



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

February 4, 2019

NATIONAL NEWS

[H.R. 1 Would Fix — and Protect — Democracy in the U.S.](#)

U.S. News and World Report

As its first order of business in the new Congress, the House proposed a package of sweeping democracy reforms in H.R. 1: legislation that aims to limit money's influence over politics, strengthen ethics laws, protect voting rights, and end partisan gerrymandering. This important bill, which the House Judiciary Committee is holding a hearing about on Tuesday, would go a long way towards fixing U.S. democracy at home as well as prevent foreign actors from meddling in it from abroad. Concern about foreign influence is not new, nor are congressional efforts to prevent it. In the last century, concern about Nazi propaganda efforts led to the passage of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). In 1976, Congress enacted laws barring foreign nationals from financially influencing U.S. elections. And at the turn of the 21st century, following an investigation into Chinese nationals funding the Democratic National Committee, Congress strengthened that prohibition and banned unregulated "soft money" that could mask foreign spending. Recent elections have revealed new ways for foreign actors to interfere in our democracy – and offer compelling new reasons for Congress to act.

[Officeholders, Candidates Must Have a New Way to Finance Campaigns](#)

The Hill

We need to be very clear-eyed about this. 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. H.R. 1 addresses the essential need for an alternative financing system by creating a small donor, public matching funds system for presidential and congressional candidates to use on a voluntary basis.



[What's Mitch McConnell So Afraid Of?](#)

CNN

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.... 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?

[GOP Rewrote Voting Laws for 8 Years. Democrats Say It's Their Turn.](#)

The New York Times

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.... 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.... Senator Mitch McConnell, the Kentucky Republican and majority leader, already has said the bill would be dead on arrival in the Senate should it clear the House, as appears all but guaranteed.... 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.”

[Judiciary Hearing on Democrats' Election Bill Turns Into Partisan Brawl](#)

The New York Times

House Democrats faced sustained partisan fire on Tuesday over their ambitious elections overhaul bill, a top priority for the new Democratic leaders who must answer charges that their efforts to counter partisan gerrymandering and ease access to the polls strain the constitutional reach of Congress. The House Judiciary Committee's inaugural hearing of the 116th Congress was dedicated to the voting and ethics rules overhaul, known as the For the People Act, which Democratic representatives have trumpeted as their signature legislative priority. But its reception underscored the challenges the bill will face in a divided Capitol. The bill would turn the drawing of congressional boundaries over to nonpartisan commissions, promote more transparency in campaign contributions and expand the public financing system for House and presidential candidates. "The broader issue is what kind of country America is and should be," said Representative Jerrold Nadler of New York, the chairman of the committee. But Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, renewed his criticism of the bill, dismissing it as a "one-sided power grab" meant to empower and protect Democratic politicians.

**Related Story: [Republicans Claim Democrats' Voting Rights Bill is Just a Play to Steal Elections.](#)*

**Related Story: [Massive Democracy-Reform Legislation Gets Its Day in Congress.](#)*

[McConnell Calls Push to Make Election Day a Holiday a 'Power Grab'](#)

The New York Times

In a speech on the Senate floor, Mitch McConnell on Wednesday denounced Democratic legislation intended to increase voter turnout as a "power grab," singling out one proposal as particularly nefarious: making Election Day a federal holiday. "This is the Democrat plan to restore democracy?" said Mr. McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the Senate majority leader, chuckling to himself. "A power grab that's smelling more and more like exactly what it is." His remarks set off a backlash from Democrats in Congress, who questioned why anyone would oppose efforts to clear obstacles for voting. The criticism extended to social media, where people accused Mr. McConnell of being afraid of increased voter turnout. Republicans have often put forward measures, like laws requiring voter identification or restricting early voting, that Democrats say are devised to suppress turnout.

[Mitch McConnell, Enemy of the Vote](#)

Rolling Stone

Suppressing votes is not merely a racist act, nor it is simply the last resort for a party out of ideas. Voter suppression is traitorous. Intentionally restricting access to the ballot is a violation of the ideals that we have been told are inherently American. The United States government is of, by

and for the people. Yet we are barred from the fundamental democratic process by those in power merely because our skin color predicts our political persuasion. The Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby vs. Holder* decision should have had people marching in the streets to restore that landmark civil rights legislation to its full powers — or at least made that a key topic of the subsequent presidential election. We are lucky if outlets use “racially tinged” or other cowardly terminology to reference it. Voter suppression is not an accident, as Chief Justice John Roberts would have us believe, some benign exclusion from the small-d democratic process. It is a form of violence. Mitch McConnell is okay with this. The Senate Majority Leader, the longest-serving Republican to ever hold that position, all but admitted on the Senate floor Wednesday that having more Americans vote is bad for the Republican Party. H.R. 1, the omnibus package of ethics and civil rights reforms proposed by the newly elected House Democratic majority, was McConnell's target. One day after the House Judiciary Committee had its first hearing for H.R. 1, the testudinate majority leader mocked the bill that would make Election Day a holiday for federal employees and encourage private businesses to do the same.

[Here's Why Republicans Don't Want an Election Day Holiday](#)

CNN

That the US votes on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November is a notable tradition, but it's also a relic of a bygone agrarian era. Most other developed countries vote either on a weekend or have made Election Day a holiday, according to research by Pew. One funny thing about his opposition to the idea of a paid federal holiday on Election Day is that in McConnell's home state of Kentucky, presidential Election Day is already a paid state government holiday. And civilians in Kentucky are entitled up to four unpaid hours by law to vote. Many states have similar laws.... A new Pew study projects the portion of nonwhite voters will grow to a third in 2020 and Latinos could overtake African-Americans as the largest nonwhite voting bloc. They voted 66% in favor of Clinton in 2016. The national demographics have been moving against Republicans for some time, but they have been able to maintain the majority of power in Washington despite that. The bill Democrats unveiled, with its assault on gerrymandering and enticements to bring more voters to the polls represented a challenge to that control Republicans have been able to maintain.

[To Fight H.R. 1, GOP Calls in Discredited Advocates of Voter Suppression](#)

Mother Jones

With the House of Representatives set to debate its first legislation of the new session on Tuesday, Republicans are calling in two “expert witnesses” to fight the measure who are best known for discredited claims about voter fraud that have been repeatedly debunked in federal court. The House Judiciary Committee is holding its first hearing Tuesday on a sweeping democracy reform bill introduced by Democrats that would make it far easier to vote and harder to buy elections. HR 1: The For the People Act includes reforms like automatic and Election Day registration, nationwide early voting, independent redistricting commissions, and public financing

of congressional campaigns. Harvard Law School professor Lawrence Lessig called it “the most important civil rights bill in half a century.” While voting rights lawyers are testifying in favor of the bill, Republicans on the judiciary committee who oppose the legislation have recruited two of the biggest vote suppressors in their party to testify against it: Hans von Spakovsky of the Heritage Foundation and J. Christian Adams of the Public Interest Legal Foundation. Von Spakovsky and Adams were key members of President Donald Trump’s controversial election integrity commission, which shut down after failing to find evidence of widespread voter fraud. For more than a decade, they have led an aggressive push to make it harder to vote and have spread false claims about fraud. Their credibility has also been called into question recently by federal courts.

[No Cracks in Democratic Unity as Ethics Overhaul Glides Along](#)

Roll Call

If Democrats on the House Judiciary panel have any concerns about their party’s mega-overhaul of voting, ethics, lobbying and campaign finance laws, they kept them private on Tuesday during the measure’s first congressional hearing. The bill, HR 1, is a top priority of the party in the chamber, though it probably won’t go anywhere in the Senate this Congress after Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky renewed his opposition Tuesday. The overhaul is likely to pass the House along party lines and will serve as a major messaging point during the 2020 campaigns, allowing Democratic candidates for Congress and the White House to rail against big money in politics and the Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United decision, which paved the way for super political action committees.

[McConnell: Making Election Day a Federal Holiday is a “Power Grab”](#)

VOX

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell doesn’t think Election Day should be a federal holiday because that would give Democrats too much power. McConnell took to the Senate floor Wednesday to rail against HR 1, the sweeping anti-corruption proposal House Democrats have put forward as their first bill in the majority. Among many other measures, it proposes making Election Day a federal holiday and encourages private sector businesses to do the same. McConnell, who calls the bill the “Democratic Politician Protection Act,” sees that as a “power grab.” “Just what America needs, another paid holiday and a bunch of government workers being paid to go out and work ... [on Democratic] campaigns,” he snarked on the Senate floor. “This is the Democrat plan to restore democracy? ... A power grab.” The proposal to make Election Day a federal holiday is based on a simple reality: A wide swath of the American public doesn’t vote — and most of those nonvoters say they skipped the polls because they had to work or get kids to school and didn’t have the time.

**Related Story: [Mitch McConnell Rips Plan to Make Election Day a Federal Holiday.](#)*

[Conservatives Unite Against H.R. 1, ‘Ultimate Fantasy of the Left’](#)

Breitbart

Over 150 conservative leaders nationwide released a “Memo to the Movement” from the Conservative Action Project on Monday, declaring that they are opposed to the Democrats’ kick-off legislation H.R. 1, which would profoundly shift elections toward liberal candidates and open the door to rampant voter fraud, calling Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s bill “the ultimate fantasy of the left.” “Conservatives are united in opposing H.R. 1, the attempt by House Democrats to fundamentally undermine the American electoral system,” the Memo begins. It explains several key features of Pelosi’s inaugural legislation, outlining how it is designed to ensure that a liberal Democrat wins the White House in 2020 and the Left gains unified control of Congress and well as take over state governments.

[Roy Moore Is Back — and Co-Signing Open Letters with Trump Advisers](#)

Talking Points Memo

If you thought you’d heard the last of Judge Roy Moore, you’d be wrong. The former Alabama Supreme Court Justice whose U.S. Senate bid famously flamed out amidst accusations from multiple women of sexual misconduct isn’t done in politics. Moore and his wife Kayla are co-signatories on a letter released Monday by the Conservative Action Project that takes aim at House Democrats’ top messaging bill for this Congress, H.R. 1. The letter’s signatories include a number of top conservative activists — including some in President Trump’s close orbit. Signatories of the letter include Citizens United head David Bossie, a top outside adviser to President Trump, as well as American Conservative Union head Matt Schlapp, another informal Trump adviser whose wife Mercedes is the White House director of strategic communications.

[Opponents of H.R. 1 Received the Bulk of Corporate PAC Donations](#)

Fast Company

The 206 members of the House of Representatives who haven’t agreed to support a major democracy reform package typically received about \$150,000 more from corporate political action committees during the midterm elections than sponsors of the measure, according to a MapLight analysis. The 228 sponsors of H.R. 1 — which would make sweeping changes to the nation’s campaign finance, voting rights, and ethics laws — received \$47.1 million from corporate PACs during the 2018 election cycle. The 198 Republicans and eight Democrats who haven’t signed on to cosponsor the legislation reported almost \$74.6 million. The corporate PAC gifts worked out to an average of \$206,651 for sponsors of the measure; lawmakers who haven’t agreed to support the legislation received an average of \$362,116 from the corporate committees.... Only 18 House members either rejected corporate PAC money during the midterm elections or returned more corporate PAC donations from previous cycles than they received during the midterm elections. They included.... John Sarbanes, D-Md.

[Trump Proposals Could Increase Health Costs for Consumers](#)

The New York Times

Consumers who use expensive brand-name prescription drugs when cheaper alternatives are available could face higher costs under a new policy being proposed by the Trump administration. The proposal, to be published this week in the Federal Register, would apply to health insurance plans sold under the Affordable Care Act. Health plans have annual limits on consumers' out-of-pocket costs. Under the proposal, insurers would not have to count the full amount of a consumer's co-payment for a brand-name drug toward the annual limit on cost-sharing. Insurers would have to count only the smaller amount that would be charged for a generic version of the drug. For example, if a consumer filled a doctor's prescription for a brand-name drug with a \$25 co-payment, rather than using a generic medicine with a \$5 co-payment, the consumer might get credit for only \$5 in out-of-pocket spending. Consumers would have to spend more of their own money before reaching the annual limit on out-of-pocket costs.

[Mnuchin Claims Conflict of Interest in Decision on Russian Oligarch](#)

The New York Times

Democrats in Congress raised ethical concerns on Tuesday about connections between Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and a billionaire Republican donor who stands to benefit financially from the Trump administration's decision to lift sanctions on the Russian oligarch Oleg V. Deripaska's companies. In a letter to Mr. Mnuchin, two senior Democratic lawmakers said the Treasury secretary's connection to an entertainment business owned in part by the donor, Len Blavatnik, a major investor in Mr. Deripaska's giant aluminum company, Rusal, was a potential conflict of interest.... The questions about Mr. Mnuchin's possible conflicts came as Democrats put new pressure on the Trump administration over the terms of its deal to lift the sanctions on Rusal, its parent company and another associated company.

[Adelsons Pumped \\$500K Into Trump Aides' Legal Defense Fund](#)

POLITICO

Billionaire Republican donors Sheldon and Miriam Adelson gave \$500,000 to a legal defense fund set up to help aides to President Donald Trump that are involved in special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation. The Adelsons each contributed \$250,000 on Oct. 1 to the Patriot Legal Expense Fund Trust, which was set up last year to help campaign aides pay for legal bills related to the investigation. The donation came during the height of the midterm elections, when the Adelsons were also the largest contributors to the Republican Party's political campaigns and committees, shelling out more than \$100 million in support of GOP candidates. The Adelsons were the only contributors to the fund between the start of October and the end of the year. The legal fund also has collected contributions from major Trump donors such as real estate mogul Geoffrey Palmer in the last year. The new disclosure, filed Thursday, shows that the legal defense fund spent more than half a million dollars between October and December, as the Mueller investigation was in full swing.

[Big Donors on the Sidelines in Early Days of 2020 Primary](#)

The Associated Press

The presidential primary is jolting to life without a traditional mainstay: the big money donor class. More specifically, their contribution checks. With as many as two dozen Democrats potentially running for the White House and no immediate front-runner, the money race in the early days of the primary is largely frozen, according to fundraisers. Though some donors have a preferred candidate, others who are spending are spreading their money across the field to hedge their bets. More often, donors are staying on the sidelines until the contours of the primary take shape. “I’m not aware of anyone who is giving now,” said Andy Spahn, a Los Angeles-based fundraiser and conduit to Hollywood wealth who has been courted by multiple contenders. “People first want to know who will actually be in the race.” The slow flow of campaign cash from the big money donor class coincides with a seismic shift in Democratic fundraising. Driven by a restive base that turned opposition to President Donald Trump into an unprecedented flood of small-dollar online contributions, some now question whether big money donors will continue to hold the same sway.

KEY OPINION

[Democrats’ H.R. 1 Offers Boost for Accountability](#)

HeraldNet (Op-Ed by Rick Larsen)

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.

[Time For Fair Electoral Districts](#)

The Grunion (Op-Ed by Rick Larsen)

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.

[The For The People Act: Sweeping Reforms](#)

The Los Feliz Ledger (Op-Ed by Adam Schiff)

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.

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