



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

December 7, 2018

NATIONAL NEWS

[House Dems Will Aim to Stunt the Influence of Big Money in Politics](#)

The Associated Press

Several incoming Democratic representatives joined Pelosi and the bill's primary author, Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., in promoting the package. They said that tackling ethics and transparency out of the gate in 2019 could help with other priorities such as expanding access to affordable health care and immigration reform. "We have to have a government voters can trust, and this is the first step to building a government they can trust," said Rep.-elect Veronica Escobar, D-Texas. Sarbanes hopes to have the legislation ready for the first day of the next Congress, Jan. 3. Much of it will be modeled on legislation that he and more than 160 House Democrats introduced in May. That resolution called for all states to establish independent redistricting commissions to draw the boundaries for future congressional districts, a move designed to reduce partisan gerrymandering that would also take power away from dozens of legislatures around the country. "Whether that's the path we will take, we'll see," Sarbanes said.

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[Trump Administration Accused of 'Rampant' Ethics Abuses](#)

Newsweek

Six members of the Trump administration have been found guilty of violating the Hatch Act for using their official social media accounts to promote the president's political messages and "Make America Great Again" campaign slogans. On Friday, the Office of the Special Counsel, the investigative and prosecutorial agency that is responsible for handling cases of government corruption, cited six staffers with violating federal law. The office was informed of the infractions with a complaint filed from the government watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics. Some of the more noteworthy offenders include White House deputy press secretary Raj Shah; Trump's executive assistant Madeleine Westerhout; Vice President Mike Pence's press secretary Alyssa Farah; and White House deputy director of communications Jessica Ditto. Jacob Wood, the deputy communications director for the Office of Management and Budget, and former White House director of media affairs Helen Aguirre Ferré were also found to be in violation of the federal rule.

[Saudi-Funded Lobbyist Paid for 500 Rooms at Trump Hotel](#)

The Washington Post

Lobbyists representing the Saudi government reserved blocks of rooms at President Trump's Washington, D.C., hotel within a month of Trump's election in 2016 — paying for an estimated 500 nights at the luxury hotel in just three months, according to organizers of the trips and documents obtained by The Washington Post. At the time, these lobbyists were reserving large numbers of D.C.-area hotel rooms as part of an unorthodox campaign that offered U.S. military veterans a free trip to Washington — then sent them to Capitol Hill to lobby against a law the Saudis opposed, according to veterans and organizers. At first, lobbyists for the Saudis put the veterans up in Northern Virginia. Then, in December 2016, they switched most of their business to the Trump International Hotel in downtown Washington. In all, the lobbyists spent more than \$270,000 to house six groups of visiting veterans at the Trump hotel, which Trump still owns.

[Trump Jr. Invested in Company Whose Chair Sought Trump Funds](#)

ProPublica

Donald Trump Jr., the president's eldest son, took a stake last year in a startup whose co-chairman is a major Trump campaign fundraiser who has sought financial support from the federal government for his other business interests, according to records obtained by ProPublica. The fundraiser, Texas money manager Gentry Beach, and Trump Jr. attended college together, are godfather to one of each other's sons and have collaborated on investments — and on the Trump presidential campaign. Since Trump's election, Beach has attempted to obtain federal assistance for projects in Asia, the Caribbean and South America, and he has met or corresponded with top officials in the National Security Council, Interior Department and Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Beach and others at the startup, Eden Green

Technology, have touted their connections to the first family to impress partners, suppliers and others, according to five current and former business associates. Richard Venn, an early backer of Eden Green, recalls the company's founder mentioning "interest from the Trump family." Another associate said Beach bragged about his ties to the Trumps in a business meeting. The investment is one of just a handful of known business ventures pursued by Trump Jr. since his father moved into the White House almost two years ago.

[Cummings Wants Kemp to Testify About Voter Suppression](#)

The Huffington Post

Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), the incoming chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, is interested in calling Gov.-elect Brian Kemp (R-Ga.) in to testify about allegations that he aided his own campaign by engaging in voter suppression. "I want to be able to bring people in, like the new governor-to-be of Georgia, to explain, you know, explain to us why is it fair for wanting to be secretary of state and be running [for governor]," Cummings told HuffPost. Kemp won a narrow victory over Democratic candidate Stacey Abrams on Nov. 6 amid allegations that he used his position as secretary of state to purge voters from the rolls and reduce polling locations in African-American communities. She is suing the state, alleging a wide range of abuses by Kemp's office aimed at reducing voting by African-Americans in the state. "It was not a free and fair election," Abrams said after conceding the election to Kemp.

[The Big Question for House Democrats](#)

Slate

At a press conference last Friday, the likely next Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi joined a group of incoming Democratic freshmen to unveil the broad outlines of H.R. 1, House Democrats' multipurpose reform bill that they intend to make their first major legislative effort in 2019.... But are House Democrats writing this bill with the intention of it going anywhere—specifically, through the Senate and to the president—or is it just a statement of Democratic priorities? Since taking back the majority on Election Day, House Democrats have faced relentless questioning about how they intend to balance a legislative agenda with oversight of and investigations into the Trump administration. But investigations aside, they face equally important decisions about legislative strategy itself. The question of how House Democrats intend to legislate—to work out bipartisan compromises in a divided government, or to demonstrate the Democratic legislation they hope to get signed into law if they can retake the Senate and White House in 2020—is one that they will face throughout the 116th Congress. And right now, it's a work in progress.

IN THE STATES

[Republicans Finally Have an Election Fraud Scandal. And None of Them Want to Talk About It.](#)

Mother Jones

In the weeks following the midterm elections, President Donald Trump and several Republican members of Congress became obsessed with the possibility of election fraud. As a recount in Florida unfolded, Trump accused Democrats of manipulating the vote count. On Twitter, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) spent days accusing local election officials of fraud and innocent voters of casting ballots illegally. Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, a Trump ally, showed up at the Broward County supervisor of elections' office during the vote-counting and, with a megaphone in hand, claimed that fraud was afoot.... But there is one place where there is a strong possibility of fraud in the 2018 midterms, and so far, none of these Republicans have mentioned it. In North Carolina's 9th Congressional District, the state election board has refused to certify the results of the election as it investigates the possibility that fraud helped Republican Mark Harris defeat Democrat Dan McCready by 905 votes out of more than 280,000 cast.... Thus far, there is evidence of tampering with absentee ballots in Bladen County, a large rural county in the southeast corner of the state. One woman recounted in a sworn affidavit that a woman had collected her absentee ballot before it was sealed in its envelope; another voter also recalled in an affidavit a woman picking up her ballot. In North Carolina, it is illegal for anyone but the voter to turn in his or her absentee ballot.

[Stung by State Election Losses, GOP Seeks to Neutralize Democrats](#)

The New York Times

When Democrats won the governor's office in Wisconsin, it was one of the party's most celebrated midterm successes in regaining power in the states. Now Republicans are striking back, moving to slash the power of the new governor even before he takes the oath of office. Democrats reacted with fury, crowding the halls of the State Capitol in Madison on Monday and accusing the Republicans of trying to undo an election they had lost. It was only the latest such Republican effort across the country to try to use legislative action to counter blows the party suffered at the polls. For Wisconsin, a state that both parties will urgently vie to win in 2020 elections, it was one more sign of the ferocious partisan split that has rippled through the state in recent years. "It's a power grab," said State Senator Jon Erpenbach, a Democrat, before a hearing on the package of bills that includes restrictions on the incoming governor's ability to shift how public benefits programs are run, and on his authority to set the rules that determine how state laws are carried out. "They lost and they're throwing a fit."

[Republicans Keep Control of Georgia Elections with Runoff Victory](#)

The New York Times

Widespread anger in Georgia over a voting system that Democrats believed to be rigged against them was not enough to prevent a Republican candidate from winning a runoff on Tuesday for secretary of state, the chief overseer of the state's elections. Brad Raffensperger, an engineer from the Atlanta suburbs and a member of the State House, defeated John Barrow, a Democrat who supported overhauling the election system that some in his party said had helped Republicans "steal" the closely fought Georgia governor's race last month.... Uncertified tallies at 11 p.m. showed Mr. Raffensperger with about 53 percent of the vote.

KEY OPINION

[I Served in Congress Longer Than Anyone. Here's How to Fix It.](#)

The Atlantic (Op-Ed by John D. Dingell)

Here, then, are some specific suggestions—and they are only just that, suggestions—for a framework that might help restore confidence and trust in our precious system of government... An electoral system based on full participation. At age 18, you are automatically registered to vote. No photo ID, no residency tests, no impediments of any kind. Advances in technology can make this happen effortlessly. Yes, voting should be restricted only to American citizens. Strict protections against foreign meddling are also necessary.... The elimination of money in campaigns. Period. Elections, like military service—each is an example of duty, honor, and service to country—should be publicly funded. Can you imagine if we needed to rely on wealthy donors to fund the military? I know there are those who genuinely believe in privatizing everything. They are called profiteers.... Public service should not be a commodity, and elected officials should not have to rent themselves out to the highest bidder in order to get into (or stay in) office. If you want to restore trust in government, remove the price tag. I am fully aware that the Supreme Court has declared that "money is speech." That's nonsense. The day my wallet starts talking to me, I might reconsider that view. Until then, I believe that the pernicious influence of money on our elections must be removed.

[Citizens United Is Still Doing the Dirty Work](#)

The New York Times (Op-Ed by Thomas B. Edsall)

In the eight years since it was decided, Citizens United has unleashed a wave of campaign spending that by any reasonable standard is extraordinarily corrupt... Will behavior like this "cause the electorate to lose faith in our democracy?" Apparently not, according to Anthony M. Kennedy, the recently retired justice who wrote Citizens United with the backing of four of his

colleagues.... Since 2010, when the case was decided, independent expenditures and other forms of outside spending have grown exponentially, according to OpenSecrets. In 2010, independent expenditures totaled \$203.9 million; in 2016, it was \$1.48 trillion. In this nonpresidential year, with final reports still to come, independent expenditures totaled at least \$1.18 trillion. The surge in outside spending unconstrained by contribution limits is a central element of current campaign finance practice.

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