



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

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NATIONAL NEWS

[VOTERS NEED SAFE AND SANITARY IN-PERSON VOTING OPTIONS](#)

THE BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE

The Brennan Center has [laid out](#) the critical adjustments that must be made to our voting system to ensure safe and fair elections this November in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Increased access to vote-by-mail is a key part of the plan, as many voters may face quarantine and illness. Safe and healthy polling places are also critical: giving every voter access to a mail ballot option will not replace all polling place voting, and it should not come at the expense of access to polling places. The anticipated shift to large-scale mail voting will put significant strains on our election systems; polling sites serve as a fail-safe to correct any problems that may arise and ensure eligible citizens can vote.

[SOME REMAIN SKEPTICAL ABOUT VOTING BY MAIL — EVEN DURING A PANDEMIC](#)

NPR ('WEEKEND EDITION SUNDAY')

Democrats in Congress had big ambitions for election reform to respond to the coronavirus. They wanted jurisdiction to be required to offer weeks of early voting, and they wanted every voter to have the option to vote by mail. But they lost that battle. The \$400 million going to elections is much closer to the original Republican Senate bill than Democrats' \$4 billion House proposal.

[CORONAVIRUS CRIPPLES VOTER REGISTRATION EFFORTS. MILLIONS COULD BE DENIED.](#)

NBC NEWS

Presidential elections are typically prime time for bringing new people into the political process, but the coronavirus pandemic is making voter registration more difficult than ever, prompting concerns that many young Americans and other nonvoters might miss their chance to get onto the rolls before November. "This is the moment when we historically see people take action to register to vote," said Kristen Clarke, the president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "The public health crisis has brought all of that activity virtually to a grinding halt." Voter registration happens year-round, but the months leading up to a presidential election are crucial as interest in politics spikes and funding for registration efforts flows in. In the runup to the 2016 presidential election, Americans filed more than 77.5 million voter registration applications, according to the Election Assistance Commission, a federal agency that helps states administer elections, and total registration topped 200 million.

[TRUMP SUGGESTS HE CAN GAG INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR STIMULUS BAILOUT PROGRAM](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

When President Trump signed the \$2 trillion economic stabilization package on Friday to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, he undercut a crucial safeguard that Democrats insisted upon as a condition of agreeing to include a \$500 billion corporate bailout fund. In a signing statement released hours after Mr. Trump signed the bill in a televised ceremony in the Oval Office, the president suggested he had the power to decide what information a newly created inspector general intended to monitor the fund could share with Congress. Under the law, the inspector general, when auditing loans and investments made through the fund, has the power to demand information from the Treasury Department and other executive branch agencies. The law requires reporting to Congress "without delay" if any agency balks and its refusal is unreasonable "in the judgment of the special inspector general." Democrats blocked a final agreement on the package this week as they insisted on stronger oversight provisions to ensure that the president and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin

could not abuse the bailout fund. They feared that Mr. Trump, who has previously stonewalled congressional oversight, would do the same when it came to the corporate aid program.

[FROM AFAR, CONGRESS MOVES TO OVERSEE TRUMP CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, moving aggressively to scrutinize the Trump administration's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, said Thursday that she would seek to create a special bipartisan committee to oversee all aspects of the government's response, including how it distributes more than \$2 trillion in emergency aid. The announcement, which drew immediate objections from President Trump and the top House Republican, came as leaders were struggling to determine how Congress could perform its most basic functions — both legislating and acting as a check on a president who has consistently stonewalled attempts at oversight — when lawmakers were scattered around the country with the Capitol shuttered. The plan to create a select committee, which would require a House vote, reflects a particular sense of urgency among Democrats to keep a close watch on how Mr. Trump carries out the more than \$2 trillion stimulus package that he signed into law last week. The measure created vast programs, including a \$500 billion corporate bailout program and a \$350 billion small-business loan initiative, and provided \$150 million for states and cities coping with the coronavirus.

[THE RACE FOR VIRUS MONEY IS ON. LOBBYISTS ARE STANDING BY.](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The federal government is open for coronavirus business, and the scramble to get some of it is on. A South Carolina company has hired a lobbyist close to President Trump to try to win regulatory approval to sell a misting spray to kill coronavirus on airplanes. A Manhattan company is seeking money from the \$2 trillion stimulus package for its quick-change recyclable hospital curtains. Two prominent and well-connected Republican fund-raisers have linked up with competing businesses, both claiming to be able to acquire coveted equipment

like coronavirus test kits and masks. Across the country, companies see a chance to cash in, do some good for the country or both, making virus outbreak response one of the few thriving sectors of the economy. And because so much of the business runs through Washington, the rush has created new opportunities for those who can offer access, influence and expertise in navigating bureaucratic hurdles and securing chunks of the relief package Mr. Trump signed into law on Friday. The boomlet has left the federal agencies responsible for regulating cleaning supplies, medical devices and medicines working overtime on requests to certify products for use in coronavirus response — and to clamp down on fraud.

[TRUMP SAYS IF RATES OF VOTING INCREASED AS DEMS PROPOSED IN CORONAVIRUS BILL “YOU’D NEVER HAVE A REPUBLICAN ELECTED IN THIS COUNTRY AGAIN”](#)

ELECTION LAW BLOG

Trump [openly admitting](#) if we made voting easier in America, Republicans wouldn't win elections.... Trump: "The things they had in there were crazy. They had levels of voting, that if you ever agreed to it you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again."

[TRUMP CAMPAIGN DECLARES WAR ON DEMS OVER VOTING RULES FOR NOVEMBER](#)

POLITICO

President Donald Trump’s political operation is launching a multimillion-dollar legal campaign aimed at blocking Democrats from drastically changing voting rules in response to the coronavirus outbreak. In the past several weeks, the reelection campaign and the Republican National Committee have helped to oversee maneuvering in a handful of battleground states with an eye toward stopping some Democratic efforts to alter voting laws, and to bolster Trump. The mobilization is being closely coordinated with Republicans at the state and local levels.... The enterprise — which includes more than two dozen GOP officials, including lawyers dedicated entirely to litigation — shows how completely the pandemic has upended the 2020 election. While litigation over voting issues is

not uncommon, the coronavirus — and the likely obstacles it will create for voting in November — has brought the issue to the forefront of the campaign.

[SECRET SERVICE SIGNS CONTRACT THIS WEEK TO RENT GOLF CARTS IN TOWN OF TRUMP CLUB](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

The Secret Service this week signed a \$45,000 contract to rent a fleet of golf carts in Northern Virginia, saying it needed them quickly to protect a “dignitary” in the town of Sterling, home to one of President Trump’s golf clubs, according to federal contracting data. The contract was signed Monday and took effect Wednesday, records show. The Secret Service paid a West Virginia-registered company, Capitol Golf Cars and Utility Vehicles, to rent 30 carts until the end of September. The new contract, which the Secret Service described as an “emergency order,” does not mention Trump or the golf club by name. But it closely mirrors past contracts signed by the Secret Service, for agents accompanying Trump to his golf clubs in New Jersey and Florida. The White House declined to comment Wednesday. Trump’s company, the Trump Organization, did not respond to questions.

[TREASURY DEPARTMENT SELECTS WALL STREET BANKS TO ADVISE ON AIRLINE AID](#)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Treasury Department plans to hire three Wall Street banks for advice on doling out tens of billions of dollars in aid to the airline industry, which is hemorrhaging cash as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The department is expected to tap PJT Partners Inc., Moelis & Co. and Perella Weinberg Partners for help with the airline portion of the \$2 trillion stimulus bill, according to people familiar with the matter. Each bank is likely to advise on aid to one of three subsectors: commercial airlines, cargo carriers....

[JUSTICE DEPARTMENT REVIEWS STOCK TRADES BY LAWMAKERS AFTER CORONAVIRUS BRIEFINGS](#)

CNN (ONLINE)

The Justice Department has started to probe a series of stock transactions made by lawmakers ahead of the sharp market downturn stemming from the spread of coronavirus, according to two people familiar with the matter. The inquiry, which is still in its early stages and being done in coordination with the Securities and Exchange Commission, has so far included outreach from the FBI to at least one lawmaker, Sen. Richard Burr, seeking information about the trades, according to one of the sources. Public scrutiny of the lawmakers' market activity has centered on whether members of Congress sought to profit from the information they obtained in non-public briefings about the virus epidemic. Burr, the North Carolina Republican who heads the Senate Intelligence Committee, has previously said that he relied only on public news reports as he decided to sell between \$628,000 and \$1.7 million in stocks on February 13. Earlier this month, he asked the Senate Ethics Committee to review the trades given "the assumption many could make in hindsight," he said at the time. There's no indication that any of the sales, including Burr's, broke any laws or ran afoul of Senate rules. But the sales have come under fire after senators received closed-door briefings about the virus over the past several weeks — before the market began trending downward. It is routine for the FBI and SEC to review stock trades when there is public question about their propriety.

[JUSTICE DEPARTMENT REVIEWS STOCK TRADES BY LAWMAKERS AFTER CORONAVIRUS BRIEFINGS](#)

THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

U.S. Sen. Kelly Loeffler's most recent financial disclosures show that millions of dollars in stocks were sold on her behalf at the same time Congress was dealing with the impact of the coronavirus. The largest transactions — and the most politically problematic — involve \$18.7 million in sales of Intercontinental Exchange stock in three separate deals dated Feb. 26 and March 11. Loeffler is a former executive with ICE, and her husband, Jeff Sprecher, is the CEO of the company, which owns the New York Stock Exchange among other financial marketplaces. During the same time period reflected on reports filed

late Tuesday, the couple also sold shares in retail stores such as Lululemon and T.J. Maxx and invested in a company that makes COVID-19 protective garments. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution got the first look at these reports, covering mid-February through mid-March and shedding new light on Loeffler's financial transactions during the pandemic. Previous reports — which have put Loeffler in the national spotlight — covered her trading during the first six weeks of 2020.... The newer stock sales came as the broader markets were diving, and they are likely to fuel allegations that Georgia's new senator used her insider knowledge about the severity of the pandemic to dump holdings while simultaneously releasing statements about the strength of the American economy and complimenting President Donald Trump on his response. The STOCK Act, a law that went into effect in 2012, makes it illegal for senators to use inside information for financial gain.

[WHY THE GOP IS POISED TO CREATE LARGE-SCALE VOTING CHAOS THIS YEAR](#)

THE NEW REPUBLIC

For decades, the agreement barred the Republican National Committee (RNC) from conducting “ballot security” activities—essentially, efforts to challenge voters’ eligibility at the polls or in any other way to prevent or deter them from casting a ballot. In 2018, a federal judge ended the ban, finding it was no longer needed. That means that this November will see the first presidential election without it since Jimmy Carter was in the White House. Voter protection groups are already bracing for potential trouble at the polls. It’s not that Republicans will have a totally free hand, of course—blatant voter intimidation, as well as racial discrimination in voting, are still illegal. But Clark told his audience that the lifting of the decree would allow the RNC to coordinate all its Election Day activities with the Trump campaign, state parties, and the House and Senate Republican campaign arms. Clark went on to describe a multimillion-dollar RNC-funded effort to flood the polls and courthouses with Republican activists and lawyers this November. The initiative, he promised, would represent “a much bigger program, a much more aggressive program, and a much better funded program” than any similar GOP effort in other recent presidential cycles. He added: “This is all a result of us being able to budget and coordinate directly with the RNC.” Some swing-state Republicans may already be taking

advantage of the change. Florida's GOP-led legislature is advancing a bill to allow Election Day poll watchers to monitor any precinct in the state; currently, they have to live in the precincts they surveil.

[HOW RUSSIA'S TROLL FARM IS CHANGING TACTICS BEFORE THE FALL ELECTION](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Ahead of November's election, American intelligence officials and others are on high alert for mischief from Russia's Internet Research Agency. Remember it? The Kremlin-backed group was identified by American authorities as having interfered in the 2016 election. At the time, Russians working for the group stole the identities of American citizens and spread incendiary messages on Facebook and other social media platforms to stoke discord on race, religion and other issues that were aimed at influencing voters. To avoid detection, the group has since evolved its tactics. Here are five ways its methods have shifted.... the Russian group often copies and pastes chunks of texts to avoid those errors; the group uses less text and few hashtags. It sometimes just reposts screenshots; the group appears to be trying to hide its accounts, leading to fewer followers; the group appears to be removing watermarks or blurring them; and the Russians seem to be using local people and media to post stories on Facebook.

**Related Story: [Facebook, Google and Twitter Struggle to Handle November's Election](#).*

[HOW TECH'S LOBBYISTS ARE USING THE PANDEMIC TO MAKE GAINS](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Last month, lobbying groups representing advertising giants like Google and Facebook asked California's attorney general to wait to enforce the state's new online privacy rules given the coronavirus ripping around the world. In Washington, lobbyists representing cloud computing giants like Amazon pushed for more money to help federal employees work remotely. And Uber began reframing a longtime campaign to avoid classifying its drivers as full-time employees through the urgency of a mounting public health crisis. The coronavirus has created an opportunity for tech companies and their lobbying operations to quietly push for

long-held goals in the frantic political and economic environment created by the outbreak. In some cases, groups or lobbyists representing companies like Google and Facebook have pursued changes, like the delay in California's privacy law enforcement, that they were already hoping for before the pandemic. Others representing companies such as Amazon have asked for regulatory changes to benefit their businesses where demand is now soaring because of the outbreak.

IN THE STATES

[STATES EXPLORE MORE VOTE-BY-MAIL OPTIONS TO COPE WITH CORONAVIRUS](#)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

States are exploring ways to expand voting by mail and early voting ahead of the November general election to make sure balloting proceeds if the coronavirus pandemic persists. Election officials from state and local governments across the country held conference calls over the past week with the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies on the logistical, financial and legal obstacles to rolling out expanded vote-by-mail initiatives, according to people who participated in the calls.

**Related Story: [Voting Rights Groups Sue Ohio Over Extended Primary](#).*

[WISCONSIN GOVERNOR MAKES LAST-MINUTE PLEA TO DELAY TUESDAY ELECTION](#)

POLITICO

In a reversal, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers announced he wants to postpone his state's Tuesday election. He called the state legislature into a special session on Saturday to take up legislation that would avoid in-person voting and create an all-mail election with a deadline of May 26 to return ballots. The Republican-led legislature has previously rejected a call from Evers, a Democrat, to send ballots to every voter who hadn't already requested one.

**Related Story:* [Federal Judge Blisters Gov. Tony Evers and GOP Lawmakers for Not Delaying Wisconsin's Election.](#)

**Related Story:* ['Your Health Or the Right to Vote': A Battle in Wisconsin As Its Primary Nears.](#)

**Related Story:* ['I'm Scared': Wisconsin Election Puts Poll Workers at Risk of Virus.](#)

[STATE ELECTIONS AND DMV OFFICIALS OFFER FREE ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION IN NORTH CAROLINA](#)

WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

The State Board of Elections and N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles have begun a free service to allow DMV customers to apply to register to vote or update existing voter-registration information online, state elections officials said Monday. The service does not require users to complete a DMV transaction, such as a license renewal, at the same time, the State Board of Elections said in a statement. The change is a response to the coronavirus pandemic.... DMV customers with a North Carolina driver's license or DMV-issued ID may apply to register to vote or update voter address or political party information through the DMV Voter Registration web page. The application does not allow voters to change their name.

[STATES PLAN TO EXPAND MOBILE VOTING AMID CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, DESPITE SECURITY CONCERNS](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

Two states will soon announce that they'll offer voters who have disabilities the option to cast ballots using mobile phones in upcoming primary elections so they don't have to risk going into polling places, said Sheila Nix, president of Tusk Philanthropies, which is funding the efforts. The option will extend to voters in the military or state residents who are based overseas. "With coronavirus and the uncertainty about what the situation will be in November, a lot of states and jurisdictions are looking for a solution," Nix told me, but declined to name the states or the mobile voting vendor they'll be using, because memorandums of understanding aren't complete yet.... But there have been dire warnings from cybersecurity experts that mobile voting lacks basic protections to ensure votes haven't been manipulated by hackers. This trade-off

for access to voting during a pandemic could undermine the sense of security around the 2020 contest that officials have worked for years to achieve following Russian interference efforts in 2016.

KEY OPINION

[A PRESIDENT SHOULD WANT ALL AMERICANS TO VOTE. WHY DOESN'T TRUMP?](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST (EDITORIAL)

President Trump utters plenty of exaggerations, half-truths and flat-out lies, but sometimes what's most stunning is when he tells the truth. Case in point: his mind-blowing admission that he wants fewer, not more, Americans to vote. As Congress last week considered reforms to encourage voting during the coronavirus pandemic, Mr. Trump was opposed. He explained this week that he doesn't want to make it easier for Americans to vote because he believes that would hurt the Republican Party. Mr. Trump is hardly the first Republican to embrace voter suppression for political reasons, but usually they're at least a little embarrassed to acknowledge their motivation. That's why they make up stories about voter fraud. And, of course, Mr. Trump is not just any Republican; it's particularly depressing that the president of the United States would give voice to views that are so patently contrary to the spirit of democracy.

★★★