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CONGRESSMAN JOHN SARBANES
MARYLAND'S THIRD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

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NATIONAL NEWS

[FRESHMEN DEMS BASH MITCH MCCONNELL WHILE CALLING FOR A SENATE VOTE ON THEIR REFORM BILL](#)

THE HUFFINGTON POST

Nearly every freshman House Democrat sent a letter on Wednesday to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) calling on him to bring the sweeping campaign finance and election reform bill passed by the House to the Senate floor for a vote. The For The People Act (H.R. 1) would create a system of publicly financed House elections, expand voting rights by mandating early voting and automatic voter registration, enhance election security and enact ethics reforms like requiring presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns. It passed the House on a 234-193 party-line vote on March 8. Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) has introduced a companion bill in the Senate backed by every Senate Democrat. McConnell, a fierce opponent of campaign finance reform, has attacked the bill a “power grab” by the Democratic Party and refused to bring it to the Senate floor for a vote.... The freshmen Democrats calling on McConnell to give their bill a vote in the Senate attacked McConnell as a “bought-and-paid-for” representative of the Washington elite on Wednesday at a press conference hosted by End Citizens United, a pro-campaign finance reform political action committee.... New Hampshire Rep. Chris Pappas (D) added: “Mitch McConnell doesn’t know what democracy looks like.” McConnell is even refusing to allow a vote on a piece of the For The People Act that would enhance election security by protecting election infrastructure from potential hacks or other interference, Rep.

Tom Malinowski (D-N.J.) said.... McConnell has promised not to bring this bill — or practically any bill passed by House Democrats — to the Senate floor. While Democrats want a vote on their bill, they also plan to use McConnell’s refusal in their 2020 election campaign to showcase their support for reforming Washington and the Republican Party’s opposition.

**Related Story: [Freshman Democrats Call on McConnell to Hold Vote on Election Reform Bill.](#)*

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[NEW ELECTION SECURITY BILLS FACE A ONE-MAN ROADBLOCK: MITCH MCCONNELL](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

A raft of legislation intended to better secure United States election systems after what the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III, called a “sweeping and systematic” Russian attack in 2016 is running into a one-man roadblock in the form of the Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. The bills include a Democratic measure that would send more than \$1 billion to state and local governments to tighten election security, but would also demand a national strategy to protect American democratic institutions against cyberattacks and require that states spend federal funds only on federally certified “election infrastructure vendors.” A bipartisan measure in both chambers would require internet companies like Facebook to disclose the purchasers of political ads. 2016 presidential election, which special counsel Robert Mueller warned the country about Wednesday.

[CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS PUSH FOR THE PEOPLE ACT TO REFORM POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS, ELECTIONS](#)

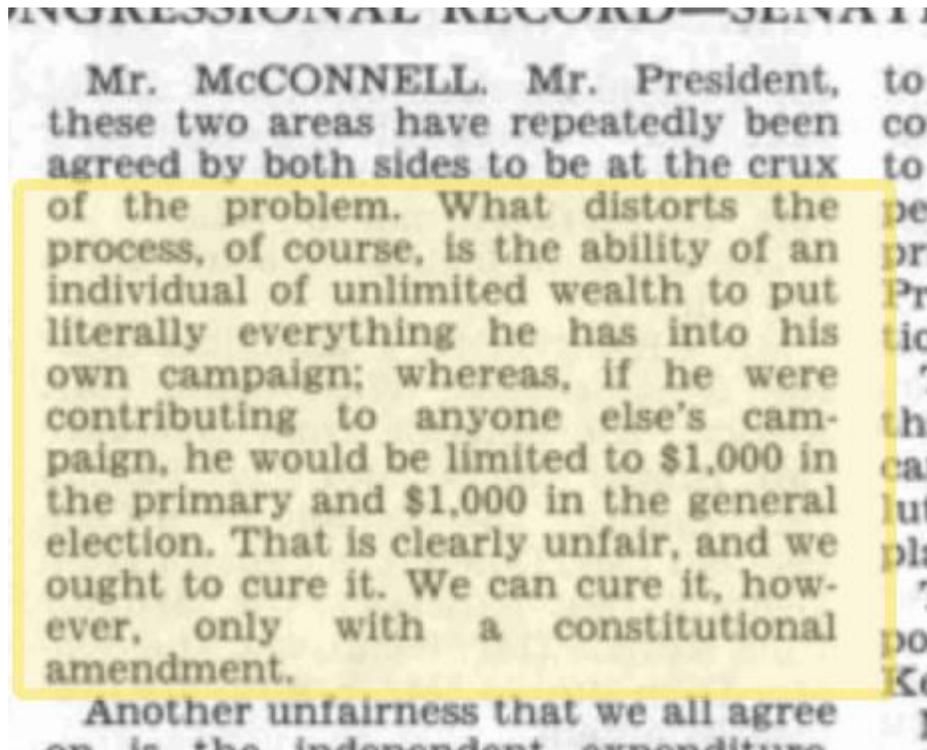
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Congressional Democrats say they have just the solution for Russia’s nefarious activities in the 2016 presidential election, which special counsel Robert Mueller warned the country about Wednesday. They are pushing a massive bill to overhaul nearly everything about the way campaigns and elections work, from

making voting easier to making voter fraud harder, while trying to reel in some of the cash that has been spent to win seats in Congress. The bill, dubbed the For the People Act, cleared the House on a strict party-line vote in March and is going nowhere in the Senate, with Majority Leader Mitch McConnell calling it an affront to free speech and a government takeover of state elections. Democrats have started calling Mr. McConnell the “grim reaper” for refusing to take up partisan bills that have cleared the House — but bowing to reality, they have said they’ll try to cut the For the People Act into smaller chunks, hoping at least some of them can earn Republicans’ support. “I am prepared to bring to the floor and pass individual bills to address the reforms included in the For the People Act,” House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer told Politico.... The package would create a national standard for voting, require some states to start automatic voter registration, and push back against political gerrymandering by urging nonpartisan commissions to draw congressional district maps. It also would create a public financing system for candidates, impose new disclosure requirements for websites and lobbyists, and overhaul the Federal Election Commission.... Rep. Derek Kilmer, chairman of the moderate New Democrats coalition, said this week on Reddit, an online forum, that Democrats will pursue parts of the For the People Act that they know have bipartisan backing. He said greater transparency for digital political ads could be one avenue. His bill was reintroduced this month with 13 Republican co-sponsors.... Breaking down the bill makes it easier for their constituents to work with, while putting Republicans in a tough position.

[IN 1987, MCCONNELL PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO LIMIT A CANDIDATE'S USE OF PERSONAL FUNDS AND INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES AS "DISTORTING THE POLITICAL PROCESS"](#)

ELECTION LAW BLOG



[SCHUMER SAYS MCCONNELL HAS AGREED TO SENATE BRIEFING ON ELECTION SECURITY](#)

THE HILL

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said the Senate will get an election security briefing, after weeks of public clamoring for Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) to agree to the demand. Schumer, speaking from the Senate floor, indicated that the Senate GOP leader had agreed to his weeks-long call for all senators to receive a briefing in the wake of special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election.... The closed-door briefing comes as senators have mounted a bipartisan push in the wake of Mueller's report to try to move election security through the Senate, but have run into high-profile opposition from McConnell and Senate Rules Committee

Chairman Roy Blunt (R-Mo.). Supporters argue that new legislation is needed to help bolster election infrastructure in the wake of Russia's actions, and as lawmakers debate how to safeguard the 2020 White House and congressional elections. Schumer argued on Monday that the closed-door briefing needed to take place in June to give lawmakers enough time to clear legislation at least a year before the 2020 election.... Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) is urging the Senate to take up H.R. 1, a wide-ranging election and ethics reform bill, and pledged that Congress will "legislate to protect our elections and secure our democracy." McConnell hasn't publicly ruled out any election security legislation, but he's declared the House bill dead on arrival in the GOP-controlled Senate.

[FEDERAL INVESTIGATORS TO EXAMINE EQUIPMENT FROM 2016 N.C. ELECTION AMID RENEWED FEARS OF RUSSIAN HACKING](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

It was a single phrase, offered without elaboration, in special counsel Robert S. Mueller III's report: In August 2016, hackers working for Russian military intelligence "installed malware on the company network" of an unnamed voter registration technology vendor in the United States. The claim amounts to one of the first indications that Russians successfully executed a cyberattack against a private company supporting American election infrastructure. And it has set off a scramble for answers in North Carolina, where officials have long been concerned about the security of a voting technology company called VR Systems — so much so that the state tried to halt the use of its electronic poll books, equipment used to check in voters.... After the Mueller report, state officials wanted to know: Was VR Systems the company referenced? What effect, if any, did the malware have? And how could they prevent it from happening in 2020? An examination of North Carolina's struggle to answer those questions, detailed in court records and a dozen interviews, hints at the difficulties state officials face in shoring up security ahead of next year's elections — a lack of technical expertise, poor communication between state and federal officials, and the apparent unwillingness, in this instance, of the federal agency involved to share information.... On Tuesday, the Department of Homeland Security told The Washington Post it will conduct a forensic analysis of the laptops used in Durham County elections in 2016. Lawson said North Carolina first asked the department to conduct such a review more than 18 months ago, though he added that DHS

has generally been a “good partner” on election security.... Today, VR Systems continues to operate in many North Carolina counties.

[ELECTION RULES ARE AN OBSTACLE TO CYBERSECURITY OF PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

One year out from the 2020 elections, presidential candidates face legal roadblocks to acquiring the tools and assistance necessary to defend against the cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns that plagued the 2016 presidential campaign. Federal laws prohibit corporations from offering free or discounted cybersecurity services to federal candidates. The same law also blocks political parties from offering candidates cybersecurity assistance because it is considered an “in-kind donation.” The issue took on added urgency this week after lawyers for the Federal Election Commission advised the commission to block a request by a Silicon Valley company, Area 1 Security, which sought to provide services to 2020 presidential candidates at a discount. The commission questioned Area 1 about its request at a public meeting on Thursday, and asked the company to refile the request with a simpler explanation of how it would determine what campaigns qualified for discounted services. Cybersecurity and election experts say time is running out for campaigns to develop tough protections.

[STANFORD GROUP CALLS FOR MAJOR OVERHAUL ON ELECTION SECURITY](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

A plan released this week by a Stanford University group that includes former top government and tech industry officials aims to be the equivalent of the 9/11 Commission report for election security. Like the 9/11 report, which fundamentally reorganized the nation’s homeland security and intelligence structure after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, “Securing American Elections” aims big. It argues Russia's 2016 election interference operation was an attack on fundamental American values, and should provoke the government and private sector to step up "defenses against efforts to erode confidence in democracy.” The report’s 108 pages include 45 recommendations ranging from securing voting systems and combating online disinformation campaigns to negotiating major election security norms with allies and punishing adversaries

who violate them.... Those recommendations include having paper trails for all ballots, conducting post-election audits and inviting ethical hackers to probe their voting systems for vulnerabilities. They also will be urging Democratic and Republican party officials to include many recommendations in their party platforms in 2020.

[RUSSIA'S MANIPULATION OF TWITTER WAS FAR VASTER THAN BELIEVED](#)

POLITICO

Russia's infamous troll farm conducted a campaign on Twitter before the 2016 elections that was larger, more coordinated and more effective than previously known, research from cybersecurity firm Symantec out Wednesday concluded. The Internet Research Agency campaign may not only have had more sway — reaching large numbers of real users — than previously thought, it also demonstrated ample patience and might have generated income for some of the phony accounts, Symantec found. Their research analyzed a massive data set that Twitter released in October 2018 on nearly 3,900 suspended accounts and 10 million tweets. It discovered that the average lag between account creation and first tweet was 177 days and the most retweeted account garnered 6 million retweets, and less than 2,000 of those came from within the IRA-linked network of accounts. The huge delay between the creation of an account and the initial tweet points to a lot of patient preparation, and the retweets indicate that a lot of unaffiliated Twitter users were amplifying the IRA's message. For some lawmakers, revelations about the broader scope of Russian disinformation on Twitter are a stark reminder that the U.S. government has precious little time to safeguard the 2020 election from foreign interference.... For Congress, a major roadblock is just understanding how tech companies police their platforms — and what they can do to prevent a repeat of 2016.... Lawmakers in the U.S. and abroad have increased pressure on social media companies to do more to stop the spread of disinformation, and companies such as Twitter and Facebook have responded by updating their policies and removing troll accounts and false information.... The research also found that the accounts played to partisans on the left and right even more than previously believed, and that most of them were fakes pretending to be regional news outlets, while a smaller subset amplified those messages.

[RUSSIA COULD UNLEASH FAKE VIDEOS DURING ELECTION, SCHIFF SAYS](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Russian government is likely to try to influence the 2020 presidential election, not through the release of stolen emails and other documents but through faked videos, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee said on Tuesday. The United States has become adept at quickly identifying the perpetrators of so-called hacking and dumping operations that result in the release of potentially damaging material, increasing the risk for Moscow that Washington will respond, said Representative Adam B. Schiff, the California Democrat who leads the committee.... Mr. Schiff said he was particularly worried about the effect of falsified videos, known as deep fakes. Such videos could be easily introduced into social media, where they will spread rapidly. A carefully crafted, controversial fake video, Mr. Schiff said, would be “hugely disruptive and hugely influential.” The risk is amplified because if a video is executed carefully, it can be hard to both prove it is fake and show where it came from.... A doctored video that appeared last month of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Democrat of California, was an example of a “cheap fake,” Mr. Schiff said, and easily shown to be falsified. But, Mr. Schiff said, when President Trump pushed out the video on his Twitter account it showed that the United States was “on treacherous ground....” “I cannot imagine anything more corrosive to a democracy than an environment where no one can tell what is true anymore,” Mr. Schiff said. “You simply retreat to your tribe and view everything as true or false depending on what party you belong to or what group you belong to.” In the next election, accentuating those divisions — more than electing a particular candidate — could well be the goal, said Jon B. Alterman, a global security expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.... Critics of the Trump administration, including Mr. Schiff, have argued that the government is doing too little to deter foreign states from launching cyberattacks or interference campaigns.

[CAMPAIGN MONEY HELPING MAKE UP FOR TENANT SHORTAGE AT TRUMP TOWER](#)

THE HUFFINGTON POST

With commercial tenants fleeing his Trump Tower, President Donald Trump continues to spend \$37,500 a month of campaign money for office space there — with some of that cash destined for his own wallet — even as thousands of square feet go unused at a newly opened office in northern Virginia. No more than “four or five” campaign staffers work at Trump’s Manhattan base, according to an informal adviser close to the White House, where the campaign rents a few thousand square feet as its “headquarters.” The per-square-foot cost is likely at least triple what the Republican National Committee pays for the much larger space it shares with the campaign in Arlington, according to a HuffPost analysis.... One former campaign staffer says that value is obvious: at least in terms of Trump’s personal bank account. The building has been shedding commercial tenants since he became president, and currently has 41,271 square feet available for rent across five floors. Should Trump move the remaining New York staff into the Arlington office, it would leave yet more vacant office space in a building whose rents continue to put money into his own pocket.... Erin Chlopak, once an FEC attorney and now with the Campaign Legal Center advocacy group, said Trump’s use of campaign money for his personal benefit might be illegal — if it can be proven that the Trump Tower office is not serving any legitimate campaign purpose. Absent such proof, though, even such “shady” behavior may be permissible, she said.

[WORLD OF INFLUENCE: A GUIDE TO TRUMP’S FOREIGN BUSINESS INTERESTS](#)

OPENSECRETS NEWS

Two years into his presidency, Donald Trump continues to make money from properties and licensing deals in nearly two dozen countries around the world, fanning the flames of concerns that the Trump administration is subject to unprecedented levels of foreign influence. Trump continued to hold more than \$130 million in foreign assets in a revocable trust as his second year in office came to a close, according to OpenSecrets’ analysis of the president’s most recent annual personal financial disclosure released by the Office of Government Ethics last month. Trump’s business entanglements continue to

leave him with positions, assets, trademarks and other business interests in more than 30 countries.... When it comes to foreign properties, the Trump Organization often charges a licensing fee to put the Trump name on the building and in some cases agrees to manage the property in exchange for a cut of the profits. This business model allows Trump to put his name on as many hotels and golf courses as possible while mitigating risk.... Although the Trump Organization ended some proposed deals around the world, it has opened several new properties since 2017, with several providing direct income to Trump.... Several groups have filed lawsuits alleging Trump has violated the Emoluments Clause, a section of the Constitution that restricts members of the government from receiving gifts or other benefits from foreign states or leaders without permission from Congress.... Trump's attorney, Rudy Giuliani, said plans for the Trump Tower in Moscow were "active" into November 2016. Trump repeatedly denied exploring a project in Moscow, as did Cohen, who pleaded guilty in November 2018 to lying to Congress. Though he was never able to complete a building in Russia, Trump has profited from wealthy Russian businessmen with ties to the authoritarian government. Reuters reported in 2017 that members of the Russian elite had invested nearly \$100 million in Trump-branded properties in Florida.... A 2018 report to Trump Hotel Chicago investors on foreign and U.S. customers broken down by country originally obtained by the Washington Post showed a 169 percent increase in Saudi Arabia-based patrons since 2016. Planning documents, agendas and conversations with organizers indicate that the Saudi government paid for more than 500 nights in Trump hotel rooms.... Trump also holds trademarks and other interests in Australia, Egypt, the European Union, Chile, New Zealand, Malaysia, Morocco and South Africa.

[WEALTHY IRAQI SHEIKH WHO URGES A HARD-LINE U.S. APPROACH TO IRAN SPENT 26 NIGHTS AT TRUMP'S D.C. HOTEL](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

In July, a wealthy Iraqi sheikh named Nahro al-Kasnazan wrote letters to national security adviser John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging them to forge closer ties with those seeking to overthrow the government of Iran. Kasnazan wrote of his desire "to achieve our mutual interest to weaken the Iranian Mullahs regime and end its hegemony." Four months later, he checked into the Trump International Hotel in Washington and spent 26 nights in

a suite on the eighth floor — a visit estimated to have cost tens of thousands of dollars. It was an unusually long stay at the expensive hotel. The Washington Post obtained the establishment’s “VIP Arrivals” lists for dozens of days last year, including more than 1,200 individual guests. Kasnazan’s visit was the longest listed.... Kasnazan said his choice of the Trump hotel was not part of a lobbying effort, adding that he came to Washington for medical treatment at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, about 45 miles away. Kasnazan, who socialized with State Department officials while in Washington, has set up several new companies in hopes of doing business with the U.S. government. His long visit is an example of how Trump’s D.C. hotel, a popular gathering place for Republican politicians and people with government business, has become a favorite stopover for influential foreigners who have an agenda to pursue with the Trump administration. A gallery of would-be foreign leaders — including exiles and upstarts who cannot always rely on a state-to-state channel to reach Trump’s government — have been gliding through the polished lobby of the Trump International Hotel since it opened in 2016.... The president’s ability to profit from foreign customers, in particular, while in the White House has drawn sharp criticism. The Trump Organization is battling a pair of lawsuits, including one filed by Democratic members of Congress, alleging that the business it does with foreign governments violates the Constitution’s emoluments clause, which bars payments to presidents by foreign states.... Trump’s arrival in the White House shifted the U.S. government’s view of Iran closer to Kasnazan’s. He was in favor of Trump’s decision to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal. He supports the approach of Bolton, who advocates for regime change in Iran.

[FOR THE CHAO FAMILY, DEEP TIES TO THE WORLD’S 2 LARGEST ECONOMIES](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The family of Elaine Chao, the transportation secretary and wife of Mitch McConnell, the Senate majority leader, has high-level political connections not only in the United States but also in China. That gives the family unusual status in the world’s two largest economies. Through interviews, industry filings and government documents from both countries, The New York Times found that the Chaos, and by extension Mr. McConnell, prospered as the family’s shipping company developed deeper business ties in China. Along the way, one of the

company's boosters was Ms. Chao, who now oversees efforts to promote America's own maritime industry, which is in steep decline as China's shipping sector rises in global dominance.... Foremost Group, the New York-based shipping company founded by Mr. Chao in 1964, landed its first big contract with the United States government, shipping rice to Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. Now, it builds most of its ships in state-owned shipyards in China, with some financed by Chinese government loans.... Ms. Chao's family ties to the shipping company and her dealings in China raise ethical issues. Ms. Chao hasn't held a formal position at Foremost since the late 1970s, but she has repeatedly used her connections and status to boost the company's reputation and visibility.... Marilyn L. Glynn, a former general counsel at the Office of Government Ethics, said Ms. Chao should recuse herself from decisions that broadly impacted the shipping industry.... Mr. McConnell benefited from his marriage into the Chao family. Ms. Chao and Mr. McConnell married in 1993, but her campaign donations, along with those of her parents, sisters and brothers-in-law, began flowing years before the wedding. The first \$10,000 came in June 1989. In the 30 years since, 13 members of the extended Chao family have given a total of more than \$1 million to Mr. McConnell's campaigns and to political action committees tied to him.

[DECEASED STRATEGIST'S FILES DETAIL REPUBLICAN GERRYMANDERING IN NORTH CAROLINA](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

When the hard drives of a deceased Republican strategist revealed new evidence last week about the Trump administration's decision to add a citizenship question to the 2020 census, many people wondered whether the files hid other revelations. On Thursday, in a county court in Raleigh, N.C., they got an answer: there is potentially much more. The late strategist, Thomas Hofeller, was the mastermind behind the G.O.P.'s gerrymandering strategy, and left behind four hard drives and 18 thumb drives containing more than 75,000 files that were found by his estranged daughter after his death in August. The advocacy group Common Cause said in court documents submitted in Raleigh on Thursday that the Hofeller files include new evidence showing how North Carolina Republicans misled a federal court to prolong the life of their map of state legislative districts, which had been ruled unconstitutional.

BANNING FORMER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS FROM LOBBYING WON'T FIX THE REVOLVING DOOR

VOX

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ted Cruz are cut from very different ideological cloth, but both enjoy “outsider” personas and occasional clashes with party leaders. They’ve formed a pact to work on legislation that would bar former members of Congress from working as lobbyists. It’s a nice feel-good story. Unfortunately, it’s not a very good idea. The most unseemly aspects of “the revolving door” can’t effectively be curtailed by a lobbying ban, and attempting to craft an airtight one will distract reform energy from more important concerns. The real strength of moneyed interests in Congress derives from America’s unfortunate habit of starving its public institutions of resources.... The problem with curbs on members of Congress becoming lobbyists is that the actual meaning of lobbyist is considerably narrower and more technical than you might think.... If you ban lobbying jobs, the same corruption can sneak through in other channels.... One realistic way to remedy this is to equip offices with their own core of experienced legislative analysts — whether in the form of personal staff, committee and subcommittee staff, or expert bodies like the Congressional Budget Office.... By the same token, members of Congress themselves should be paid more to narrow the economic gap between serving members and ex-members.... People who want to reduce special interests’ stranglehold on the system should focus on real reforms that would make a difference and not chase shiny demagogic objects.

EVERYONE KNOWS MONEY INFLUENCES POLITICS ... EXCEPT SCIENTISTS

FIVETHIRTYEIGHT

Are you shocked to find out that there’s evidence suggesting campaign donations have power in the halls of congress? I wasn’t. Nor, likely, were the 72 percent of Americans who already believe their federal political system is tainted by filthy lucre. If anything, what’s surprising here is that we didn’t already know this for sure.... There are lots of competing pressures attached to both roll call votes and campaign donations. People donate to politicians who already share their views.... But there are many ways to influence legislation beyond dictating

whether someone votes yes or no. Those decisions are tiny stitches, largely invisible in the finished bill. The problem for researchers is there's seldom a record of those small alterations.... The ACA was different, however. Politicians were eager to avoid the political debacle of the 1990s' attempts at health care reform.... That led legislators to take rare steps to make the 2009 bill-writing process more transparent.... McKay used the letters, amendments and campaign finance records to follow a trail: from fundraising to fundraisers' suggestions for the bill to amendments based on those suggestions. The paths she found were clear.... Hosting a fundraiser turned out to increase your chances of getting your words in a proposed amendment — hosts' letters were three and a half times as likely to text-match with amendments as non-hosts'.... In theory, evidence ought to put an end to arguments. Two people disagree, and the one with the evidence wins. The problem is solved. But that's not really the norm, especially in the realm of politics.... McKay told me she used to believe Congress was essentially honest — the data changed her mind. But McKay is a researcher, not a politician. While the Supreme Court may be coming to the question from the same starting point as McKay, the data alone is unlikely to sway them.

[MCCONNELL'S TOBACCO 21 BILL EXPOSES STATES TO BIG TOBACCO'S WISHLIST](#)

THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

Last week, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) introduced a so-called Tobacco 21 bill to raise the federal minimum age for buying tobacco products, including vaping products, from 18 to 21. The legislation does not include preemption of state regulations or other industry-friendly measures, but it requires states to take follow-up actions that could give the tobacco industry a chance to flex its lobbying muscle and enact its regulatory wishes in states across the country. Tucked into the bill is an update to a 1992 law, the Synar Amendment, that requires states to enact and enforce their own laws prohibiting the sale and distribution of tobacco products to people under the age of 18. The McConnell bill, which is co-sponsored by Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, would raise that age limit to 21, forcing states to update their laws in order to remain in compliance. If states are not in compliance with the Synar requirement, they could lose federal funds available through the Department of Health and Human Service's Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant awards. A critic of the bill is fellow Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), who introduced his own bipartisan bill that's similar to

McConnell's but does not require states to pass their own Tobacco 21 legislation.... Juul has come out in support of the McConnell measure, a seemingly surprising move considering the bill would ostensibly restrict the company from selling to a large portion of its current customer base.... Juul's 80-plus state lobbyists, as well as lobbyists for other tobacco companies, have been very active, and if the McConnell legislation passes, the Synar bills would give them the legislative hooks they need to enact their wish list at the state level. Several states have recently seen industry lobbyists attack tobacco legislation introduced in their legislatures, a likely preview of what would happen if states were required to put forth bills to be in compliance with the Synar law.... Juul's partial owner, Altria, has been a consistent backer of McConnell's campaigns and PACs since forming in 2003.... Altria is headquartered just outside of Richmond, Virginia, which is represented by Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine, a co-sponsor of the McConnell bill. Like his Republican colleague, Kaine's campaigns have benefited from the company's donations. In the 2018 election cycle, Altria's PAC and employees made the company Kaine's fourth-largest donor, according to data compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics.\

[JOHN BOEHNER: FROM SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE TO CANNABIS PITCHMAN](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

John A. Boehner, the former speaker of the House, once stood second in line for the presidency and staunchly against legalized marijuana. Now you can find the longtime Republican standing before a wall-size photo of the Capitol, making an online infomercial pitch for the cannabis industry.... Mr. Boehner's pro-weed epiphany coincides with the prospect of a payday as high as \$20 million from the industry he once so vigorously opposed. He sits on the board of Acreage Holdings, a marijuana investment firm whose sale to a cannabis industry giant hinges on Mr. Boehner's ability to persuade Congress and the federal government to legalize, or at least legitimize, marijuana.... This year, Acreage announced plans to sell itself to Canopy Growth, a Canadian company that is the biggest cannabis holding in the world. The deal, worth around \$3 billion, based on current stock prices for both Acreage and Canopy, would create an \$18 billion behemoth, industry analysts say.... But there is a catch. The takeover will not happen without substantial changes in marijuana policy, leaving it up to Mr. Boehner and his team of lobbyists to work their magic in Washington. Mr. Boehner "sees an investment opportunity in cannabis," Mr. Holt [a spokesman for the National Cannabis Roundtable, which

Mr. Boehner founded in February] said. Citing statistics suggesting most Americans favor “some kind of marijuana reform,” he added, “Who wouldn’t want to be involved?” A slew of former lawmakers agree. Among those who have signed on in recent months to represent the weed industry are former Senator Tom Daschle of South Dakota, a longtime Democratic leader in the Senate; former Representative Dana Rohrabacher, Republican of California; former Representative Joseph Crowley, Democrat of New York; and former Representative Carlos Curbelo, Republican of Florida.

[TECH GIANTS AMASS A LOBBYING ARMY FOR AN EPIC WASHINGTON BATTLE](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Faced with the growing possibility of antitrust actions and legislation to curb their power, four of the biggest technology companies are amassing an army of lobbyists as they prepare for what could be an epic fight over their futures. Initially slow to develop a presence in Washington, the tech giants — Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google — have rapidly built themselves into some of the largest players in the influence and access industry as they confront threats from the Trump administration and both parties on Capitol Hill. The four companies spent a combined \$55 million on lobbying last year, doubling their combined spending of \$27.4 million in 2016, and some are spending at a higher rate so far this year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks lobbying and political contributions. That puts them on a par with long-established lobbying powerhouses like the defense, automobile and banking industries.... The influence campaigns encompass a broad range of activities, including calls on members of Congress, advertising, funding of think-tank research and efforts to get the attention of President Trump, whose on-again, off-again streak of economic populism is of particular concern to the big companies.

[WITH 2020 LOOMING, PARTIES FIGHT STATE BY STATE OVER VOTING ACCESS](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

After a record turnout in November swept Democrats into several key federal and state offices in Arizona, the Republicans who have dominated the Statehouse for a decade did two things: They raised the specter of election fraud. And they proposed a sheaf of bills to tighten the rules for registering to vote and for casting ballots.... But warnings of stolen votes and corrupted voter rolls that used to reliably muster support for restrictions are now being countered by citizen initiatives to restore voting rights and a wave of grass-roots activism. And suddenly, the fights are not so lopsided. Since 2010, 25 states, mostly Republican-led, have significantly toughened ballot laws. But by the time Arizona's legislature adjourned last week, only two comparatively minor new bills tightening ballot rules had made it to the governor's desk. The headline struggle is in Florida, where a citizen initiative in November restored ballot rights to as many as 1.5 million former felons, and the Republican-controlled legislature last month waged a pitched battle to blunt the initiative's impact. The Democratic-run legislature in New Hampshire sent the state's Republican governor legislation last month to undo stiff barriers to voting by college students from out of state. In North Carolina this week, the Republican legislature abandoned an effort to impose rules that would render many student IDs useless at polling places. Voting rights advocates have sued to overturn a new law enacted in Tennessee last month that saddled voter registration drives with fresh requirements.... Elsewhere, the movement to expand ballot access has enjoyed a string of once-unlikely victories. Nevada's legislature voted last month to restore former felons' voting rights, following Louisiana's restoration of rights in February.

SEATTLE'S RADICAL EXPERIMENT

HARVARD POLITICAL REVIEW

In January 2017, every resident of Seattle received a small white packet in the mail. Inside each of these packets was free money — a cumulative total of \$54 million dollars — from the city of Seattle. Well, it was not exactly free money. The city had given each resident \$100, not in cash but in “democracy vouchers,” with the goal of allowing every Seattleite the opportunity to donate to a political campaign of their choosing. In 2015, voters passed “Honest Elections Seattle,” a citizen-led initiative to reform campaign finance rules. As part of that initiative, the democracy vouchers program was born. Seattle’s democracy vouchers are part of the city’s experiment to increase political engagement and reduce the power of big money in politics through a system of public funding for political campaigns.... The issue of money in politics commands rare bipartisan agreement. Politicians from Joe Biden to Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders to Rick Santorum have spoken out against the corrupting nature of money in politics. Given money’s importance to candidates for advertising and logistical organizing, it is unsurprising that 88 percent of 2018 U.S. House races were won by the candidate that spent the most money. Those midterms were the most expensive in history, despite the fact that less than half of 1 percent of Americans donated more than \$200 to a political campaign. Instead, this money overwhelmingly came from the richest families in America, who donate millions each cycle to swing elections and influence policies.... The problems created by this political financing system are not easy to fix, especially in light of the Supreme Court’s decisions in *Citizens United* and *Buckley v. Valeo* about campaign finance and freedom of speech. But Seattle’s democracy vouchers represent one potential way to reduce the power of big money: flood the city with small money.... The 2017 elections — the first elections held with the democracy vouchers program in place — witnessed a 16 percent increase in the number of ballots cast from the 2015 election. The numbers show that the vouchers program increased not only the number but also the diversity of donors.... Though more experimentation is needed, Seattle’s democracy vouchers are a promising model for a system that could make American elections fairer and more open for all.

[OREGON JOINS INTERSTATE PACT TO IGNORE ELECTORAL COLLEGE](#)

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oregon voted Wednesday to become the 15th state to grant its electoral college votes to whoever wins the popular vote across the country. The Oregon House sent the governor a measure to join National Vote Interstate Compact, a pledge between states to side-step the Electoral College and overhaul the way the nation elects presidents. Gov. Kate Brown, who has made expanding voter access a priority, has already indicated she will sign the measure.... The move taps into growing anger over the nation's complicated elections process that some argue doesn't always align with the will of the voters. President Donald Trump became the second Republican in five elections to win the presidency through the Electoral College despite losing the popular vote.... Fourteen states plus the District of Columbia have already signed onto the pact, which only takes effect when enough states join to reach 270 electoral votes – the threshold needed to win the White House. With Oregon's 7 electoral votes, the movement is now 74 electoral votes short of that goal.

KEY OPINION

[I BEAT DARK MONEY IN MONTANA. WE CAN BEAT IT ACROSS AMERICA.](#)

THE DES MOINES REGISTER (OP-ED BY STEVE BULLOCK)

On Wednesday, I'm taking the Trump Administration to court to defend the integrity of our elections. Why? In 2018, the same day Trump was meeting with Russian president Vladimir Putin, the Trump Administration repealed a rule in place since the 1970s requiring dark money groups to disclose their biggest donors to the IRS. These groups are some of the biggest spenders in our elections, and their influence has corrupted our politics and our policies for far too long. Trump's new dark money loophole pours gasoline on a fire that has raged out of control since the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision.... These dark money groups spend millions to sway our elections, yet they refuse to reveal where the money comes from. Before the

Supreme Court ruled in Citizens United, these groups accounted for about two percent of outside spending in our elections. Now it's more than half.... In Montana, I took this fight head-on. I argued the first challenge to Citizens United all the way to the Supreme Court. As governor, I passed some of the strongest campaign disclosure laws in the country and banned foreign money in our elections. If we can kick the Koch Brothers out of Montana's elections, we can do it in Iowa and in states across the country.

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