



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

December 14, 2018

NATIONAL NEWS

[Republicans Are Rigging Democracy. We Will Fix it, With or Without Them.](#)

USA Today (Op-Ed by Ben Ray Luján and John Sarbanes)

The first legislation that the new Democratic House majority will pass next year in the 116th Congress is a sweeping package of changes to our campaign finance, ethics and voting laws. We will shine a light on the dark money in our politics, and empower small donors to own elections and drive the agenda in Washington. We will demand that public servants work for the public interest, not the special interest. We will make it easier, not harder, to vote. Together, these bold reforms will restore and protect the voice of the American people in our democracy.... Democrats should not have to pass these reforms alone.... Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush all renewed and strengthened the Voting Rights Act. The late Republican Sen. John McCain joined with progressive Sen. Russ Feingold to pass the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act — the most significant update of campaign finance laws since Watergate. In response to the lobbying scandals of the mid-2000s, 411 bipartisan members of the House and 83 bipartisan senators passed an ethics reform bill that President George W. Bush signed into law.... Democrats in the House are ready to pass bold reforms. We sincerely hope that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle will come to the table to help us restore power to the American people. But if the Republican-led Senate and the Republican president choose not to help fix our democracy, we will look to the American people to replace them with Democrats who will.

[No Tea Party Here: House Democrats Can't Wait to Govern](#)

The Associated Press

As House control is about to switch, it serves as a reminder about Democrats: They like government. And governing.... Democrats say the goal is not necessarily a return to big government or to quickly start impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump — but to reassert Congress' ability to govern, which they say diminished under Republicans.... “We really do want to restore the Democracy, make it work for people,” said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-

Md., who is leading the effort on H.R. 1.... "A lot of the tea party people arrived in Washington a few years ago with this mission of tearing government down.... You have Democrats arriving in this class who very much want to fix it, repair it, strengthen it, restore it."

[How Dems Plan to Pressure Trump, GOP to Pass Reforms](#)

Newsweek

The strategy to pass such a measure [as H.R. 1], said Democratic Representative John Sarbanes during a call with reporters Thursday, is to "come out strong" supporting the bill in January, creating momentum that puts "pressure on all members" on "both sides of the aisle." Sarbanes handles campaign finance and ethics matters for the House Democratic Caucus and is chairman of the Democracy Reform Task Force, a Democratic group aimed at "[confronting] the Trump Administration's conflicts of interest and ethical lapses," exposing "special-interest policies in Congress," and improving "accountability and transparency in government." One potential strategy to garner support for the bill from both the American people and Republicans, Sarbanes said, is to promote each one of the three sections separately in individual bills. Then, voters can "assemble themselves around" the separate measures and get GOP senators "interested in some pieces" to then push forward the full package. "Once the public sees it, then they'll want to pass the whole thing, not just pieces," Sarbanes said, warning there would be a "political consequence for those who stand in its way."

[Incoming CBC Chairwoman Says Voting Rights Will Be a Top Priority](#)

The Hill

Incoming Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Karen Bass (D-Calif.) said in an interview that aired Tuesday on Hill.TV's "Rising" that voting rights will be the caucus' top priority in the new Congress next year.... The congresswoman's comments come as controversy swirls around the House race in North Carolina's 9th Congressional District after multiple voters came forward with sworn statements saying their absentee ballots were hand-collected by canvassers, which is not allowed in North Carolina.

[Voting Rights Piece May Take More Time in Ethics Overhaul](#)

Roll Call

House Democrats who are preparing an overhaul of political and ethics laws, a top priority of the incoming majority, have acknowledged that a component aimed at restoring a key section of the Voting Rights Act may take longer than their speedy timeline for the bill. Other pieces of the overhaul, which Democratic leaders have said they will designate as House bill 1 in the new Congress, could also run parallel to the main package as a way to garner bipartisan support in the Senate, said Rep. John Sarbanes, the Maryland Democrat who is crafting the bill. House Democrats have said they want to move swiftly in January on the overhaul as a way to prove to

voters that the party can tackle other matters, such as health care and gun control, without the perception that big donors have outsize influence. But Sarbanes said the voting measure may require more time. "We're not going to put any fixed deadline on that," Sarbanes said Thursday during a news call on the bill organized by the outside group End Citizens United.

[Trump Inauguration Spending Under Criminal Investigation](#)

The Wall Street Journal

Federal prosecutors in Manhattan are investigating whether President Trump's 2017 inaugural committee misspent some of the record \$107 million it raised from donations, people familiar with the matter said. The criminal probe by the Manhattan U.S. attorney's office, which is in its early stages, also is examining whether some of the committee's top donors gave money in exchange for access to the incoming Trump administration, policy concessions or to influence official administration positions, some of the people said. Giving money in exchange for political favors could run afoul of federal corruption laws. Diverting funds from the organization, which was registered as a nonprofit, could also violate federal law.

[Trump in Room During Hush Money Discussions with Tabloid Publisher](#)

NBC News

Donald Trump was the third person in the room in August 2015 when his lawyer Michael Cohen and National Enquirer publisher David Pecker discussed ways Pecker could help counter negative stories about Trump's relationships with women, NBC News has confirmed. As part of a nonprosecution agreement disclosed Wednesday by federal prosecutors, American Media Inc., the Enquirer's parent company, admitted that "Pecker offered to help deal with negative stories about that presidential candidate's relationships with women by, among other things, assisting the campaign in identifying such stories so they could be purchased and their publication avoided." The "statement of admitted facts" says that AMI admitted making a \$150,000 payment "in concert with the campaign," and says that Pecker, Cohen and "at least one other member of the campaign" were in the meeting. According to a person familiar with the matter, the "other member" was Trump.

[The Oil Industry's Covert Campaign to Rewrite Car Emissions Rules](#)

The New York Times

When the Trump administration laid out a plan this year that would eventually allow cars to emit more pollution, automakers, the obvious winners from the proposal, balked. The changes, they said, went too far even for them. But it turns out that there was a hidden beneficiary of the plan that was pushing for the changes all along: the nation's oil industry. In Congress, on Facebook and in statehouses nationwide, Marathon Petroleum, the country's largest refiner, worked with powerful oil-industry groups and a conservative policy network financed by the billionaire

industrialist Charles G. Koch to run a stealth campaign to roll back car emissions standards, a New York Times investigation has found. The campaign's main argument for significantly easing fuel efficiency standards — that the United States is so awash in oil it no longer needs to worry about energy conservation — clashed with decades of federal energy and environmental policy.

[While Working for Trump, Giuliani Courts Business Abroad](#)

The New York Times

The special counsel's investigation was grinding relentlessly onward, with President Trump's former national security adviser pleading for leniency in his case and his former fixer about to be sentenced for his crimes. But Mr. Trump's personal lawyer, Rudolph W. Giuliani, was in Manama, Bahrain, on Tuesday, meeting with the king and the interior minister of an important United States ally in the Middle East. The government-run Bahrain News Agency featured a photo of Mr. Giuliani meeting in a royal palace with King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. The story said the king discussed "Bahraini-U.S. relations" with Mr. Giuliani, who was described as leading a "high-level U.S. delegation." But Mr. Giuliani was not in Bahrain, a country with a record of human rights abuses, on official business. He was there to seek a lucrative security consulting contract with the government. The trip was part of a concerted push Mr. Giuliani has undertaken in the last few weeks to win business from governments around the world — including in Africa and South America — for a firm he owns called Giuliani Security and Safety.

[Targets of U.S. Sanctions Hire Lobbyists With Trump Ties to Seek Relief](#)

The New York Times

As President Trump's administration has increasingly turned to sanctions, travel restrictions and tariffs to punish foreign governments as well as people and companies from abroad, targets of those measures have turned for assistance to Washington's K Street corridor of law, lobbying and public relations firms. The work can carry reputational and legal risks, since clients often come with toxic baggage and the United States Treasury Department restricts transactions with entities under sanctions. As a result, it commands some of the biggest fees of any sector in the influence industry. And some of the biggest payments have been going to lobbyists, lawyers and consultants with connections to Mr. Trump or his administration.

[Kushner Startup Seeks \\$100 Million Investment from Saudi-Backed Fund](#)

Business Insider

A real estate startup partly-owned by presidential senior adviser Jared Kushner is seeking an investment of at least \$100 million from a private fund backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Sources familiar with the plans told Bloomberg a senior executive at Cadre, which was co-founded by Kushner, recently met with representatives of SoftBank Vision Fund, a Japanese conglomerate which receives much of its funding from the Saudi and UAE

governments. The technology investment fund claims investors such as Apple, Foxconn, Oracle cofounder Larry Ellison, and Qualcomm. Nearly half of its \$100 billion is financed by the Saudi government's Public Investment Fund, Bloomberg said. At least \$15 billion has been invested by the UAE sovereign wealth fund. According to the report, Cadre officials said Kushner doesn't play an active role in the business, and sources close to the discussions said Softbank approached Cadre with investment plans.

[Ivanka, Kushner Could Profit From Tax Break They Pushed](#)

The Associated Press

At an Oval Office gathering earlier this year, President Donald Trump began touting his administration's new "Opportunity Zone" program that offers massive tax breaks to developers who invest in downtrodden American communities. He then turned to one of the plan's strongest supporters.... The Opportunity Zone program promoted by Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner — both senior White House advisers — could also benefit them financially, an Associated Press investigation found. Government watchdogs say the case underscores the ethical minefield they created two years ago when they became two of the closest advisers to the president without divesting from their extensive real estate investments.... Separately, the couple owns interests in at least 13 properties held by Kushner's family firm that could qualify for the tax breaks because they are in Opportunity Zones in New Jersey, New York and Maryland. There's no evidence the couple had a hand in the selecting any of the nation's 8,700 Opportunity Zones, and the company has not indicated it plans to seek tax breaks under the new program. But the Kushners could profit even if they don't do anything — by potentially benefiting from a recent surge in Opportunity Zone property values amid a gold rush of interest from developers and investors.

[Billionaire GOP Donor Gave Scott Pruitt \\$50,000 for Legal Expenses](#)

The Washington Post

Scott Pruitt, who resigned this summer as the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency amid a flurry of ethics inquiries, received \$50,000 for his legal defense fund from a Wisconsin billionaire, according to a financial disclosure released Thursday. The contribution came this year from Diane Hendricks, a businesswoman and major Republican donor, though it was not clear precisely when she donated to the "Scott Pruitt Legal Expenses Trust." It also did not specify whether he had spent the money, or how. In the financial disclosure form, which Pruitt was required to file upon leaving the agency, EPA officials made clear that he had not sought ethics advice before accepting the donation to offset his legal expenses. The disclosure covers this calendar year, through Pruitt's resignation in early July.

[Admin. Hid Report Revealing Wells Fargo Charged Students High Fees](#)

POLITICO

The Trump administration for months concealed a report that showed Wells Fargo charged college students fees that were on average several times higher than some of its competitors. The “unpublished” report was obtained by POLITICO through a Freedom of Information Act request. It was produced by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau office previously led by Seth Frotman, who quit as the bureau’s top student loan official in protest of Trump administration policies. Frotman said in his resignation letter that CFPB leaders had “suppressed the publication” of the report. The previously unseen analysis examined the fees associated with debit cards and other financial products provided by 14 companies through agreements with more than 500 colleges across the country.

[Attorney General Nominee William Barr Has Given More Than \\$500,000](#)

The Washington Post

President Trump has repeatedly derided prosecutors investigating potential coordination between his presidential campaign and Russia as “angry Democrats,” pointing to their past political donations as proof of bias. But William P. Barr, Trump’s nominee to lead the Justice Department and oversee the Russia investigation, would be by far the most prolific political donor to step into the country’s top law enforcement post in at least a quarter-century... Barr has donated more than \$567,000 in the past two decades, nearly all to GOP candidates and groups, federal records show. His wife, Christine Barr, gave more than \$220,000 over that time, records show. Before he was nominated to be attorney general, Barr criticized past donations by prosecutors working for special counsel Robert S. Mueller III.

[The Tale of the Corporate Lobbyist Sworn in as a Temporary Senator](#)

The Intercept

Few have paid much attention to Kyl, who is wrapping up one of the strangest and — to his critics — one of the most corrupt tenures in the modern history of the Senate. Kyl was a registered lobbyist at a powerhouse D.C. law firm, who lived and worked in Washington for five and a half years before taking a four-month gig as a senator. His only floor speeches have involved matters at least glancingly tied to his lobbying. His entire term of office seems like a calculated attempt to refresh his contacts and gain clout from the inside, only to spin back out to influence the institution. He’s supposed to represent Arizona, but increasingly it appears that he only represents K Street... Despite pleading in the media that Kyl “didn’t want to do this,” others described the temporary Senate appointment as a sharp business decision. By 2018, only 60 of the 100 senators Kyl served with were still in the chamber; another five will leave at the end of the year. A short-term gig in the Senate would re-familiarize Kyl with new colleagues and show potential clients in the corporate world his established clout.

[Inhofe Bought Defense Stock Days After Pushing for Pentagon Spending](#)

The Daily Beast

Just days after signaling his support for unprecedented levels of U.S. defense spending, Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK), the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, reported purchasing tens of thousands of dollars of stock in one of the nation's top defense contractors. After The Daily Beast asked about the purchase, Inhofe's office said the senator had contacted his financial adviser to cancel the transaction and instructed him to avoid defense and aerospace purchases going forward. Inhofe, who took over the top spot on Armed Services after the death of Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) in August, has repeatedly pressed President Donald Trump to dramatically scale up the Pentagon's annual budget, which currently stands at \$717 billion. Last week, after Trump hinted he would like to scale back parts of that budget, Inhofe met with the president and Defense Secretary James Mattis, after which it was announced that the administration would seek even more defense funding: a record \$750 billion in spending for fiscal year 2020. News of that budget request broke on Sunday. On Tuesday, Inhofe's financial adviser bought him between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in stock in defense contractor Raytheon, according to documents filed with Senate ethics officials.

[Retiring Kansas Lawmaker Opens Lobbying Shop While Still in Office](#)

Roll Call

Retiring Kansas Rep. Lynn Jenkins launched a new lobbying firm in her home state weeks before she officially steps out of public office, according to a local media report published Friday. Lawmakers are restricted from working as lobbyists until they have been out of office for a year. But the federal law that restricts their activities is porous, and former lawmakers routinely find ways to trade their influence before the prohibition expires. Ethics watchdogs told the Kansas City Star the new venture launched in November by the Republican appears to be such a case.... Jenkins' office told the paper in a statement that she had consulted the House Ethics Committee.... Her former chief of staff in Washington, Pat Leopold, registered the consulting business LJ Strategies, LLC. with the Kansas Secretary of State Nov. 20.

[House Dems Offer Resolution to Overturn IRS Donor Disclosure Guidance](#)

The Hill

House Democrats on Thursday offered a resolution that would overturn IRS guidance reducing donor disclosure requirements for some tax-exempt groups, a day after the Senate approved a measure to reverse the agency's guidance. The House resolution was introduced by Rep. David Price (D-N.C.) and is co-sponsored by several other Democratic lawmakers. It was offered under the Congressional Review Act, which gives Congress the opportunity to disapprove of recent regulatory items from federal agencies. Price, a vice chair of the House Democracy Reform Task Force, said he offered the resolution "to hold political groups accountable and shine a light on dark money in our elections."

[Campaign Finance Fraud Accusations Haunt Spano, Congressional Office](#)

POLITICO

U.S. Rep.-elect Ross Spano is struggling to hire office staff as he relies on a controversial adviser: one of the friends at the center of a campaign finance scandal that is rocking the Florida Republican. Spano, an attorney and outgoing state legislator with past financial troubles, recently admitted in a letter to the Federal Election Commission that he might have committed a campaign finance “violation” in failing for two months to disclose \$180,000 he accepted from two friends. Spano, who personally loaned his campaign \$174,500, says the funds he received were loans. But if the FEC deems the “loans” to be campaign contributions, they would exceed legal donation limits of \$2,700 per cycle, per contributor. And experts say it could constitute a criminal violation by Spano and, potentially, the two people who gave his campaign the money — Cary Carreno and Karen Hunt.

[Former Rep. Steve Stockman’s Staffer Sentenced in Fraud Case](#)

Roll Call

Former Capitol Hill staffer, Thomas Dodd, was sentenced Wednesday for participating in an extensive scheme that involved defrauding charitable donors by laundering funds to pay personal and campaign expenses. Dodd, 40, was an aide to former Rep. Steve Stockman. He was sentenced to 18 months in prison, ordered to pay \$800,000 in restitution and ordered to forfeit \$153,044.28 in illicit gains. Stockman, a former Texas Republican Congressman, was sentenced in November to 120 months in prison after a federal jury convicted him of 23 counts of mail fraud, wire fraud, money laundering and making false statements to the Federal Election Commission. A federal jury in April found Stockman, 60, guilty of soliciting \$1.25 million in donations based on false pretenses, specifically using some of the funds meant for charities to pay for his personal expenses and to further his political ambitions.

[Democratic, GOP Super PACs Quadruple Fundraising](#)

POLITICO

Super PACs aligned with House and Senate Democrats and Republicans more than quadrupled their total fundraising in the 2018 midterms compared to four years ago, a sign that campaign money and power is amassing at big outside groups that face fewer transparency rules and can be difficult for party leaders to oversee. Meanwhile, fundraising at party committees such as the National Republican Congressional Committee and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee was roughly stagnant from the 2014 midterms to 2018, and three of the four congressional committees were outraised by their corresponding super PACs, disclosures with the Federal Election Commission showed Thursday.

IN THE STATES

[Republicans Nationwide Are Working to Declare Dems Unconstitutional](#)

The Huffington Post

The lame-duck power plays by Republican legislatures in Michigan, North Carolina and Wisconsin to seize power from recently elected Democratic Party executive officials are just the latest egregious efforts by the Republican Party to deem Democrats unconstitutional. What does it mean when Republicans deem Democrats unconstitutional? It means that Republicans do not believe that the Democratic Party can legitimately hold power. The GOP will use its power to enact last-minute laws to hurt Democratic constituencies and make it harder for Democrats to win power; if they somehow do, Republicans strip them of authority or prevent them from governing. “We are going to have a very liberal governor who is going to enact policies that are in direct contrast to what many of us believe in,” said Robin Vos, the Republican Speaker of the House in Wisconsin, as he explained why Republicans would gut the authority of incoming Democratic Gov. Tony Evers. For Republicans, political power is now no different than an exclusionary childhood clubhouse: *No Democrats allowed.*

[Public Campaign Financing Sees Record Year](#)

WVIT-TV (Online)

Connecticut’s program that provides money to candidates running for state offices from the legislature all the way up to governor saw a record year. A total of 335 candidates received grants from the Citizens Election Program (CEP) worth a combined \$26.5 million, according to the State Elections Enforcement Commission. “I think it was a tremendous year for the Citizens Election Program,” said Michael Brandi, executive director of the agency. CEP is considered a model around the country, and it’s benefitted both Republicans and Democrats over the years. From 2010 to 2016, Republicans gained 41 seats in the General Assembly, but then saw major losses in statewide elections last month. This year, many of the Democrats who received public financing were successful in their bids for office. Gov. Dannel Malloy used the program for both of his general election victories before deciding not to run for a third term.

KEY OPINION

[Our Democracy Restored – Building on the Foundation of 2018](#)

AFRO (Op-Ed by Elijah Cummings)

During the current Congress, I have been honored to serve as a Co-Chair of the House Democracy Reform Task Force, chaired by my Maryland colleague, Congressman John Sarbanes. Our primary objective has been clear: to develop and advocate for the legislative measures needed to restore our Democracy. As Congressman Sarbanes and Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi declared in their November 25 Washington Post op-ed, our first order of business next year [H.R. 1] will be to clean up the corruption in Washington, reduce the roll of money in politics, restore ethics and integrity to our government, and strengthen our voting laws. Republicans in the Senate and White House may attempt to block our package of necessary reforms. They should be advised that we will not relent.

[Dems, Pelosi Announce Bill Tackling Corrupt Campaign Finance System](#)

NBC News (Op-Ed by Fred Werthimer)

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has revealed that political reform will be the first order of business for the Democratic House of Representatives in January. On Nov. 30, she announced that House Democrats would begin the new congressional session with an unprecedented package of reforms designed to repair our broken political system and strengthen our democracy. The coming legislation, already known as H.R. 1, involves a holistic approach — covering campaign finance, voting rights and government ethics reforms. One essential feature is a new way to finance campaigns that would combat big money's corrupting influence in American politics. Wealthy donors and special interests now drown elections in an ocean of influence-seeking and dark money. We can greatly diminish their corrupting influence on government decisions by flooding elections with small contributions, bolstered by robust public matching funds.... A difficult battle lies ahead.... This is a fight that must be won to end the corrupt, rigged system in Washington — and protect the integrity and health of our democracy. In January, Pelosi and House Democrats will begin the first chapter of this historic battle.

[House Dems' Big Reform Package is Good Policy, and Smart Politics](#)

Vox (Op-Ed by Lee Drutman)

House Democrats have decided on their priority legislation for the next Congress, and it's all about improving the quality of American democracy. HR 1, the bill number typically reserved for the House majority party's most important policy, marks the first time that political reform has been given this kind of top billing. There's a lot in the bill, including a number of ethics and

disclosure and election security proposals that should be commonsense. But at heart, there are four big-ticket items that would be standalone news on their own: a small-donor matching system for campaign finance, mandatory independent redistricting commissions, automatic voter registration, and felon reenfranchisement. Collectively, this is the most transformative pro-democracy package in decades.

[The Democrats' Best Response to Republican Power Grabs](#)

The New York Times (Op-Ed by Jacob T. Levy)

In Michigan and Wisconsin, lame duck Republican-majority legislatures are enacting laws to limit the powers of incoming Democratic governors. Two years ago in North Carolina, the same happened. These moves are particularly striking examples of recent aggressive Republican procedural hardball. Whatever the right rules are for the separation of powers, they should apply to both parties and not be changed opportunistically.... There is a better option, and it also happens to be the best option. Democrats can use the Republican hardball against them by weaving together the Michigan, Wisconsin and North Carolina cases into a larger story to take to voters in 2020: the indictment of Republican attacks on democracy accompanied by an aggressive reform agenda for strengthening constitutional norms and democratic procedures.... President Trump's administration has made this job easier: The midterm election results showed that its scandals and disgrace have already focused voters' attention. That's not the time for retaliation and escalation. It's the time offer prescriptions for rebuilding the rules that accompany a diagnosis that helps voters make sense of how badly wrong things have gone.... The package of reforms that the incoming House Democratic majority intends to introduce as its symbolic first bill, H.R. 1, contains some of these ideas mixed in with others that I think will muddy the message, but it's the right kind of beginning.

[Dems Will Try to Get Trump's Tax Returns. But They Need to Do It Right.](#)

The Washington Post (Column by Greg Sargent)

One big question facing the incoming House Democratic majority will be how aggressively to pursue President Trump's tax returns, and Nancy Pelosi, who is likely to be the next House speaker, told reporters on Thursday that decisions about how to proceed will be left to the House Ways and Means Committee. Pelosi said getting Trump's returns may prove "a little more challenging than you might think," adding: "I'm sure the White House will resist, so the question is, 'Where do we go from there?'" Here's something that I expect to happen, something that will become an important part of this story: Democrats will likely tie the quest for Trump's returns to a much broader argument about corruption and the need to clean up government. That is, Democrats will seek Trump's returns in the context, to coin a phrase, of a larger effort to drain the swamp -- only for real this time.

[The G.O.P. Goes Full Authoritarian](#)

The New York Times (Op-Ed by Paul Krugman)

If you want to understand what's happening to our country, the book you really need to read is "How Democracies Die," by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. As the authors — professors of government at Harvard — point out, in recent decades a number of nominally democratic nations have become de facto authoritarian, one-party states. Yet none of them have had classic military coups, with tanks in the street. What we've seen instead are coups of a subtler form: takeovers or intimidation of the news media, rigged elections that disenfranchise opposing voters, new rules of the game that give the ruling party overwhelming control even if it loses the popular vote, corrupted courts... As Levitsky and Ziblatt say, the states, which Justice Louis Brandeis famously pronounced the laboratories of democracy, "are in danger of becoming laboratories of authoritarianism as those in power rewrite electoral rules, redraw constituencies and even rescind voting rights to ensure that they do not lose." ... Thus, voter purges and deliberate restriction of minority access to the polls have become standard practice in much of America. Would Brian Kemp, the governor-elect of Georgia — who oversaw his own election as secretary of state — have won without these tactics? Almost certainly not.

[The Corporate Donors Behind a Republican Power Grab](#)

The New York Times (Opinion by David Leonhardt)

Walgreens portrays itself as the friendly neighborhood drugstore. It gives flu shots to children, helps communities after storms, donates to charity — and makes feel-good advertisements trumpeting its various good deeds. But Walgreens also has a tougher side, one you won't see in those ads. To protect a tax break, the company has allied itself with Wisconsin's brutally partisan Republican Party. That party is now in the midst of a power grab, stripping authority from Wisconsin's governor and attorney general solely because Republicans lost those offices last month. The power grab comes after years of extreme gerrymandering, which lets Republicans dominate the legislature despite Wisconsin being a closely divided state. Wisconsin's Republicans really are trying to undo democracy. When I asked Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt — the political scientists who wrote the recent book "How Democracies Die" — about the situation, they agreed that the Wisconsin power grab was the sort of move their book describes. If it continues, it can lead to the breakdown of a political system.

[Congress Can Finally Secure Our Right to an Equally Weighted Vote](#)

Union of Concerned Scientists

When the 116th Congress convenes in January, the new Democratic House majority has promised to make electoral integrity literally its first priority: House Resolution 1. Led by veteran reform advocate Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD), House Democrats hope to have a bill ready to go on January 3. The odds of eventually passing such a bill with the GOP-controlled Senate and getting it signed by President Trump are slim. Yet in true Madisonian fashion, the new House

majority is seeking to thwart their opponents by siding with voters, who just passed a historic set of reform initiatives across states and localities. This bill will cover campaign finance, ethics, and voting rights, but the voting rights section is arguably the most complex and controversial. A broad range of reforms to address electoral design and performance throughout the election cycle, from voter eligibility through the allocation of legislative seats, is required to upgrade U.S. democracy.

* * *

