



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

November 9, 2018

NATIONAL NEWS

[House Democrats Vow to 'Drain the Swamp' and Bring 'Accountability'](#)

NPR

Cleaning up Washington was a campaign rallying cry for Democrats. They promised to go after corruption in the Trump administration, and they vow that their first piece of legislation will aim to strengthen integrity in government.... Leading the charge is Maryland Congressman John Sarbanes. “It’s three very basic things that I think the public wants to see. Make it easy and not hard to vote in America. Serve with ethics and integrity. And don’t get tangled up in the money” [said Sarbanes]. By “the money,” he means political cash. This election, money came at campaigns from more places and in larger volumes than ever before. Super PACs and political nonprofits were prominent. But at the same time, small donors showered record sums on many of the Democratic candidates. The reform bill would promote more small-dollar giving. The other provisions of the bill would restore protections in the Voting Rights Act and close loopholes in ethics laws. Sarbanes said the midterms offer a launching pad for the bill. “What happened yesterday is the people gave our democracy its footing back. We found our footing. Now we’ve got to begin that march to the kind of democracy that people want to see.”

[Trump Administration Spares Corporate Wrongdoers Billions in Penalties](#)

The New York Times

Across the corporate landscape, the Trump administration has presided over a sharp decline in financial penalties against banks and big companies accused of malfeasance, according to analyses of government data and interviews with more than 60 former and current federal officials. The approach mirrors the administration’s aggressive deregulatory agenda throughout the federal government. The New York Times and outside experts tallied enforcement activity at the S.E.C. and the Justice Department, the two most powerful agencies policing the corporate and financial sectors. Comparing cases filed during the first 20 months of the Trump presidency with the final 20 months of the Obama administration, the review found:

- A 62 percent drop in penalties imposed and illicit profits ordered returned by the S.E.C., to \$1.9 billion under the Trump administration from \$5 billion under the Obama administration;
- A 72 percent decline in corporate penalties from the Justice Department's criminal prosecutions, to \$3.93 billion from \$14.15 billion, and a similar percent drop in civil penalties against financial institutions, to \$7.4 billion;
- A lighter touch toward the banking industry, with the S.E.C. ordering banks to pay \$1.7 billion during the Obama period, nearly four times as much as in the Trump era, and Mr. Trump's Justice Department bringing 17 such cases, compared with 71.

[Newly Released Emails Suggest Zinke Contradicted Ethics Pledge](#)

The Washington Post

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke continued to engage in discussions involving his family foundation's property in summer 2017 despite the fact that he had pledged to recuse himself from such matters for a year, according to documents obtained by The Washington Post. At issue is an August 2017 email exchange with David Taylor, the city planner for Whitefish, Mont. Zinke authorized him to access the property and explained that he was engaged in negotiations with a real estate developer over building a parking lot on his foundation's land. But under an ethics pledge he signed Jan. 10, 2017, Zinke vowed to step down from his position as president of the Great Northern Veterans Peace Park Foundation after winning confirmation and refrain from participating in any matters concerning the group for one year. Zinke won confirmation on March 1, 2017, but state records and the foundation's 2018 annual report listed him as continuing to serve as a foundation officer months after that.

**Related Story: [Zinke Houseguest Impersonates Secretary, Calls U.S. Park Police.](#)*

[China Greenlights Large Batch of Ivanka Trump Trademark Applications](#)

The Washington Post

Ivanka Trump-branded semiconductors and voting machines? In China? That's an odd, if remote, possibility after Chinese trademark regulators awarded preliminary approval for 16 trademark applications from the president's daughter and White House senior adviser, online Chinese government filings show. The approvals by Beijing on Oct. 13 were notable for their timing, coming just as Chinese and U.S. officials were seeking to restart trade talks that had collapsed amid acrimony. They also raised eyebrows for covering a grab-bag of products, including electoral hardware in a country not exactly known for its elections. Ethics watchdogs have long warned about the possibility of foreign governments seeking to curry favor with President Trump

through his family's extensive business interests, and Ivanka Trump appeared to acknowledge the potential for conflict in her dual roles as White House official and international entrepreneur in July, when she shut down her namesake fashion line.

[House Democrats' Win Fuels K Street Hiring](#)

POLITICO

House Democrats' return to power after eight years in the minority has reordered Washington's lobbying scene, fueling demand for hires who have relationships with Democrats and rattling companies that are afraid they'll get caught up in investigations led by the incoming majority. The Democratic takeover of the House ... ends two years of unified GOP control of Washington in which corporate America and its lobbyists saw major victories, including a tax bill that slashed the corporate rate and extensive deregulation. Washington offices of major corporations now are grappling with how to work a Democratic House full of newly elected members, many of whom ran on promises to resist special interests and who are generally younger and more diverse than the denizens of K Street.

[Four Fights Over Voting Rights](#)

The New York Times

Easing early voting. Or not. When North Carolina's Republican legislature ordered all early-voting sites to stay open 12 hours a day for 18 days this year, they called it a move to boost voting. It's not turning out that way. Many poorer counties don't have the resources to comply, and more than half — including many rural, disproportionately minority ones — have had to close some early-voting sites.... **Busting ballot collectors.** In September, a divided United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld an Arizona law that makes it a felony for anyone but a family member, caregiver or postal worker to deliver ballots. The state's Republican-controlled legislature has called the law an antifraud measure, despite lacking evidence that the practice abetted fraud.... **On the bus, off the bus.** Few states have been as contentious as Georgia this election. That is largely because Brian Kemp, the secretary of state, has presided over an aggressive policy of voter purges that have fallen heavily on minorities. He is also the Republican candidate for governor. But the contentious atmosphere was crystallized on Oct. 15, when about 40 older black voters in Jefferson County were told to get off a bus heading for early voting, after a county official intervened.... **Straight tickets, in dire straits.** On Election Day, Iowans and Michiganders will lose the option to easily vote for a single party across the board, so-called "straight-ticket voting."

[Twitter Deletes Over 10,000 Accounts That Sought to Discourage Voting](#)

Reuters

Twitter deleted more than 10,000 automated accounts posting messages that discouraged people from voting in Tuesday's U.S. election and wrongly appeared to be from Democrats, after the party flagged the misleading tweets to the social media company. "We took action on relevant accounts and activity on Twitter," a Twitter spokesman said in an email. The removals took place in late September and early October.... The number is modest, considering that Twitter has previously deleted millions of accounts it determined were responsible for spreading misinformation in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. Yet the removals represent an early win for a fledgling effort by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

[Facebook Blocks More Accounts Ahead of Midterms](#)

AXIOS

Facebook late Monday said it had blocked accounts from its namesake platform and Instagram, some of them focused on politics, after law enforcement told the company they might be linked to "foreign entities." The announcement came less than 12 hours before polls open for the U.S. midterm elections. "Typically, we would be further along with our analysis before announcing anything publicly," said Nathaniel Gleicher, Facebook's head of cybersecurity policy, in a blog post. "But given that we are only one day away from important elections in the U.S., we wanted to let people know about the action we've taken."

[LinkedIn Houses Hyperpartisan Content, False Memes, and Troll Battles](#)

BuzzFeed News

They have American flags and "MAGA" in their profiles, share political memes and hyperpartisan news to their followers, and complain that their posts are being censored because they love Donald Trump. But instead of being active on Twitter and Facebook, these Trump supporters have brought the meme wars to the platform best known for Broetry, influencers, and professional networking: LinkedIn. Facebook and Twitter's crackdown on hate speech, false news, and manipulation has caused some people to move their political content sharing to LinkedIn. The result is an increase in MAGA and #Resistance memes and intense, sometimes, vitriolic, political discussions. This spike in political content has also led to the familiar problems of fake accounts, false claims and memes, and comment threads that devolve into name-calling and sometimes threats.

IN THE STATES

[Seattle's Radical Plan to Fight Big Money in Politics](#)

Vox

Last January, half a million Seattle residents received a small white packet in their mailboxes. Some thought it was junk mail and tossed it in the recycling. Others thought it might be important — the return address showed it came from the government — but forgot about it, letting the envelope gather dust on a side table or desk. Those who did actually open the envelope, however, found quite a surprise: free money, courtesy of the city of Seattle. Each packet contained \$100 in “democracy vouchers” that voters could donate to local political candidates of their choice. Voters could redeem the money by writing the candidate’s name on one of the blue slips of paper, signing it like a check, and then mailing it back to the city — or handing it to a candidate in person.... Seattle’s experiment is an unprecedented campaign finance experiment that acknowledges getting big money out of politics is, for the time being, impossible. Recent Supreme Court cases like Citizens United allow wealthy individuals and corporations to funnel unlimited spending into Super PACs.

[Public Financing of Elections Passes in Baltimore, Denver and Portland](#)

Citizen Truth

In a move to limit the influence of big money in determining election results in the state, Baltimore voters passed a bill that allows for public financing of elections. The charter amendment will enable candidates to leverage the small contributions they receive by giving them access to matching public funds. With the bill’s passing, the state will now set up a “Fair Elections Fund” and a body to oversee it. The goal of the Fair Elections Fund is to limit the influence of big money in elections by providing eligible recipients with matching funds for small-dollar donations. Now approved, the first candidates to receive donations from the fund might not be until 2024. The bill’s supporters said passing the bill is a huge boost for democracy. Baltimore Councilman Kristerfer Burnett told the Baltimore Sun in July that the fund will enable election contestants to have a level playing field.

[Conservatives Want to Bypass Usual Way to Amend Constitution](#)

The Washington Post

Whatever success Republicans have amassed in taking control of all three branches of U.S. government, and whatever fate awaits them as midterm elections near, some on the right are working to cement change by amending the Constitution. And to the mounting alarm of others on

all parts of the spectrum, they want to bypass the usual process. They're pushing for an unprecedented Constitutional convention of the states. While opponents are afraid of what such a convention would do, supporters say it is the only way to deal with the federal government's overreach and ineptitude. "They literally see this as the survival of the nation," said Karla Jones, director of the federalism task force at the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council, which represents state lawmakers and offers guidance and model legislation for states to call a convention under the Constitution's Article V. Among the most frequently cited changes being sought: amendments enforcing a balanced federal budget, establishing term limits for members of Congress, and repealing the 17th Amendment, which put the power of electing the Senate in the hands of the public instead of state legislatures.

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