up the executive branch's Office of Government Ethics, which clashed with Mr. Trump early in his presidency, and requiring the president and vice president to divest any business holdings to prevent a possible conflict of interest.

Roll Call

America Is at a Midterm Crossroads. Let Us Count the Ways

BY KATE ACKLEY | OCTOBER 30, 2018

In the House, if Democrats control the chamber, a vocal group of incumbents, including House Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer of Maryland, along with some of the likely stars of the incoming freshman class, have called for the new majority's top priority and first order of legislative business to be a far-reaching overhaul of the nation's campaign finance, voting rights, lobbying and ethics laws.

"All of these items should be packaged, in my opinion, into one reform bill and addressed in the opening days of the next Congress," Hoyer said recently. "Democrats, if entrusted with the leadership will do exactly that. ... If Democrats can fix government we can earn the trust of voters to lead on addressing health care, infrastructure, jobs, the environment and so many other critical issues."

Hoyer's endorsement of such a measure is significant. It's the kind of talking point one would expect from Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, not Hoyer, who enjoys a friendly rapport with the nation's business community and has a long list of former aides in the K Street lobbying corridor.

A major campaign finance, lobbying, ethics and anti-corruption package would not pass the Senate, but the proposal would allow Democrats to deliver, in the House, a platform for the party, including those running for president in 2020.

"We'll be creating a new baseline of what Democrats stand for," said Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland, who chairs the House Democrats' Democracy Reform Task Force. He said his party has big ideas on immigration, health care, gun control and a number of other issues. But first, he said, "You have to establish this idea that you're unrigging the system."

The Washington Post

Job No. 1 for a Democratic House? A Sweeping Good-Government Bill, Groups Say.

BY MIKE DEBONIS | OCTOBER 31, 2018

Democratic Party leaders are under pressure from a broad coalition of liberal groups to make a sweeping government-overhaul bill their first order of business in January if the party wins a House majority.

The effort has gotten at least tentative backing from top House Democratic leaders. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) and Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer (Md.) have called for early ethics legislation and specifically praised the work of Rep. John Sarbanes (Md.), who released a broad legislative blueprint earlier this year.

But the demand from outside groups — including influential organizations such as the Service Employees International Union, Planned Parenthood, and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights — who have signed a "Declaration for American Democracy" stands to make an overhaul bill a top priority, even as Democratic candidates campaign mainly on preserving affordable health care and Social Security.

The groups are calling for legislation that expands voting-rights protections, tightens campaign finance laws and cracks down on government ethics in Washington. All three areas are addressed in the Sarbanes blueprint, although the leaders of the groups in question said Tuesday that they planned to push for action regardless of who wins the House majority.

…

The changes they are seeking include national automatic voter registration, ending the ability of lobbyists to “bundle” campaign donations and sending a constitutional amendment to the states to overturn the Citizens United Supreme Court decision. Each of those elements was included in a House resolution introduced in May that won support from dozens of Democrats, including the ranking members of the committees that would write the legislation.

Sarbanes said in an interview Monday that he considered the resolution to be a blueprint for further legislation, which will be cobbled together from more than 20 existing bills and further refined in the relevant committees.

The overhaul package is a political imperative as much as a policy necessity, Sarbanes said, adding that he had a “strong commitment” from leadership to move quickly on the legislation but could not guarantee it would be the very first bill put up for a vote.

“The public hates Washington and both parties with a broad brush right now. They look at us and they say, ‘You’re all part of the same corrupt system,' " Sarbanes said. “This is an opportunity for Democrats to establish a brand that says, ‘We get it.’ Every time you hand us the gavel, we’re going to go make this kind of change to restore your voice. And I think doing that quickly is important.”

“Put it on the floor, make the statement that Democrats get it, that we understand how angry people are,” he added.

HUFFPOST

The First Thing Democrats Will Do If They Win The House Is Pass Anti-Corruption And Voting Rights Reforms

BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL | OCTOBER 31, 2018

The first bill Democrats plan to introduce and pass if they win control of the House of Representatives on Nov. 6 will be a comprehensive package of campaign finance, voting rights, redistricting and ethics reforms.

The presumptive H.R. 1 will be based on a House resolution introduced in 2018 by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) and co-sponsored by 165 Democratic House members, including the entire party leadership.

“Reform is going to be the first thing out of the gate,” he said.

The bill will include the creation of a small-donor public financing system for congressional elections, the restoration of the Voting Rights Act, nationwide automatic voter registration, nonpartisan redistricting reforms for congressional elections and a host of ethics reforms to rein in corruption in Congress and the executive branch.

TIME

Democrats Put Ethics Reform at Top of Legislative Agenda, If They Win the Midterms

BY ALANA ABRAMSON | OCTOBER 30, 2018

With the midterm elections just over a week away, Democrats have begun touting an ethics reform package that will top their legislative agenda if they take over the House of Representatives.

On Tuesday, approximately 100 advocacy groups will announce their support for the legislation, which is still being written, as part of a campaign called "A Declaration for American Democracy."

The [democracy reform] package is expected to incorporate proposals for campaign finance reform, voting rights and ethics and accountability.

…

Some of the groups that have signed on are largely associated the progressive movement, like MoveOn, NARAL Pro Choice America, Planned Parenthood, and Indivisible. Others like Common Cause and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, are non-partisan organizations largely focused on oversight…

HUFFPOST

Over 100 Democrats Want the Next Congress to Prioritize Anti-Corruption Reforms

BY DANIEL MARANS | OCTOBER 4, 2018

Over 100 Democratic House candidates penned a letter Thursday calling for Democrats to make campaign finance and electoral reform their highest priority in the next Congress.

The letter, signed by 107 Democratic contenders, is the latest sign that the party sees cleaning up corporate influence in Washington and other forms of corruption as a key part of its plan to take control of the House of Representatives.

…

“Restoring faith in our elections and in the integrity of our elected officials should be a top priority that all members of Congress can agree upon,” the letter reads. “Without these reforms we will be unable to truly regain the public trust or tackle the challenges of our day, like the costs of health care and prescription drugs, the opioid epidemic, or building an economy that is strong for working families.”

The Washington Post

The GOP Is Buying the House. Literally.

BY DANA MILLBANK (OPINION) | SEPTEMBER 26, 2018

A poll commissioned in June by the George W. Bush Institute, the University of Pennsylvania's Biden Center and Freedom House found that "big money in politics" tied with "racism and discrimination" as the top issues.

With that in mind, 164 House Democrats have co-sponsored a "By the People Resolution" from Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) promising action on voting security, automatic voter registration, nonpartisan redistricting, ethics laws, lobbying limits, disclosure of secret campaign money and a constitutional amendment undoing the *Citizens United* ruling.

The resolution, introduced in June with the support of Democratic leaders, has zero chance of coming to a vote. It is meant to present voters with a choice for the next Congress: an anti-corruption agenda as the first order of business, or the best House money can buy.

The Washington Post

Democrats Would Hold Quick Vote on Sweeping Ethics Bill, Hoyer Says

BY MIKE DEBONIS | SEPTEMBER 12, 2018

If they win a majority in the House, Democrats should quickly hold a vote on a wide-ranging package of government reforms, the No. 2 Democratic leader in the chamber said in a policy address Wednesday.

The ethics focus from Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) comes as Democrats begin to seize on a spate of Trump administration scandals and the recent federal indictments of two sitting Republican House members less than two months before the midterm elections.

"The American people need to see that we're serious and that we understand the scope of our challenges," he said, according to prepared remarks delivered at a Washington event hosted by the End Citizens United Action Fund. "If Democrats can fix government, we can earn the trust of voters to lead on addressing health care and infrastructure and the other challenges before us."

The suite of overhauls floated by Hoyer includes campaign finance measures, new ethics provisions and voting process changes. All, he said, "should be packaged into one reform bill and addressed in the opening days of the next Congress" if Democrats win control of Congress.

Roll Call

Government Overhaul Like 'Caffeine' for Economic Agenda, Dems Say

BY LINDSEY MCPHERSON | SEPTEMBER 12, 2018

If Democrats win the House majority, Steny Hoyer believes their economic agenda will do better if they first pass a government overhaul package to help restore Americans' continuously eroding trust in government.

"To regain that trust, our response must be vigorous and innovative," the minority whip plans to say in a speech Wednesday morning, according to excerpts shared with Roll Call.

"Campaign finance reform, voting reform, and ethics reform, alongside new rules to improve how Congress works — all of these items should be packaged into one reform bill and addressed in the opening days of the next Congress, should Democrats be entrusted with the House majority," the Maryland Democrat plans to say during remarks at an event hosted by End Citizens United Action Fund.

House Democrats' Top Priority If They Win in November Is a Sweeping Anti-Corruption Bill

BY ELLA NILSEN | SEPTEMBER 11, 2018

If Democrats win back the House in 2018, a consensus is emerging on what they need to do first: Pass a sweeping anti-corruption bill.

One specific legislative package has emerged, largely crafted and sponsored by the chair of the Democracy Reform Task Force, Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD). The agenda — recently formalized by a House resolution — is designed to rein in the influence of money and lobbying in Washington, expand voting rights in the United States, and increase public financing of campaigns. Democrats are prepping a final version of a bill to be ready to go if they are in charge by January 2019.

"I think it needs to be [first], and I'm sure it will be a top priority of ours," said Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), the ranking member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. "I'm hoping that it's the first or second bill this fall. It's just that important."

Anti-corruption messages are always politically popular, but the idea has taken on a new urgency in the age of Trump. It now has support from ranking members of key committees, as well as current Democratic leadership in the House. And the party's base — eager for congressional Democrats to take on Trump — is clamoring for substantial reform.

"We've already committed that [democracy reform] will be one of the first things we address," said Drew Hammill, spokesman for Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

HUFFPOST

Trump's Corrupt Inner Circle Won't Be Democrats' New Midterm Focus

BY KEVIN ROBILLARD | AUGUST 22, 2018

For Sarbanes, however, the corruption message isn't about hammering away on individual bad actors like Cohen and Manafort, but about showing how a corrupt system prevents good policy – how pharmaceutical company donations drive up drug prices and why Wall Street lobbies against minimum wage hikes. "This anti-corruption, reform message caffeinates every other message we're delivering," he said.

"It's important for people not to get too bogged down in the latest specific scandal. This is like an impressionist painting or something, every breaking development is more paint on this picture of corruption," Sarbanes said. "If you're tired of looking at it, you should give Democrats a chance to prove we can do something different."

The Case for Cautious Optimism on Campaign Finance Reform

BY LEE DRUTMAN (OPINION) | AUGUST 21, 2018

As the midterms approach, Democrats appear to be coalescing around an anti-corruption message.

It's smart politics. For the first time since 2006, Democrats are running in a midterm election against unified Republican control in Washington. This gives them a unique opportunity to campaign as the "out" party. The simplest message for "out" parties is always to paint the "in" party as corrupt. And painting the Trump administration as corrupt is especially easy — a bit like painting a white wall white.

…

But if Democrats are going to campaign on anti-corruption, they'd better be serious about following through if/when they get back into power.

…

Rep. Sarbanes is right that the Democrats can't just casually message on this. They have to commit. As he put it, "This reform message is not something you just wear for the evening, this is something you own."

The road to reform is challenging. But momentum is slowly building. There is now, for the first time in more than a decade, a real chance that good politics and good policy can actually come together in democracy reform. This is significant.

Associated Press

Dems Pounce on GOP Lawmaker's Downfall, Blast 'Cesspool'

BY ALAN FRAM | AUGUST 21, 2018

Democrats want to taint the GOP with an aura of corruption and portray it as championing the wealthy elite as part of a campaign-season effort to offer themselves as the party of the people. Underscoring that contrast, Sarbanes and Bustos said Democrats were promising legislation aimed at protecting voters from Republican efforts to making registering and voting harder and beefing up ethics laws covering campaign contributions and financial disclosure by office holders.

DAILY BEAST

Democrats Try to Thread the Needle on Russia in New Anti-Corruption Platform

BY GIDEON RESNICK | MAY 22, 2018

Sarbanes, along with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), unveiled a broad anti-corruption platform on Monday meant to serve as a supplement to the Democrats' economic messaging in the "Better Deal" platform. Riffing on President Trump's own successful slogan "drain the swamp," the platform is intended to fix the campaign finance system, strengthen ethics laws and facilitate better access to the ballot box for every American voter. It harkens back to a successful messaging platform of 2006, a year in which Democrats won majorities in both the House and Senate.

PBS NEWSHOUR

The Democrats' Latest Plan to Confront Political Corruption

BY JESSICA YARVIN | MAY 22, 2018

Democrats have introduced a wide-ranging plan to confront corruption in Washington in hopes it will resonate with voters and drum up enthusiasm ahead of the midterms this fall.

Democratic lawmakers unveiled a new reform-minded agenda Monday that's billed as "a better deal for our democracy." It builds on the "Better Deal" economic blueprint Democrats introduced last summer.

"We got to do things that make everyday Americans empowered in the democracy so they are calling the shots, not sitting in the bleachers," Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., the chair of the Democratic group that spearheaded the effort, said in an interview.

The plan centers on three broad reforms: improving election security; enforcing lobbying ethics regulations; and changing campaign finance laws to reduce influence from deep-pocketed interest groups and individuals.

The agenda is similar to the "culture of corruption" message Democrats used in the 2006 midterms. Democrats that year evoked the many scandals plaguing Republicans lawmakers at the time, arguing they would clean up the House if voters put the party back in power. The strategy helped Democrats win control of Congress, and the next year, party leaders worked with President George W. Bush to pass reform legislation that included a ban on lobbyist gifts.

This time around, Democrats in both chambers are again contrasting themselves with a Republican-controlled Congress. But they also have a new target in President Donald Trump, who adopted the motto “Drain the Swamp” as a candidate while vowing to rid Washington of powerful special interests.

“There was an expectation and hope that this president would do something to really clean things up,” Sarbanes said. “He made it even worse.”

the Nation

Democrats' New Midterm Approach: It's the Corruption, Stupid

BY DAVID DAYEN | MAY 22, 2018

Today the Democrats unveiled a new plank in their Better Deal agenda, an anti-corruption platform that both depicts the broken nature of the political system and puts reform at the forefront of any campaign to give regular people a voice in our democracy. It brings together the anti-Trump and populist-economics messages in a way that makes them inextricable. "Creating jobs, raising wages, contributing to people's quality of life, is an important and powerful message," said Representative John Sarbanes (D-MD), who chairs the party's Democracy Reform Task Force and has been highlighting anti-corruption policies since entering office in 2007. "But people are right to say, how can we get an economic agenda that's good for the country enacted if we don't fix the institutions?"

Democrats have used ethics and corruption to great effect in the recent past. The term "drain the swamp" came from Nancy Pelosi in the 2006 midterm elections, after lobbying scandals from Jack Abramoff and Tom Delay laid bare a culture of corruption.

But Donald Trump could credibly run on the same themes a decade later because the swamp is entrenched in Washington, with both parties feeding at its trough. Getting rid of it won't be as easy as flipping a switch by changing parties, and Sarbanes understands you have to be candid with the public. "The cynicism is so deep that if you don't follow through you make it worse," he said. "I concede that everybody in some way is part of the broken system. What differentiates us is that we're not content with current system. We want to change it and reform it."

HUFFPOST

Democrats Plan Big Anti-Corruption Theme for Midterms

BY AMANDA TERKEL AND IGOR BOBIC | MAY 21, 2018

Democrats unveiled their agenda Monday during a press conference on Capitol Hill. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) were joined by other lawmakers who have been working on these issues, including Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.).

“President Trump has become the swamp and Americans are paying the price. The American people deserve better,” Pelosi said at the press conference, citing the Trump administration’s failure to reduce the price of prescription drugs and its repeal of numerous Obama-era regulations concerning air and water.

Schumer similarly lamented that Trump had failed to take on the powerful pharmaceutical industry, which is something he promised to do while on the campaign trail.

…

“The swamp has never been more foul than under this president,” Schumer said.

Democrats said they would bring accountability and transparency back to Washington by providing aggressive oversight of the Trump administration and by toughening the nation’s campaign finance laws in order to stem the flow of anonymous political spending known as dark money.

Democrats' New "Better Deal for Our Democracy," Explained

BY TARA GOLSHAN | MAY 21, 2018

Congressional Republicans have had to answer for — and have largely gone along with — an unprecedented number of corruption and ethics scandals under the Trump administration, from Cabinet secretary resignations to Trump's personal lawyer taking hundreds of thousands of dollars from Russian oligarchs and major international corporations in exchange for "insight" into the Trump administration. Democrats are hoping to brand the first two years of the Trump presidency as the "most corrupt administration in modern times," drawing on recent polling that shows voters mobilize around the "money in politics" issue.

The platform itself is reminiscent of a message Democrats campaigned on in 2006, a midterm election year that also came after historic Republican corruption scandals and resulted in Democratic control in the House, Senate, and a majority of governorships. With Trump's record-setting unpopularity and a Democratic voter base enthusiastic to come out and vote, Democrats are banking on this message to bring them sweeping electoral wins once again.

NBC NEWS

Turning Up the Heat on Trump: Dems Say 'Culture of Corruption' to Be Focus of Midterms

BY ALEX SEITZ-WALD | MAY 21, 2018

Democrats are going to make prosecuting what they called a "culture of corruption" in President Donald Trump's administration a central theme of this year's midterm elections, the party's congressional leaders signaled Monday.

"The swamp has never been more foul or more fetid than under this president," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said at a news conference on the Capitol steps.

…

"The problem is that a lot of people hear that (economic) message, they agree with that message, but they're not convinced that we can actually get it done because they view Washington as captured by special interests," Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., who helped craft the new strategy, told NBC News.

"We realized that every other message we're putting out there needs to be accompanied by a democracy reform agenda," Sarbanes continued. "We think that that caffeinates every other message that we're delivering."

He added at the news conference: "The people know what happens when a culture of corruption takes hold. Government works for somebody else and not for them."

It's an effort to provide an overarching framework of the myriad and diverse scandals in Washington, from Scott Pruitt's Environment Protection Agency to

the Trump-Russia saga, arguing that they all come back to a culture in which donors are rewarded, not voters.

Voters are already primed for that message, Democrats argue, pointing to polling that shows the public thinks Republicans are more likely to be beholden to special interests than Democrats.

On Monday, the party's leaders committed to a package of a good-government reforms and campaign finance changes to try to tap into the same populist revulsion with Washington that helped put Trump in office.

"Instead of delivering on his promise to drain the swamp, President Trump has become the swamp," said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. "Republicans in the White House and the Congress are cravingly beholden to big money interest and the American people are paying the price."

Democrats Rip Trump Over Failed 'Swamp' Cleaning, Promise A 'Better' Plan

BY GREGORGY KRIEG | MAY 21, 2018

How can Democrats attack President Donald Trump this midterm season without getting swept up in and drowned out by his personal controversies?

It's a question that has confounded party leaders, individual candidates, outside groups and activists across the liberal spectrum. Now, as the elections near, Democrats on Capitol Hill think they are getting closer to cracking the code.

On Monday, they introduced a new suite of anti-corruption proposals and "democracy reforms" designed to hammer at a variety of allegations of unethical behavior and investigations swirling around the Trump administration and team, from a personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, accused of trading on his access to the President, to cabinet officials like EPA administrator Scott Pruitt and OMB director Mick Mulvaney, the acting director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, who Democrats accuse of actively seeking to undermine their agencies' own missions.

"Instead of delivering on his promise to drain the swamp, President Trump has become the swamp," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said.

Chuck Schumer, the Senate's top Democrat, echoed Pelosi. "The swamp," he said, "has never been more foul or more fetid than under this President."

…

“A lot of this is structural and a lot of it has been around for a long time," Sarbanes said earlier Monday. "Everybody knows it. The question is what are we going to do about it?"

Democratic leaders Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, along with Sarbanes, who chairs the party's "Democracy Reform Task Force" on Capitol Hill and has introduced a comprehensive reform bill called the "Government by the People Act," are hoping this new effort will inspire more faith from voters who might doubt that the party's increasingly ambitious policy goals -- like a deepening commitment to universal health care -- will ever get a fair hearing in the swamp.

"We think this (new rollout) caffeinates, makes stronger and reinforces, all the other messages that are part of 'The Better Deal,'" Sarbanes said. "'A Better Deal for our Democracy' is telling people that we want to find a way to give them their institutions back and make their voice count again."

That means encouraging policy points like automatic voter registration, an end to partisan gerrymandering, countering state laws Democrats believe are purpose-built to disenfranchise those already or trying now to get on the rolls, shining new light -- and toughening enforcement -- on dark money groups and, ultimately, reversing the effects of the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision with new legislation.

The Washington Post

Democrats' Newest Midterm Pitch: A Crackdown on Corruption

BY MIKE DEBONIS | MAY 21, 2018

Democrats plan to highlight allegations of corruption surrounding the Trump administration — and a legislative agenda to prevent future abuses — as they continue rolling out their party platform ahead of November's midterm elections.

The first planks of the "A Better Deal" platform, released last year, focused on the party's economic agenda. Now, with questions about pay-to-play politics swirling around President Trump and his current and former aides, Democrats introduced new anti-corruption proposals Monday billed as "A Better Deal for Our Democracy."

"Instead of delivering on his promise to drain the swamp, President Trump has become the swamp," said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) during a rollout event on the Capitol steps.

While the new agenda was only sketched out in broad terms Monday, it includes proposals that would eliminate loopholes that allow lobbyists and lawmakers to buy and sell influence without the public's knowledge, allow big donors to influence the political process through unreported donations and to improve elections by eliminating partisan gerrymandering and implementing automatic voter registration.

The message, the Democrats said: Elect us in November to "clean up the chaos and corruption in Washington."