



DAILY CLIPS
CONGRESSMAN JOHN SARBANES
MARYLAND'S THIRD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

MAY 17, 2019

NATIONAL NEWS

[DEMS PLAN SLICE-AND-DICE STRATEGY TO PRESSURE MCCONNELL](#)

POLITICO

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. House Democrats are eager to remind the public about a marquee proposal that some lawmakers fear has been overshadowed by the bruising shutdown battle and subsequent fights on oversight and the Mueller probe. Separate votes would also help draw attention to little-noticed pieces of the initial bill, such as automatic voter registration or a crackdown on super PACs,

which are priorities for the liberal grassroots and something some lawmakers say Democratic leaders have not done enough to promote. Democrats are eager to hammer Senate Republicans for failing to take up ideas that have bipartisan support, like tightening the rules for TV ad disclosures or protecting state election security systems from foreign hacking.

[HOUSE LEADERS AIM TO SECURE VOTING WITH GRANTS AND PAPER BALLOTS](#)

NEXTGOV

House Democratic committee leaders recently introduced a comprehensive election security bill that would commit more than \$1 billion in grants to secure America's election systems and mandate states to use paper ballots for votes. This could be the first election security directive that Congress passes since foreign actors shook up the nation's 2016 election through a hacking and disinformation operation.... Reps. John Sarbanes, D-Md., [Bennie] Thompson, [D-Miss.] and Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., introduced the Election Security Act in an effort to protect future elections from "malevolent attacks and foreign interference." The legislation is a key provision of the H.R.1 For the People Act, which is a reform bill that was recently passed in the House and involves a total rehaul around election integrity and ethics. The standalone bill gives the Election Security Act two possible paths forward, a committee representative told Nextgov. Aside from requiring states to use paper ballots and authorizing more than \$1 billion in funding grants to help states improve election security, the bill would also establish cybersecurity standards for voting systems vendors and require that voting machines be manufactured in the United States. The legislation would also order voting systems to be tested nine months prior to elections and require the president to produce a national strategy around protecting democratic institutions. Under the bill, the Director of National Intelligence would also be required to conduct threat assessments at least 180 days ahead of elections and the Homeland Security Department would be directed to expand the assistance it provides to state election officials, including expediting their security clearances.

**Related Story: [Legislation Would Protect US Elections from Foreign Interference.](#)*

SENATE UNLIKELY TO VOTE ON ELECTION SECURITY BILLS

THE WASHINGTON POST (THE CYBERSECURITY 202)

The Senate is unlikely to vote on any election security bills this Congress despite intelligence agencies' warnings that Russian hackers will probably try to undermine the 2020 election as they did in 2016, Senate Rules Committee Chairman Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) said Wednesday. Blunt made the comments during a Rules Committee hearing, saying there's no point in his committee considering election security bills because Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (Ky.) won't allow a floor vote on them. That was in response to a question from Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.). Politico's Eric Geller recounted the exchange on Twitter:



H.R. 1 was a catch-all Democratic House bill that mandated election security reforms as well as increased voter access and other progressive priorities. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) introduced an election security bill popular with Democrats this week that would mandate paper ballots, post-election audits and minimum cybersecurity standards for state and local election systems. A bipartisan election

security bill with fewer mandates sponsored by Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla.) is expected later this month.

**Related Story:* [Senate Refuses to Consider Bills Protecting Elections from Foreign Interference.](#)

**Related Story:* [Top Republican Says Senate Unlikely to Vote on Any Election Security Bills.](#)

REPUBLICANS ABANDON ELECTION SECURITY

THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

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 the floor."

[RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT HACKERS TARGETED SMALL COUNTY IN FLORIDA PANHANDLE IN 2016](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

The voter registration database of a small county in the Florida panhandle was breached by Russian government hackers in 2016, according to two U.S. officials. The Russian military spy agency, the GRU, was responsible for the penetration of Washington County's database, according to the two officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter. The county has a population of about 25,000. Carol F. Rudd, county elections supervisor, declined to comment on the breach but said it's important for federal, state and local officials to be able to communicate confidentially.... Congressional members from Florida are promising legislation to change the rules about breach notification related to election infrastructure after the FBI confirmed that voter databases in two Florida counties were hacked during the 2016 election and told lawmakers the information was classified. It is unclear which other Florida county was targeted. The bipartisan effort is an attempt to force federal law enforcement agencies to disclose more information about cyberattacks as they occur.... The lawmakers were frustrated that the FBI and Department of Homeland Security officials who briefed them weren't able to guarantee the breaches hadn't resulted in election information being compromised.

**Related Story: [F.B.I. to Florida Lawmakers: You Were Hacked by Russians, But Don't Tell Voters.](#)*

[JUSTICE DEPARTMENT ASKS JUDGE TO PAUSE EMOLUMENTS CASE, ARGUES TRUMP IS TOO BUSY](#)

CNN

President Donald Trump made yet another move on Tuesday to stop Democrats in Congress from getting his business records. After a morning court hearing where Trump sought to hold off the congressional subpoena of his accounting firm, the Justice Department told a separate federal judge overseeing a different court case that congressional Democrats should pause their pursuit of his records. The reason they gave: the President is too busy to deal with it. This new attempt to stop Democrats from collecting Trump's business information comes amid a growing battle between Congress and Trump for financial records. Earlier

Tuesday, Trump's private legal team was in court asking a judge to kill a subpoena for Trump's accounting records, alleging that Congress should not have the ability to look into the same topics as law enforcement when investigating the President. But the judge pushed back on whether courts could limit Congress' request for information. House Democrats have sent subpoenas, separately, to two banks that worked with Trump and his companies, and to the IRS for his tax returns.

COMPLAINTS GROW THAT TRUMP STAFFERS ARE CAMPAIGNING FOR THEIR BOSS

POLITICO

A Trump appointee displayed a “Make America Great Again” hat at her Housing and Urban Development office. A top official at the Office of Management and Budget used his official Twitter account to promote President Donald Trump’s campaign slogan. And White House Counselor Kellyanne Conway delivered a scathing and unprompted attack on Trump’s potential opponent, Joe Biden, during a TV interview. Those three instances — all in the last few months — are just a few of the growing number of complaints since Trump took office that federal employees are using their platform to campaign for the president or his allies, a violation of the Hatch Act. In Trump’s first year on the job, formal complaints to the government office that oversees compliance with the 80-year-old law jumped nearly 30 percent. Such sloganeering would once have startled lawmakers and even the public. In an early executive order, Thomas Jefferson admonished government employees for trying to “influence the votes of others,” calling it “inconsistent with the spirit of the Constitution.” Nearly a century and a half later, Congress made it official with the Hatch Act, hoping to quell concerns that the powerful Franklin D. Roosevelt-era Democratic machine was using government workers to sway elections. But increasingly, the public — and, watchdog groups say, the Trump administration — merely shrugs at such activities, representing another political norm trampled during the president’s tenure. It’s concerning advocates who say the rise in complaints reflects broader ethical lapses in the Trump administration, including staffers spending staggering amounts on travel, promoting the president’s businesses and failing to file legally required financial reports.

[INVESTIGATORS URGE E.P.A. TO PURSUE SCOTT PRUITT FOR \\$124,000 IN 'EXCESSIVE' TRAVEL COSTS](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Federal investigators concluded in a report Thursday that Scott Pruitt had spent nearly \$124,000 on “excessive” travel arrangements as head of the Environmental Protection Agency and recommended that the agency try to recover the money. The report, issued by the E.P.A.’s inspector general, brings to a close a nearly two-year investigation into Mr. Pruitt’s travel. It found that 40 trips or planned trips that were later canceled during 10 months starting in March 2017, the time frame of the investigation, had cost taxpayers a total of more than \$985,000. About 82 percent of that was for first-class and business-class airfare, and 16 of the trips involved stops in Tulsa, Okla., where Mr. Pruitt owned a home. The expenses also included a \$629-per-night hotel room in Italy. Many of the trips were approved by agency officials retroactively after Mr. Pruitt’s travel. Of the total cost, inspectors concluded that \$123,942 had been spent “without sufficient justification and, initially, without appropriate approval authority.” The investigation was one of more than a dozen into the former administrator’s conduct at the agency before he resigned in July amid ethics questions about his round-the-clock security and the pay raises given to select aides. He was also under scrutiny for renting a condominium at \$50 a night from the wife of a lobbyist with business before the agency. In a statement, the E.P.A. said it would not seek to recover any travel costs. It described the expenses in question as “valid” and properly justified, and added that the agency had since adopted new rules for approving travel.

[FEDS OPEN FOREIGN-MONEY INVESTIGATION INTO TRUMP DONOR CINDY YANG](#)

MIAMI HERALD

The FBI has opened a public corruption investigation into Republican donor and South Florida massage-parlor entrepreneur Li “Cindy” Yang, focusing on whether she illegally funneled money from China into the president’s re-election effort or committed other potential campaign-finance violations, the Miami Herald has learned. Investigators obtained a federal grand jury subpoena Tuesday seeking records from Bing Bing Peranio, an employee of Yang’s family’s spa business who last year contributed a maximum \$5,400 to President Donald Trump’s re-election effort, according to a source familiar with the probe. Yang

came to Peranio's workplace and helped her write the check, Peranio told reporters from The New York Times, who first reported the contribution. Peranio told The Times she didn't "say no." The subpoena asked for any records related to that March 5, 2018, donation and possibly other contributions between 2014 and the present, said the source, who asked for anonymity to discuss an ongoing federal investigation.... FBI agents based in West Palm Beach are trying to determine if Yang reimbursed Peranio for that contribution or delivered "anything of value" to her over that period to benefit the Trump campaign. Reimbursing someone for a political contribution without disclosing the original source is illegal, as is making a contribution in someone else's name.

[RUDY GIULIANI CANCELS HIS TRIP TO UKRAINE, BLAMING DEMOCRATS' 'SPIN'](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Facing withering attacks accusing him of seeking foreign assistance for President Trump's re-election campaign, Rudolph W. Giuliani announced on Friday night that he had canceled a trip to Kiev in which he planned to push the incoming Ukrainian government to press ahead with investigations that he hoped would benefit Mr. Trump. Mr. Giuliani, President Trump's personal lawyer, explained that he felt as if he was being "set up" by Ukrainians critical of his efforts, and he blamed Democrats for trying to "spin" the trip. "They say I was meddling in the election — ridiculous — but that's their spin," he said. Mr. Giuliani said on Thursday that he had hoped to meet in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, with the nation's president-elect and urge him to pursue inquiries that could yield new information about two matters of intense interest to Mr. Trump.

[EX-FUGEES RAPPER CHARGED IN CAMPAIGN FINANCE CONSPIRACY CASE](#)

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

One of the founding members of the 1990s hip-hop group the Fugees has been charged in a campaign finance conspiracy that took place during the 2012 presidential election, the Justice Department said Friday. A four-count indictment accuses Prakazrel "Pras" Michel of conspiring with fugitive Malaysian financier Low Taek Jho, usually known as Jho Low, to make and conceal foreign campaign contributions. He is alleged to have used straw donors to give campaign

contributions to a U.S. presidential candidate, who is identified in the indictment only as Candidate A. Low has gained attention in the last several years after U.S. officials accused him of masterminding a money laundering and bribery scheme that pilfered billions from the Malaysian state investment fund known as 1MDB. He's been charged separately by both U.S. and Malaysian officials in connection with that alleged fraud but remains at large. Prosecutors allege that from June to November 2012, Low directed more than \$21.6 million to be moved from foreign entities to Michel's accounts in order to funnel money into the 2012 presidential election. They say Michel then paid about 20 straw donors and conduits so they could make the donations in their names and conceal where the money actually came from, according to the indictment. More than \$1 million was also sent to an independent expenditure committee, prosecutors said.

[FACEBOOK BANS ISRAELI FIRM OVER FAKE POLITICAL ACTIVITY](#)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Facebook Inc. said it removed hundreds of fake accounts, pages and groups linked to a commercial entity based in Israel, a rare move against a private operation as the social network tries to stamp out misinformation around global elections. The company Thursday said it took down a network of 265 accounts, pages and groups, including 65 Facebook and four Instagram accounts, that posted content primarily pertaining to elections and other political activity in Africa, as well as Latin America and Southeast Asia. About 2.8 million accounts followed one or more of the inauthentic pages, Facebook said in a blog post. Nine events—one dating back to October 2017 and one scheduled for May—were organized by the pages, though Facebook said it didn't know if any events took place. Archimedes Group didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. Facebook has been working to remove bad actors from its platforms for years, but the latest incident is atypical because it involves a commercial entity, as opposed to a political or government-backed group, operating in a country that is a U.S. ally.

[SEN. TOM UDALL HOLDS 'FOR THE PEOPLE ACT' FORUM](#)

LOS ALAMOS DAILY POST

U.S. Sen. Tom Udall held a forum Saturday on the For The People Act, his landmark legislation to reform democracy, at Central New Mexico Community College where he discussed his efforts to enact sweeping legislation that will fight corruption, fix broken politics and make government work for all Americans. During the forum, Udall moderated panel discussions on campaign finance reform and voting rights with a host of policy experts, community advocates, elected officials, and pro-democracy champions from a range of nonprofits and civic organizations. Udall and the panelists discussed legislative strategies for ending the dominance of big money in politics and ensuring access to the ballot box, while answering a series of questions from the audience on how to fix our broken political system.... The For the People Act is a sweeping package of pro-democracy reforms that aims to make it easier, not harder, to vote; end the dominance of big money in politics; and ensure that public officials work for the public interest. The bill serves as Senate companion legislation to H.R. 1 in the U.S. House of Representatives, which passed the House in March of this year. It builds off of Udall's We the People Democracy Reform Act of 2017, which was introduced in the 115th Congress as a comprehensive reform package encompassing a number of bills championed by Udall and others to address various shortcomings in our political system, and strengthen and revitalize our democracy.

[TEXAS ATTORNEY GENERAL AGAIN BLOCKS U.S. HOUSE REQUEST FOR VOTER PURGE DOCUMENTS](#)

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's office this week again denied a request for records by a U.S. House panel seeking to investigate the state's botched voter purge program. The standoff over the records started April 1, when the Oversight and Reform Committee demanded them as part of an investigation into what House Democrats have called voter intimidation efforts in several states. The voter purge program, which the Texas secretary of state's office

launched in late January, relied on faulty data to allege that nearly 100,000 registered Texas voters may not be citizens. It was shut down by a federal judge in San Antonio the following month, after civil rights groups sued. While the Attorney General's office has refused to release documents, Secretary of State David Whitley's office said Tuesday it has released more than 1,000 pages of documents in response to the request and plans to produce more by the end of the week now that the federal lawsuit has been settled. Whitley's office continues to withhold other documents it says are exempt from disclosure because of attorney-client privilege. First Assistant Attorney General Jeff Mateer in a letter Monday reiterated his claim that the House committee lacks the authority to force the secretary of state to produce documents.... [Congressman Jamie] Raskin and Committee Chair Elijah Cummings in an April 29 letter to Paxton defended the committee's right to investigate and argued that it was not subject to state public record laws, as the two Texas agencies have asserted.

[TEXAS USED MONEY FROM THE HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT TO HELP PAY FOR ITS BOTCHED VOTER CITIZENSHIP REVIEW](#)

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Texas' botched search for noncitizens on the voter rolls, which ended in a legal settlement after state officials jeopardized the voting rights of thousands of legitimate voters, was paid for in part with dollars earmarked for bolstering election security amid concerns of interference in 2016. The Secretary of State's Office used roughly \$121,000 in funds it received from the federal Help America Vote Act to run its search for supposed noncitizens. The dollar figure was provided to state lawmakers and confirmed Wednesday by a spokesman for the secretary of state who said it was a legitimate use of the money because it was meant to improve the state's maintenance of its massive voter registration list. Texas was granted \$23.3 million as part of Congress' 2018 reauthorization of the Help America Vote Act to help improve and secure elections. It allowed the state to put the money toward election security enhancements, including replacing voting equipment, upgrading election-related computer systems to address cybersecurity vulnerabilities and funding "other activities that will improve the security of elections for federal office...." From the start, state officials have cited the need to protect the integrity of the rolls as the reason for the review. But naturalized citizens and civil rights groups that sued alleged the state's efforts violated the U.S. Constitution and the Voting Rights Act because they focused on voters of

colors and immigrants. A federal judge appeared to agree when he put the review on hold over concerns that “perfectly legal naturalized Americans” were targeted in ways those born in the country would not be. Democratic lawmakers on Wednesday argued that those efforts flew in the face of the Help America Vote Act’s initial purpose to improve elections and voter access.

[IN SEATTLE, THE SOCIALISTS ARE GIVING BIG BUSINESS A RUN FOR THEIR MONEY — LITERALLY](#)

THE SEATTLE TIMES (OP-ED BY DANNY WESTNEAT)

We had an excellent story in this paper over the weekend about how big business is fed up with city politics and is ready to throw its weight around. Headlined “Business lobby sees opportunity to unseat Seattle City Council’s progressive majority,” the story detailed how the political arm of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce has already amassed a \$700,000 war chest. It’s an impressive figure, fueled by Amazon’s \$200,000 pledge. It’s also only May — the candidate sign-up period doesn’t even close until this Friday. In the last municipal campaign with district voting, in 2015, the same business group spent less than \$500,000 for both the primary and general elections. So business is fired up. But there’s something else going on out that’s arguably even more interesting — which is that, so far, they’re being outgunned. By ... the socialists? I kid you not. As of Tuesday afternoon, three out of the top four money-raising candidates in the city are socialists or socialist-leaning.... The wild card is that if business uses its war chest for an expensive independent ad campaign, the spending limits for the voucher-receiving candidates can be raised. And so far, it’s the lefty candidates that seem the best at rounding up those vouchers. It will be fascinating to watch this play out. But there’s no question the democracy voucher program, if it survives a court challenge, has tilted Seattle’s political playing field. The socialists are literally giving big business a run for their money.

DEMOCRATS NEED A POWER AGENDA, NOT JUST A POLICY AGENDA

VOX (OPINION BY EZRA KLEIN)

The Democratic Party has lots of policy ideas. But policymaking is downstream from power. The kinds of policies that get crafted, considered, and passed, reflect the balance of power in society. And for all the clarity and rigor Democrats bring to the policy debate, they don't have a clear theory of power — who they think holds it, and what, if anything, they want to do about it. But that's changing. In Bernie Sanders's focus on "the millionaires and billionaires," in Elizabeth Warren's proposals for accountability capitalism, in Pete Buttigieg's emphasis on restructuring political institutions, in Kirsten Gillibrand's plan to supercharge small donors, Democrats are beginning to have an overdue debate about how to change power structures such that they can then change policy structures. That's the context for the Roosevelt Institute's manifesto-ish new paper, "New Rules For The 21st Century: Corporate Power, Public Power, and the Future of the American Economy." The report, written by Nell Abernathy, Darrick Hamilton, and Julie Margetta Morgan, tries to fashion a left-wing agenda that synthesizes a theory of policy with a theory of power. Their argument is simple enough: concentration of power is the problem, so redistribution of power is the policy. The idea that you can pass a bunch of policies fixing America's problems without confronting the power structure behind America's problems — as the Clinton and Obama administrations sought to do — is, in their view, the key to the past few decades of policy failure.... If power is as, well, powerful as the authors say, it's not going to work to confront every form of it, all at once. It's not possible in a context where the main form of power you have access to — popular opinion — is blocked from expressing itself. And so, if you want to break the concentrations of power in American politics, the place to start is with the power of political institutions to frustrate the public's demands for change. Democrats have begun moving in that direction already. It's notable that the first bill the House Democrats introduced was a package of political reforms. But holding the line on that prioritization will be harder if Democrats take back the power to pass policy, as the impulse is always to start with bills that immediately improve people's

lives, as opposed to bills that will improve the process by which you can improve people's lives. That's where Democrats need to listen to the Roosevelt Institute: Our policy problems are downstream from our power problems, and so the best way to fix policy is to start by fixing power.

[FOR THE PEOPLE ACT RETURNS POLITICAL POWER TO VOTERS – WHERE IT BELONGS](#)

COURIER-JOURNAL (OP-ED BY FRAN WAGNER)

Our current democratic system faces grave challenges. From corporate interests influencing politicians, to gerrymandered districts that strip voters of their voice, to outdated election machines that cause long lines on Election Day, the American people have lost confidence in the process and don't see their interests represented by some elected officials. But there is a solution on the horizon to fix these problems. Newly introduced legislation in the U.S. Senate will significantly restore power to voters that has been usurped by moneyed and political interests. Last month, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R.1, the For the People Act, and Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico introduced its Senate companion bill. This comprehensive legislation takes direct aim at many of the current roadblocks to making American democracy work. Some have said that the For the People Act is a "power grab," and it is: It takes power away from special interests and returns it to the people.... The For the People Act is a bold, transformative set of reforms that will strengthen our democracy and return political power to the people. As an organization with the mission of empowering voters and defending democracy, the League of Women Voters is proud to support legislation that does the same. The American people deserve to know more about this important legislation. We urge every Kentuckian to contact our senator, Mitch McConnell, as the most powerful senator in the chamber, to move this forward with a committee hearing. As with all U.S. senators, he is obligated to respond to the will of his fellow Kentuckians. The League of Women Voters envisions a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate.

★★★