



## DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

November 2, 2018

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### NATIONAL NEWS

#### [Job One for Democratic House Is a Sweeping Good-Government Bill](#)

**The Washington Post**

Democratic Party leaders are under pressure from a broad coalition of liberal groups to make a sweeping government-overhaul bill their first order of business in January if the party wins a House majority. The effort has gotten at least tentative backing from top House Democratic leaders. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) and Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer (Md.) have called for early ethics legislation and specifically praised the work of Rep. John Sarbanes (Md.), who released a broad legislative blueprint earlier this year.... Groups are calling for legislation that expands voting-rights protections, tightens campaign finance laws and cracks down on government ethics in Washington. All three areas are addressed in the Sarbanes blueprint, though the leaders of the groups in question said Tuesday that they planned to push for action regardless of who wins the House majority.... Sarbanes said in an interview Monday that he considered the resolution to be a blueprint for further legislation, which will be cobbled together from more than 20 existing bills and further refined in the relevant committees. The overhaul package is a political imperative as much as a policy necessity, Sarbanes said, adding that he had a "strong commitment" from leadership to move quickly on the legislation, but stopped short of calling it ironclad. "The public hates Washington and both parties with a broad brush right now. They look at us and they say, 'You're all part of the same corrupt system,' " Sarbanes said. "This is an opportunity for Democrats to establish a brand that says, 'We get it.' Every time you hand us the gavel, we're going to go make this kind of change to restore your voice. And I think doing that quickly is important."

#### [Dem Focus: Campaign, Ethics Changes, Infrastructure and Drug Prices](#)

**The New York Times**

Democrats would use their first month in the House majority to advance sweeping changes to future campaign and ethics laws, requiring the disclosure of shadowy political donors, outlawing

the gerrymandering of congressional districts and restoring key enforcement provisions to the Voting Rights Act, top Democratic leaders said on Tuesday.... At least in theory, Democrats view election and ethics reform as another issue of potential collaboration. But their legislative package of more than a dozen bills, overseen by Representative John Sarbanes of Maryland, looks more like a retort to Mr. Trump's popular campaign claims that he would "drain the swamp" in Washington — a difference Democrats have weaponized on the campaign trail.

## [Democrats Prioritize Ethics Reform If They Win the Midterms](#)

### **TIME**

With the midterm elections just over a week away, Democrats have begun touting an ethics reform package that will top their legislative agenda if they take over the House of Representatives. On Tuesday, approximately 100 advocacy groups will announce their support for the legislation, which is still being written, as part of a campaign called "A Declaration for American Democracy." The package is expected to incorporate proposals for campaign finance reform, voting rights and ethics and accountability. The latter is expected to include a provision that President Donald Trump must release his tax returns. Democratic Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland introduced a resolution incorporating these proposals in June with 160 cosponsors, but it never reached the floor in the Republican-controlled House.... Sarbanes, who chairs the Democracy Reform Task Force and introduced the resolution in June told TIME the broad base of support is indicative of Democrats' unity when it comes to the overriding legislative goal of holding the Administration accountable. "Having all of those statements, those commitments in a sense published before the election happens reminds us all that it's an important priority and it's bound up in the outcome of this election," he said Monday. "The timing is appropriate in terms of putting your marker down but also to just send a signal that this has to be first order of business when a new congress convenes in January."

## [The First Thing Democrats Will Do If They Win The House Is Pass Anti-Corruption And Voting Rights Reforms](#)

### **The Huffington Post**

The first bill Democrats plan to introduce and pass if they win control of the House of Representatives on Nov. 6 will be a comprehensive package of campaign finance, voting rights, redistricting and ethics reforms. The presumptive H.R. 1 will be based on a House resolution introduced in 2018 by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) and co-sponsored by 165 Democratic House members, including the entire party leadership. "Reform is going to be the first thing out of the gate," he said. The bill will include the creation of a small-donor public financing system for congressional elections, the restoration of the Voting Rights Act, nationwide automatic voter registration, nonpartisan redistricting reforms for congressional elections and a host of ethics reforms to rein in corruption in Congress and the executive branch. A coalition of 100 groups called the Declaration for American Democracy — including broad-based membership

organizations like the NAACP, Planned Parenthood, Sierra Club, Indivisible, Public Citizen and Common Cause — endorsed this democracy reform package as the first priority for a Democratic House on Tuesday. The coalition will organize its members to support the passage of this legislation if Democrats win control of the House.

## [Outside Groups Push for Revamp of Campaign Finance, Ethics Laws](#)

### **CQ News**

Nearly 100 mostly liberal-leaning lobbying groups will launch a campaign Nov. 7 to build pressure on lawmakers to put an overhaul of campaign finance, ethics and voting rights laws at the top of the agenda in the next Congress. The campaign will begin in earnest the day after voters cast their ballots in the midterm elections, no matter which party or parties control the House and Senate.... Top House Democrats already have said they would make such a package a first order in the 116th Congress if their party wins control of the chamber on Nov. 6, but such an agenda would not be a priority for Republicans.... On the political money front, the groups endorsed proposals in Congress, such as a bill (HR 20) from Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., that would offer taxpayer matching funds for voters making relatively small campaign donations.... Sarbanes, who chairs House Democrats' Democracy Reform Task Force, told CQ that before taking on other big issues such as immigration, health care and gun control, "You have to establish this idea that you're unrigging the system."

## [America Is at a Midterm Crossroads. Let Us Count the Ways](#)

### **Roll Call**

Next week's elections will not only determine the balance of power on Capitol Hill but also will seal the fate of the Trump administration's legislative agenda for the next two years and set the landscape of the 2020 presidential campaigns. The direction of the nation's most contentious and consequential issues — health care, immigration, taxes, climate change, trade, gun control, ethics and campaign finance overhauls and oversight of the administration — hinges on what voters decide Nov. 6.... Steny H. Hoyer of Maryland, along with some of the likely stars of the incoming freshman class, have called for the new majority's top priority and first order of legislative business to be a far-reaching overhaul of the nation's campaign finance, voting rights, lobbying and ethics laws.... "We'll be creating a new baseline of what Democrats stand for," said Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland, who chairs the House Democrats' Democracy Reform Task Force. He said his party has big ideas on immigration, health care, gun control and a number of other issues. But first, he said, "You have to establish this idea that you're unrigging the system." Democrats can't fight pharmaceutical companies on drug prices if the party is beholden to the industry's donations, he said. More than 100 Democratic challengers have called on the party's House leaders to embrace the idea.

## [Trump's Corruption: The Definitive List](#)

### **The New York Times**

President Trump, his family and more than a few of his appointees are using his presidency to enrich themselves. They are spending taxpayer dollars for their own benefit. They are accepting sweetheart deals from foreigners. And they are harnessing the power of the federal government on behalf of their businesses. There's a word for this: corruption. Given how widespread Trumpian corruption has become, we thought it was time to make a list. It's meant to be a definitive list of self-dealing by the president, his family, his staff or his friends — since he began running for president. To qualify, an incident needs to seem highly credible, even if it remains unresolved, and needs to involve making money. Compiling the list made us understand why some historians believe Trump's administration is the most corrupt since at least Warren Harding's, of 1920s Teapot Dome fame. Trump administration officials and people close to them are brashly using power to amass perks and cash. They are betting that they can get away with it. So far, Congress has let them.

## [Inquiry Into Ryan Zinke Land Deal Is Said to Escalate](#)

### **The New York Times**

The Interior Department's top watchdog has referred an investigation into a possible conflict of interest by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to the Justice Department, according to a person familiar with the matter, a sign that the federal government is considering a criminal investigation of Mr. Zinke's actions. It is not known which investigation was referred to the Justice Department. Mr. Zinke is the subject of at least 18 known federal investigations into allegations of ethical misconduct or other policy violations. However, the person familiar with the matter, who was not authorized to speak publicly, said it was highly likely that the investigation now being examined by the Justice Department was one involving a Montana land deal involving Mr. Zinke and the chairman of the energy giant Halliburton. The Interior secretary has come under heightened scrutiny since the resignation in July of the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Scott Pruitt, who stepped down after investigations revealed multiple violations of ethics rules and possibly of the law.

*\*Related Story: [Zinke Faces Increased Ethics Scrutiny.](#)*

*\*Related Story: [A Guide to Ryan Zinke Investigations.](#)*

## [Zinke's Heir Apparent Ready to Step In](#)

### **POLITICO**

Like Scott Pruitt before him, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has an experienced deputy steeped in the world of bureaucratic infighting waiting on deck if scandal drives him from office. Zinke has long been expected to join a post-election exodus from the Trump administration, even before

this week's reports that Interior's internal watchdog had referred at least one investigation into the secretary's ethical problems to the Justice Department. And he already has an heir apparent: Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt, a longtime lobbyist for the oil and gas and water industries, who would be well placed to execute President Donald Trump's pro-fossil fuel, anti-regulatory policies.

## [Eleven Donors Have Plowed \\$1 Billion Into Super PACs](#)

### **The Washington Post**

Just 11 donors have injected \$1 billion into U.S. political races in the past eight years through super PACs, the big-money entities that have given wealthy contributors a powerful way to influence elections. The donors — a bipartisan collection of hedge-fund billionaires, entrepreneurs, media magnates and a casino mogul — together contributed more than one-fifth of the \$4.5 billion collected by these types of political action committees since their inception in 2010, according to a Washington Post analysis of data from the Federal Election Commission and the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. The list of the 11 biggest super-PAC donors comprises five Republicans, five Democrats and former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, who previously had declared himself a political independent.

## [Female Candidates Break Barriers, Except When It Comes to Money](#)

### **The New York Times**

Women have broken many barriers in this midterm election cycle: Record numbers have run for Congress and record numbers have won primaries, including a record number of women of color like [Rashida] Tlaib. Women are newly asserting themselves as donors, too, often helping female candidates; while donations from women to Republican men have dropped off a cliff since the election of President Trump, donations from women to Democratic women have shot up, reflecting a trend the Women's Philanthropy Institute calls "rage giving."

But women who run for office are still struggling to raise as much as men, particularly if they are Republican, or challenging incumbents, or running in places where the opposing party has a big advantage — as is the case with many Democratic women this year. Men are still making the large majority of political contributions, and male candidates are still raising more money.

## [We Posed As 100 Senators to Run Ads on Facebook. All Were Approved](#)

### **VICE News**

One of Facebook's major efforts to add transparency to political advertisements is a required "Paid for by" disclosure at the top of each ad supposedly telling users who is paying for political ads that show up in their news feeds. But on the eve of the 2018 midterm elections, a VICE News investigation found the "Paid for by" feature is easily manipulated and appears to allow anyone to lie about who is paying for a political ad, or to pose as someone paying for the ad. To

test it, VICE News applied to buy fake ads on behalf of all 100 sitting U.S. senators, including ads “Paid for by” by Mitch McConnell and Chuck Schumer. Facebook’s approvals were bipartisan: All 100 sailed through the system, indicating that just about anyone can buy an ad identified as “Paid for by” by a major U.S. politician.

## [Facebook Removes Iranian Network That Was Spreading Disinformation](#)

### **The New York Times**

Last year, when Facebook disclosed a sweeping, coordinated disinformation campaign carried out by Russian agents, the company presented the first evidence of a new kind of information warfare. Now mischief makers in other countries appear to be following the Russian playbook. Facebook said on Friday that it had identified and removed a new influence network that had originated in Iran. It was the second time this year that a disinformation effort targeting people in the United States and Britain had been tied to Iranians. The company took down more than 82 pages, groups and accounts, including 30 Facebook pages, 33 Instagram accounts and three Facebook groups, it said. About one million users in the United States and Britain followed those accounts. The latest disinformation campaign, which Facebook said was discovered last week, was much smaller than the Russia-linked information operations before and after the 2016 presidential election.... But the type of material released on Friday was remarkably similar – emotionally charged topics like race relations and President Trump.

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## IN THE STATES

## [Fighting Corruption Is On the Ballot in 3 States And 2 Cities](#)

### **The Huffington Post**

South Dakota is one of a handful of states and cities where citizens will vote on ballot initiatives that enact anti-corruption laws, including campaign finance, ethics and lobbying reform. Ballot initiatives that seek to correct the corrupting role of money in politics have multiplied across the country since the Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United ruling, which legalized unlimited campaign spending by corporations and the super-rich. Although, in these cases, each ballot initiative has its own local story.... A small group of cities also have campaign finance-related initiatives on the ballot for voters this November. If approved, a ballot initiative in Baltimore, Maryland, would give the city council the power to update the city’s public campaign financing system, establishing a fund to match public dollars to candidates raising small-donor contributions. The city was inspired to ask the public to help update its public financing system after voter-backed initiatives created similar programs in Montgomery and Howard counties.

## [Voters Could Tighten Ethics, Campaign Finance at the Ballot Box](#)

### **NPR**

Voters in more than a dozen states will vote on ballot questions next Tuesday to enact stringent laws on campaign finance and other government ethics issues affecting state and local lawmakers. The surge in ballot questions comes as national Democrats are embracing ethics reform issues. House Democrats have legislation ready to launch, with more than 100 Democratic congressional candidates signing a letter this month calling for reforms to be "the very first item Congress addresses" in January. And 120 Democratic nonincumbents on next week's ballots have pledged to reject contributions from corporate PACs.... Some of the ballot measures would exceed federal standards, which have been steadily relaxed by the Supreme Court. Congress last passed a major campaign finance bill in 2001.

*\*Related Story: [What to Know About Massachusetts Ballot Question Two.](#)*

## [To Cast Their Ballots, These Voters Will Have to Get Out of Dodge](#)

### **The New York Times**

On Election Days past, voters cast their ballots at the only polling place in this town of 27,000: the sprawling civic center on the north side of Dodge City. But with a construction project expected to start there soon, the county clerk moved the polls this year almost four miles away, past the railroad tracks and beyond the city limits. That switch, which in some places might be little more than a footnote in a local newspaper, stoked anger and was perceived by some Democrats as a blatant attempt to suppress the vote of Dodge City's Hispanic majority. On Friday, the American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas filed a federal lawsuit asking a judge to intervene and reopen the civic center for voting. The swift backlash and widespread attention to Dodge City's change came in no small part because of restrictive voting laws championed by Kansas' secretary of state, Kris Kobach, a frequent A.C.L.U. foe who also happens to be the Republican nominee in this year's extremely close race for governor.

## [Political Money in State-Level Campaigns Exceeds \\$2B](#)

### **The Associated Press**

Candidates for governor, legislature and other state offices this year have brought in \$2.2 billion in campaign contributions — nearly matching the combined total of \$2.4 billion for candidates for the U.S. House and Senate. That makes this year among the most expensive ever in state-level politics, and the total will only grow in the final stretch before Tuesday's election. At stake is control of 36 governors' offices and legislative chambers in most states.

Activists see state elections as a good investment because it doesn't take as much money to influence them as it does congressional races.

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## KEY OPINION

### [How Voter Suppression Could Swing the Midterms](#)

#### **The New York Times (Op-Ed by Ari Berman)**

The issue of voter suppression has exploded in recent weeks, most notably in the Georgia governor's race between Stacey Abrams, a Democrat, and Brian Kemp, a Republican. While running for higher office, Mr. Kemp, as secretary of state, also enforces Georgia's voting laws. This month, The Associated Press reported that Mr. Kemp's office had put more than 53,000 voter registration applications in limbo because the information on the forms did not exactly match state databases. Seventy percent of the pending registrations were from African-Americans, leading Ms. Abrams to charge that Mr. Kemp was trying "to tilt the playing field in his favor." Mr. Kemp claimed a voter registration group tied to Ms. Abrams had "submitted sloppy forms." Since the 2010 election, 24 states overwhelmingly controlled by Republicans have put in place new voting restrictions, such as tougher voter ID laws, cutbacks to early voting and barriers to registration. Republicans say these measures are necessary to combat the threat of widespread voter fraud, even though study after study shows that such fraud is exceedingly rare. Many of these states have hotly contested races in 2018, and a drop in turnout among Democratic constituencies could keep Republicans in power.

### [How Democrats Can Reverse Years of Voter Suppression](#)

#### **SLATE (Op-Ed)**

Faced with the latest flurry of hardball Republican tactics on voting issues this election cycle, Democrats are grappling with the reality of an opposition that now seems determined to cement long-term minority rule. In order to combat this dynamic, progressives need a plan of their own for the next time they control both houses of Congress and the presidency. The single best step that Democrats could take under a future unified control would be to use the "nuclear option" to expand voting rights. This would let Democrats, by a simple majority vote, enact wide-ranging voting reform, from restoring a key part of the Voting Rights Act, to automatic voter registration, to statehood for D.C.

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## NEW REPORTS

### [Leadership PACs, Inc.](#)

#### **Issue One**

Not all 535 members of Congress have leadership PACs, but most do. Some members of Congress even operate two affiliated leadership PACs, which share one contribution limit. For this report, Issue One identified 503 leadership PACs operated by 488 lawmakers who were sitting members of Congress as of September 28, 2018. Then, using data obtained from the Center for Responsive Politics in mid-October, Issue One analyzed the sources funding these committees during the 2017-2018 election cycle.

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