



WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP
DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE
REP. JOHN SARBANES, CHAIR

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NATIONAL NEWS

[ONE YEAR LATER, IT'S TIME FOR MITCH MCCONNELL TO STOP
BLOCKING CRITICAL ANTI-CORRUPTION AND ELECTION
REFORM LEGISLATION](#)

THE CHARLESTON CITY PAPER (OP-ED BY REP. JOE CUNNINGHAM)

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.... 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.



THE CYBERSECURITY 202: OFFICIALS FEAR CORONAVIRUS COULD BE NEXT FRONT IN ELECTION INTERFERENCE

THE WASHINGTON POST

U.S. officials fear adversaries might weaponize public fears about coronavirus ahead of Super Tuesday to spread disinformation, amplify rumors and tamp down voter turnout. The concern comes as people test positive for the virus in numerous states, including California, Texas and Alabama – which are among the 14 states that will hold their Democratic primaries Tuesday.... The coronavirus is especially ripe for disinformation attacks because it's already being treated as a partisan issue. President Trump claimed at rallies that Democrats are "politicizing" the virus and called it the left's "new hoax." And Democrats have savaged the president for using the virus as a political football.... This political bickering over public health could sow public distrust in government and expert statements about the virus, leading many to believe it's either not as bad or far worse than it really is, Singer said.... Coronavirus fears are not just affecting U.S. elections. In Israel, which holds its general election today, the Central Elections Committee has set up an information center to "help refute baseless rumors" about the virus and is warning voters to be wary, Aaron Rabinowitz at Israeli newspaper Haaretz reports.

**Related Story: [Some States Encourage Mail-In Ballots As Coronavirus Worries Grow.](#)*

TRUMP'S DOJ HAS NOT FILED A SINGLE NEW VOTING RIGHTS ACT CASE

TALKING POINTS MEMO

The apparent refusal of President Trump's Justice Department to engage in any meaningful, public enforcement of the Voting Rights Act has taken Republicans' general hostility to the law to a whole new level. The DOJ has not filed a single new Voting Rights Act case since the Trump administration took over — setting it apart from the last several administrations, Republican and Democratic. While it did some litigating of cases under other election laws in the first half of the administration, the Justice Department's Voting Section has not brought any new cases since 2018. The current dry spell in DOJ voting rights enforcement is unprecedented, according to the DOJ's own public record and what former voting section officials told TPM. "It's not that there is an absence of enforcement

opportunities. Private plaintiffs continue to bring cases, some quite vigorously,” said Justin Levitt, an election law professor who served as a deputy assistant attorney general of the Civil Rights Division under President Obama. “The fact the department is currently involved in none of them is disturbing.”

[FACEBOOK REMOVES MISLEADING TRUMP CENSUS ADS](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Facebook said on Thursday that it had removed misleading ads run by President Trump’s re-election campaign about the 2020 census, in a stand against disinformation ahead of the decennial population count that begins next week. Earlier this week, Trump Make America Great Again, a joint fund-raising arm of Donald J. Trump for President Inc. and the Republican National Committee, started running ads on the social media site that Facebook said could have caused confusion about the timing of the census. “President Trump needs you to take the Official 2020 Congressional District Census today. We need to hear from you before the most important election in American history,” the ad said. The campaign asked followers to “respond NOW” to help our campaign messaging strategy, with an appeal to text “TRUMP to 8022.” The Census Bureau will not begin to survey the public for its population survey until next week. The ad linked the census to the Trump campaign, a misrepresentation of the official government survey, said civil rights groups.

[WATCHDOG SUES TO FORCE FACEBOOK TO REVEAL POLITICAL AD SPONSOR](#)

BLOOMBERG GOVERNMENT

A watchdog group is seeking to force Facebook Inc. to disclose who paid for online political ads on the social media site in 2018 that promoted Green Party candidates in certain House and Senate races. The Campaign Legal Center (CLC) has filed a lawsuit to enable it to subpoena Facebook for information on America Progress Now. The CLC sued the Federal Election Commission for failing to act on the group’s complaint about APN, which the suit alleges “is not a real entity.” The FEC currently lacks a quorum of commissioners and can’t act on any enforcement matters. Federal campaign finance law provides that a complainant may file a “citizen suit” to enforce the law if the FEC doesn’t act, but

the provision is largely untested. CLC's goal is to get the federal court in Washington, D.C. to allow such a suit, according to attorney Adav Noti. The watchdog would then be able to subpoena Facebook for the information necessary to identify who's behind the ad sponsor and get penalties imposed for false disclaimers and illegal non-reporting of campaign spending.

CASHING IN ON JUSTICE

ROLL CALL

Before they put on their robes, dozens of federal judges appointed during the Trump and Obama administrations made significant campaign contributions to Senate Judiciary Committee members and their home-state senators — the very people who could make or break their nominations. And three Republican senators — Ted Cruz and John Cornyn of Texas and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina — got more money than the rest of the Judiciary Committee combined. Virtually all of those contributions came from judicial nominees they ultimately backed. Home-state senators who haven't served on the panel also wield considerable influence on who becomes a federal judge. They've received significant contributions from donors who ended up on the bench. A Democrat — Bob Casey of Pennsylvania — tops that list.... The investigation also found that judges appointed by Trump were at least twice as likely to have contributed to a Judiciary Committee member as judges appointed by Obama. The analysis looked at 330 judges nominated during all eight years of the Obama administration and 149 judges nominated during the first two and a half years of the Trump administration. In all, CQ Roll Call found that about three out of every five of those judges, who were nominated from January 2009 through July 2019, made political contributions.

CYBER COMMISSION WILL RECOMMEND FIFTH EAC MEMBER TO VOTE ON CYBERSECURITY

POLITICO

The Cyberspace Solarium Commission will recommend expanding the Election Assistance Commission to include a fifth member to vote on cybersecurity issues, co-chairman Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) said today. With four members divided between Democrats and Republicans, the commission is sometimes gridlocked,

King said. "It's not really functional," he said. The commission will advocate for a "special member who can react on some of these cyber-related issues," he said at a Center for Strategic and International Studies event. Re-balancing the commission entirely didn't seem like a realistic recommendation, King said. The commission wants to "try to help clear the logjam at least on cybersecurity," said Suzanne Spaulding, a senior adviser for CSIS and a Solarium member. King said the commission favors sending additional funding to states for election security upgrades, too. Spaulding said the commission will also recommend steps to "promote digital media literacy" and "more robust civic education" via more resources, in a bid to counter election disinformation. Asked if Super Tuesday had seen a spike in online disinformation, CISA Director Chris Krebs answered, "I'm not sure the extent we're seeing it just yet."

[RUSSIAN SOCIAL ACCOUNTS SOW ELECTION DISCORD — AGAIN](#)

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Four years after Russia-linked groups stoked divisions in the U.S. presidential election on social media platforms, a new report shows that Moscow's campaign hasn't let up and has become harder to detect. The report from University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Young Mie Kim found that Russia-linked social media accounts are posting about the same divisive issues — race relations, gun laws and immigration — as they did in 2016, when the Kremlin polluted American voters' feeds with messages about the presidential election. Facebook has since removed the accounts. Since then, however, the Russians have grown better at imitating U.S. campaigns and political fan pages online, said Kim, who analyzed thousands of posts. She studied more than 5 million Facebook ads during the 2016 election, identifying Russia's fingerprints on some of the messages through an ad-tracking app. Her review is co-published by the Brennan Center for Justice, a law and policy institute, where she is a scholar. The Russian improvements make it harder for voters and social media platforms to identify the foreign interference, Kim said. Kim's report comes weeks after U.S. intelligence officials briefed lawmakers on Russian efforts to stir chaos in American politics and undermine public confidence in this year's election.

TRUMP HAS ACCUMULATED 3,000 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

Since assuming the presidency, Donald Trump has racked up more than 3,000 conflicts of interest from his refusal to divest from his businesses, according to a report released today by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW). CREW, which has closely monitored President Trump's conflicts of interest since the beginning of his presidency, has tracked interactions between the president, the Trump Organization, and those trying to influence government decisions and public policies, including members of Congress, industry groups, lobbyists and cabinet officials. Trump averages more than two conflicts of interest per day, an astonishing rate of corruption. CREW monitors the president's conflicts of interests by assigning them into five broad categories that showcase the president's willingness to blend his personal gain with his professional responsibilities.... CREW's tracking defines a conflict of interest as any interaction between the Trump Organization and the federal government, U.S. state governments, and foreign governments, as well as interactions between the Trump Organization and special interests that try to influence the federal government.

SEVENTH DISTRICT RESIDENTS FIND COMMON GROUND ON CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

THE NEW JERSEY HILLS

At a time when the chasm between political parties seems too wide to breach, 7th Congressional District residents appear to be closer on several issues than one might expect. Area Democrats and Republicans found mutual understanding on several matters related to money in politics, campaign finance, gerrymandering and lobbying in a recent survey conducted by the Program for Public Consultation at the University of Maryland in conjunction with national nonprofits Common Ground Solutions and Voice of the People. Survey respondents discussed the results at a Saturday, Feb. 29, “Citizen Panel Forum” in Berkeley Heights with Rep. Tom Malinowski, D-7. The survey results were revealed to the congressman and the crowd of about 40 people for the first time at the forum. The survey of 478 district residents found bipartisan majorities to be most in agreement on campaign finance reform. In four separate questions, majorities of at least 69 percent of Republicans and at least 81 percent of Democrats called for greater transparency in campaign finance disclosures by large donors, corporations and federal contractors. Sixty-six percent of respondents (83 percent of Democrats and 58 percent of Republicans) said they would support a Constitutional Amendment to overturn the Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United decision, which lifted restrictions on corporate spending to benefit political campaigns. Some 59 percent of respondents (70 percent of Democrats and 57 percent of Republicans) said they would support a 50 percent tax credit incentivizing campaign contributions from small donors giving up to \$50.

**Related Story: [Malinowski: Campaign Finance Reform 'Critical' to Our Democracy](#).*

SOME ELECTION-RELATED WEBSITES STILL RUN ON VULNERABLE SOFTWARE OLDER THAN MANY HIGH SCHOOLERS

PRO PUBLICA

The Richmond, Virginia, website that tells people where to vote and publishes election results runs on a 17-year-old operating system. Software used by election-related sites in Johnston County, North Carolina, and the town of Barnstable, Massachusetts, had reached its expiration date, making security updates no longer available. These aging systems reflect a larger problem: A ProPublica investigation found that at least 50 election-related websites in counties and towns voting on Super Tuesday — accounting for nearly 2 million voters — were particularly vulnerable to cyberattack. The sites, where people can find out how to register to vote, where to cast ballots and who won the election, had security issues such as outdated software, poor encryption and systems encumbered with unneeded computer programs. None of the localities contacted by ProPublica said that their sites had been disrupted by cyberattacks. ProPublica also spotted files that should have been kept hidden because, when identified, they could give hackers a roadmap to the computer system's weaknesses. Some election websites shared the same computer server with many other local government sites, magnifying the potential repercussions of an attack. "Shared hosting environments are rarely appropriate for critical infrastructure," researchers Bob Rudis and Tod Beardsley of the security firm Rapid7 wrote in a February report for ProPublica.

MICHIGAN'S SWING STATE STATUS COULD PUT IT AT RISK FOR RUSSIAN ELECTION INTERFERENCE

THE DETROIT FREE PRESS

With the March 10 primary one week away and Michigan seen as a battleground state in November, voters and election officials should be on guard for Russian and other foreign interference, experts say. Threats range, they say, from false information posted online about when and how to vote, to "fake news" Facebook posts intended to increase division and reduce voter turnout, to actual attacks on voter databases and other election-related infrastructure. But they say, residents should be mindful that one of our greatest vulnerabilities



is ourselves. Ben Nimmo, an international internet sleuth whose work helped Facebook and other social media platforms ban thousands of accounts that spread disinformation during the 2016 election campaign, said it is the hyperpolarized nature of the U.S. political scene that makes the country more vulnerable to disinformation campaigns, which are increasingly difficult to detect.... Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson encourages residents "to follow our social media and use our website to ensure they have accurate information about voting and voter registration," said Jake Rollow, a spokesman for Benson. "We also direct voters to their local election clerks, as they often have the best local information," Rollow said.

[AFTER DELAY, VIRGINIA DEMOCRATS ADVANCE REDISTRICTING](#)

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

After a lengthy delay, Virginia Democrats are advancing legislation to amend the state's constitution to overhaul how new congressional and legislative maps are drawn. A House committee voted Monday to support a proposed constitutional amendment establishing a bipartisan commission made up of lawmakers and citizens charged with drawing maps, instead of letting lawmakers draw the maps themselves. The measure now heads to the full House, where it is expected to pass in coming days. Virginia Democrats have been in a national spotlight on redistricting reform after taking full control of the statehouse this year. The party has made redistricting reform a key campaign plank but has been split on whether to support the proposed constitutional amendment or back a different proposal that is friendlier to the new Democratic majority. House leaders delayed making a decision on the measure for much of this year's legislative session, which is set to end Saturday. Supporters say the proposed constitutional amendment will limit lawmakers' ability to gerrymander maps for political advantage.

[SOME STATES MAKE IT HARDER FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS TO VOTE](#)

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Vanderbilt University student Will Newell wishes it was easier for college students like him to cast ballots in Tennessee, one of 14 states holding a

presidential primary on Super Tuesday. The campus has no locations for early voting, so students must visit an off-campus polling location to cast a ballot on Election Day.... He supports a bill introduced in the Tennessee Legislature that would require early voting locations at large colleges and universities in the state. That's not the only restriction working against college students in the state. Tennessee, where overall voter turnout is low, is among several states that does not allow a college student ID. But it does allow a handgun license.... Texas and Tennessee are among seven states where college identification cards are not allowed at polling places, with laws enacted by Republican-controlled legislatures between 2008 and 2018. The others are Arizona, Iowa, North Dakota, Ohio and South Carolina — all are states won by Donald Trump in 2016.

[WHY VOTING DISCRIMINATION HAUNTS AMERICA](#)

AMNEWYORK

Hundreds of thousands of transgender Americans may be unable to vote in this year's election because their name or looks do not match their identification card, research showed on Thursday, a trend that experts say could affect Democratic turnout. Some 378,000 eligible U.S. voters who are trans do not have identification such as a driver's license that reflects their appearance or gender identity, said a report by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, a public policy research institute. In the United States, 35 of the 50 states require voters to show identification and of the trans people without IDs, 260,000 live in one of the 35 states, the research said. Backers of voter ID laws say they are intended to combat voter fraud. Voter rights advocates say the number of actual cases is extremely small and restrictions disproportionately affect poor and minority voters.

[WISCONSIN COURT OVERTURNS RULING THAT ORDERED REMOVAL OF UP TO 209,000 PEOPLE FROM VOTER ROLLS](#)

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Wisconsin appeals court on Friday overturned a ruling that ordered the removal of up to 209,000 people from the state's voter rolls, handing Democrats a victory in a case they said was intended to make it more difficult for their voters to cast ballots in November. The court last month put the ruling, and the purge, on hold while it considered the case. The 4th District Court of Appeals ruling

overturned the decision of an Ozaukee County judge who had initially ruled in favor of a conservative law firm that was seeking the purge. The appeals court also vacated an order from that same judge that found the state Elections Commission in contempt for not moving forward with the purge. The appeals court sent the case back to the lower court and ordered that it be dismissed. The case has received a lot of attention because Wisconsin is among a group of swing states being targeted by Democrats and President Donald Trump this year. Trump won Wisconsin in 2016 by fewer than 23,000 votes, putting even more of a focus on every voter in the state.

HARRIS COUNTY'S CASCADE OF ELECTION DAY FUMBLES DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Not even 24 hours later, a university forged during segregation would instead become the epicenter of the challenges and complications often faced by communities of color when they attempt to make themselves heard in Texas. Too few voting machines — and technical failures of aging equipment. Insufficient training of election workers. A shoddy system reporting incorrect wait times that routed voters to crowded locations. Long lines that only grew — initially wrapping through a campus library and eventually out into a courtyard — as voters rushed to jump in line before polls closed. Wait times for voters in the queue, students and other residents of Houston's Third Ward extended past the four-hour, then five-hour, then six-hour marks. The last voters at the polling place on campus would ultimately spend nearly an entire workday waiting in line to cast their ballots, almost five hours after polls closed. The excessive wait times were not limited to college campuses or even to the Houston area. But Texas Southern University easily saw the worst of it as a result of a sort of perfect electoral storm in which state voting policy ran into local political disputes that were then met by an unexpected surge in Democratic voters — all at the expense of voters in a predominantly black community.

[ALABAMA BLOCKED A MAN FROM VOTING BECAUSE HE OWED \\$4](#)

THE GUARDIAN

In 2018, with the midterm elections approaching, Alfonzo Tucker Jr was particularly eager to vote.... But Tucker wasn't able to cast a ballot – state officials refused to even let him register. It wasn't until weeks later that he learned why he had been deprived of the right to vote. He owed the state \$4. The U.S. is founded on the promise of democracy and fair representation, but it is also the country where minorities are frequently disenfranchised for political gain. Among the most vulnerable are millions of Americans, disproportionately African Americans, like Tucker, who have been entangled in America's racially biased criminal justice system, and lose civil liberties like voting as a result. The barriers facing Americans like Tucker, advocates say, are modern adaptations of poll taxes and other devices which were designed to keep people from the voting booths during the Jim Crow era – when white politicians used the law to curb the civil rights of African Americans. Alabama is one of 30 states that requires people with felony convictions to pay back the financial obligations associated with their sentence before they can vote again.

[LIKE BEING 'AN ENSLAVED PERSON': WHY FORMER PRISONERS ARE SUING PENNSYLVANIA OVER 'PRISON GERRYMANDERING'](#)

THE INQUIRER

Sentenced to prison as a teenager, Abd'allah Lateef lost his right to vote for the 31 years he spent in a state prison in rural Greene County, more than 300 miles from home. But he was counted in the U.S. census as a resident of that county — and remains so today, almost three years after returning home to North Philadelphia. “As a formerly incarcerated person, coming into that knowledge and the understanding of that, to me in many ways was reminiscent of the thought of what it was like to be an enslaved person,” said Lateef, who registered to vote a week after being released from a life sentence for participating in a robbery in which an older accomplice shoved the victim, who died 18 days later of heart failure. “You couldn't vote. Yet, your body was counted to create power within small rural counties that otherwise would not

receive the representation.” That’s why Lateef and two other former prisoners-turned-activists — exoneree Terrance Lewis and former juvenile lifer Robert Saleem Holbrook — are suing to stop the practice known as prison gerrymandering. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the law firm Ballard Spahr filed the suit Thursday in Commonwealth Court on behalf of the three men, the NAACP, and student groups from the University of Pennsylvania who argue that, as Philadelphia residents, their vote is being diluted. The respondents include the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Gov. Tom Wolf.

[INVESTIGATORS FIND NO EVIDENCE FOR GEORGIA GOV. KEMP’S HACKING CLAIM](#)

THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Just two days before the 2018 election for governor, Republican Brian Kemp opened an explosive investigation, accusing the Democratic Party of Georgia of trying to hack voter registration systems. Kemp was Georgia’s secretary of state at the time, overseeing his own heated election for governor against Democrat Stacey Abrams. Sixteen months later, the attorney general’s office released a report Tuesday finding no evidence of a hack and closing the investigation Kemp had launched. No election information was damaged, stolen or lost, according to the report, and there was no evidence of computer crimes. Democratic Party of Georgia Chairwoman Nikema Williams said Kemp created “outright lies” to attack his political opponents and help his election.

KEY OPINION

[ENOUGH FINGER-POINTING ON RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE. HERE'S HOW TO PREPARE FOR 2020.](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST (OP-ED BY SUZANNE SPAULDING SENIOR ADVISER FOR HOMELAND SECURITY AT THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES)

Finger-pointing about which candidate Vladimir Putin prefers doesn't help; instead, we should try to better anticipate and understand how Russian information operations are intended to work against democracy.... The Russian government may no longer pay for online ads in rubles, but the lack of legal requirements for transparency — some of which could have been addressed with the stalled Honest Ads Act — means that there are still loopholes whereby bad actors can push dark money into politics.... So what is the Russian government seeking to achieve? Putin's objectives go beyond elections. He targets a few audiences with the same basic narrative: Democracy is corrupt, hypocritical and chaotic.... Putin's goal is to weaken us by exploiting and exacerbating division and distrust.... By undermining trust in institutions such as the media and the courts — institutions we look to as arbiters of truth — Putin hopes to get us to give up on the idea of truth and on the idea that we can hold our institutions accountable.... Americans must understand what Putin hopes to achieve. It's not just about which candidate Russia may support. Democracy is under attack, and we must all fight to defend it by refusing to give up. Hold our institutions accountable and believe in our power to bring about change. Vote. Know there may be disruptions and claims of corruption. Insist on impartial processes to resolve issues, and, when all is said and done, accept the outcome of the election.

★★★