



WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP
DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE
REP. JOHN SARBANES, CHAIR

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NATIONAL NEWS

[WANT TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE? FIX CAMPAIGN
FINANCE FIRST, 2020 DEMOCRATS SAY](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

It is not just about the Earth's rising temperatures. Many Democrats running for president see climate change as symptomatic of another problem: too much money in politics. One White House hopeful, Sen. Michael F. Bennet (D-Colo.), on Thursday unveiled an anticorruption plan that is explicitly meant to make it easier for Congress to address global warming — and other Democratic priorities. “So much of what we've got to get done, from climate change to health care to changing tax code, is going to require us to change the way our politics work. Because for the decade that I've been in the Senate, it largely hasn't worked,” Bennet told reporters Thursday. He's just one of many 2020 candidates tying legislative action they want to take on climate change with the need to overhaul how money is spent on electoral campaigns and lobbying. Their thinking goes: As the oil, gas and coal industries pump money into political campaigns, these fossil-fuel interests have been able to forestall meaningful legislation to slow climate change.... The attention Democratic candidates are paying to the issue of money in politics is due in part to the swarms of progressive activists who have shown up at campaign events and pressed hopefuls, such as O'Rourke and former vice president Joe Biden, to commit to refuse campaign donations from lobbyists or executives in the oil, gas or coal business. So far, the pressure has worked. The vast



majority of the 2020 Democratic field — 18 in total including O'Rourke, according to the anti-fossil fuel nonprofit advocacy group Oil Change US — have signed the “No Fossil Fuel Money pledge.” Biden is expected to sign the pledge in the coming days. Bennet's plan in particular calls for a lifetime ban on lobbying for former members of Congress... and a constitutional amendment to overturn what many Democrats see as the biggest step back in campaign finance reform in a generation — the Citizens United Supreme Court decision.... The Citizens United decision, according to its opponents, has had a measurable effect on how willing Republicans are to support climate legislation now that fossil fuel companies, many of which oppose strict carbon-pollution rules, have more leverage over members of Congress.

FEDERAL ELECTION OFFICIAL ACCUSED OF UNDERMINING HIS OWN AGENCY

POLITICO

A tiny federal agency that plays a crucial role in assisting the nation's local election supervisors is gripped by a leadership crisis that has sparked concerns that it is unprepared to play its role in protecting the 2020 presidential race from foreign interference. Brian Newby, the executive director of the Election Assistance Commission, has blocked important work on election security, micromanaged employees' interactions with partners outside the agency and routinely ignored staff questions, according to former election officials, former federal employees and others who regularly work with the agency. In doing so, Newby has not only frustrated his own employees and helped create a staff exodus — nine EAC office directors have left since Newby arrived — but also angered cybersecurity experts, election integrity activists and state and local officials.... POLITICO's seven sources — all of whom requested anonymity to speak candidly — described Newby, a Republican, as too beholden to the EAC's GOP chairwoman, Christy McCormick, who masterminded his appointment and later spent years denying the reality of Russian interference in the 2016 election.... The troubles comes at a time of turmoil for other federal agencies responsible for defending critical U.S. computer networks from foreign hackers. The White House's Office of the Federal Chief Information Officer is planning a reorganization this summer after POLITICO reported on complaints of infighting, high turnover and cratering morale. The Department of Homeland Security, which works with state election offices to

secure their networks, has no permanent leader after former chief Kirstjen Nielsen resigned in April.... Despite the issue's importance, Newby has never made a priority of election security, four people knowledgeable about his work told POLITICO.... As Newby and McCormick weigh the odds of his reappointment, EAC employees and outside groups are left wondering where this leaves the agency as its partners gear up for 2020. Multiple people said that between staff shortages, low morale and a lack of guidance from Newby, the EAC is ill-prepared to fully participate in this process alongside DHS and the FBI.

WHAT AMERICANS REALLY THINK ABOUT FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN U.S. ELECTIONS

THE WASHINGTON POST

Russian attacks on the U.S. election infrastructure in 2016 were even more serious than reported at the time, recent disclosures show, and intelligence officials say they are bracing for more aggressive attacks from a wider array of foreign adversaries in 2020. Yet instead of moving to shore up the nation's vulnerable voting machines and databases, the Trump administration is sabotaging efforts to enhance election security at every turn. Trump's determination to portray Russian interference as a hoax has made it taboo for members of his own administration to even talk about foreign meddling, and has derailed the leading bipartisan election security bill on Capitol Hill. To make matters worse, Republicans have signaled that they don't even plan to hold a single hearing on election security legislation—despite a growing list of bills introduced in recent weeks to block foreign interference on multiple fronts, many of them bipartisan. The reason? It seems that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is in such a fit of pique over House Democrats' approval of sweeping democracy legislation that he's unwilling to discuss election legislation of any kind. Never mind that Democrats' reform package, known as H.R. 1, contained multiple election security measures, including grants for voting machine upgrades and testing, that are broadly supported on both sides of the aisle. McConnell abhors the bill's disclosure and public matching funds provisions, and has slammed it as a "Democrat Political Protection Act." That's poisoned the waters, say Republicans who argue that the election security stalemate is therefore (somehow) Democrats' fault. Democrats' approval of H.R. 1 has "made it even less likely" that an election security bill would come to the floor,

Republican Senator Roy Blunt told The Kansas City Star. Blunt chairs the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, which has jurisdiction over election security, but he told the Star that there would be no point marking up a bill “that can’t possibly be voted on the floor.”

THE SHADOW CABINET: HOW A GROUP OF POWERFUL BUSINESS LEADERS DROVE TRUMP’S AGENDA

ROLLING STONE

On a summer day in 2016, a group of businessmen and women descended on Trump Tower in Manhattan. They exited their black SUVs and rode the golden elevators to the 26th floor, where they assembled in a boardroom and awaited the presumptive presidential nominee of the Republican Party.... Trump took his seat at the head of a long table and thanked his guests for coming. It was the inaugural meeting of the Trump Leadership Council, a kitchen Cabinet and sounding board featuring representatives from many of America’s biggest industries: energy, finance, transportation, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, defense, construction and health care.... In the three years since that inaugural meeting, the council’s impact has been seen across the administration. At the urging of coal and oil industry representatives, Trump’s EPA has systematically rolled back environmental protections and frozen new ones, affecting the air and water of thousands of people.... The National Association of Manufacturers, a lobby group for big business whose leader, Jay Timmons, was a council member, sent the Trump administration a wish list of 132 regulations that NAM members took issue with, including Obama’s signature climate change legislation, the Clean Power Plan, and the FCC’s net neutrality rule. A recent report by the watchdog group Public Citizen found that the Trump administration has moved to implement 64 percent of NAM’s recommendations.... Rolling Stone obtained a complete list of the members and interviewed half a dozen people who attended and organized the council.... Together, they form a lost chapter in the story of how Trump’s pro-industry, anti-regulation America First agenda became a reality.... The industry best represented on the council was energy — a who’s who of fossil-fuel champions, including coal baron Bob Murray of Murray Energy, who’s called climate change a “hoax”; Joe Craft of Alliance Resources, one of the U.S.’s biggest coal companies; and Larry Nichols of Devon Energy, the \$11 billion oil giant that has long been a fierce opponent of

climate regulations.... Whatever happens in 2020, Trump's all-out assault on regulations will long outlive his presidency, whether it's four or eight years. At a time when the climate crisis threatens the future of humanity, Trump and his corporate backers have taken the country in the opposite direction.

[A FOREIGNER PAID \\$200,000 FOR TICKETS TO TRUMP'S INAUGURAL. NOW HE SAYS HE WAS DUPED.](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

A Ukrainian-Russian developer who wanted access to President Trump's inauguration filed a lawsuit on Tuesday saying he was bilked out of the \$200,000 he paid for what he thought would be V.I.P. tickets to the event. The developer, Pavel Fuks, who once discussed a Moscow real estate project with Mr. Trump, said in the lawsuit, filed in the United States District Court for the Central District of California, that he had paid the money to a firm at the direction of Yuri Vanetik, a prominent Republican fund-raiser and sometime lobbyist. But, the lawsuit said, Mr. Vanetik failed to come through with the promised tickets, and Mr. Fuks ended up watching the inauguration from a Washington hotel bar. The lawsuit sheds new light on efforts to accommodate foreign politicians and business executives who sought to attend Mr. Trump's inauguration to press their agendas, curry favor or make influential connections with the incoming administration. It is illegal for foreign nationals to buy tickets from the committees that host the official parties and other events around United States presidential inaugurations, a ban intended to limit international influence in American politics and government.... Federal prosecutors are investigating whether foreigners illegally funneled money to Mr. Trump's inaugural committee and a pro-Trump super PAC to try to influence Mr. Trump's team. And a Washington lobbyist, in a guilty plea for violating foreign lobbying laws, admitted to helping a Russia-aligned Ukrainian oligarch illegally purchase four tickets to Mr. Trump's inauguration.... Had Mr. Vanetik used \$200,000 from Mr. Fuks to buy tickets to official events from Mr. Trump's inaugural committee, it could have resulted in an illegal foreign donation to the inaugural committee, said Brendan Fischer, an official at the Campaign Legal Center. "The specter of an incoming administration selling access in exchange for five- or six-figure donations to an inaugural committee is ugly on its own, but it gets even uglier when foreign nationals are taking advantage," Mr. Fischer said.



LOBBYING ON TRADE ISSUES COULD SET NEW RECORD AS COMPANIES SOUND OFF ON TARIFFS, USMCA

MARKETWATCH

Lobbying on trade-related issues could set a new record this year, as companies sound off on the Trump administration's moves with tariffs and its push to get a replacement deal for Nafta ratified. The number of companies, industry groups or other organizations that disclosed efforts to influence Washington on trade matters reached a record level of 1,299 last year. And with this year not even half over, 1,063 organizations have reported trade-related lobbying, suggesting 2019 could deliver a new all-time high.... Walmart said in a first-quarter disclosure that its lobbying on trade has involved talking to lawmakers and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative about tariff proposals and the North American Free Trade Agreement's replacement, known as the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. It's among the retailers that has warned that tariffs mean higher prices for American shoppers for items such as cribs, backpacks and bikes. Meanwhile, Google disclosed lobbying on tariffs targeting Chinese goods, technology-transfer issues and "new trade agreement negotiations.... "

BENNET UNVEILS PLAN TO CURB CORRUPTION, BOLSTER VOTING RIGHTS

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Sen. Michael Bennet on Thursday rolled out a plan designed to curb the influence of money in politics and bolster voting rights, among other priorities, saying that making headway on issues like climate change and taxes will require big changes to the political system itself. "I think we've got an incredible opportunity to use this moment to elect a president who can lead us into an era of new politics, to fix our democracy, reform the way that Washington works, and build confidence in our exercise in self-government," the Democratic presidential hopeful said on a conference call with reporters. He said President Trump has failed to live up to his pledge to "drain the swamp.... " Mr. Bennet is seeking a constitutional amendment to overturn the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United decision on political contributions. In a bid to neuter the effect of wealthy political donors, he also wants to set up a voluntary "small-donor" matching system for federal elections that would be paid for with a "surcharge" on

penalties for corporate and white-collar crime.... He would also require social media companies to disclose “the source and scope of all political ads” on their platforms. The Colorado Democrat said the vast majority of Americans blame money in politics and wealthy political donors when they get asked about the ongoing dysfunction in the nation’s capital.... He would also require the president, vice president, and candidates for both offices to release 10 years of tax returns and “disclose and divest” any potential conflicts of interest. Mr. Trump has resisted releasing his own tax returns despite a congressional subpoena.

KEY OPINION

[RUSSIA’S ELECTION INTERFERENCE IS NO LONGER A SURPRISE. IT SHOULD STILL INFURIATE.](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST (EDITORIAL)

Russia’s meddling with democracy no longer comes as a surprise. It should, nevertheless, continue to provoke anger, outrage and a determination to respond. Observers predicted that last month’s elections for European Parliament would offer a window on a new era of disinformation. Now, European Union officials have rendered a verdict that suggests the Kremlin kept itself busy — engaging not in any grand cross-border campaign but in sustained interference on a smaller scale that may be even harder to root out. Worse, others followed its lead. The E.U. report and concurrent outside research show that the enemy is evolving. Gone are the days when vast networks of false-identity accounts and their automated counterparts worked en masse to spread tales of events that never occurred or malicious lies about public figures. Now, operations are more localized and harder to detect. They feature what experts call narrative warfare, pushing polarizing and distorted variations of otherwise true stories, stripped of context, rather than outright fabrications. The tactic is tougher both for platforms to detect and for governments to legislate against.... E.U. officials have said they may still seek to regulate social media sites to force them to invest more in fighting disinformation.... The E.U. also should build on what authorities say worked well this time around: public education and coordination among sites, civil society and member states, including through a “rapid alert system,” to detect and debunk

threats. Other countries with no coherent strategy to counter disinformation, including the United States, should take a lesson. Most of all, those governments, and the United States', should stay angry. Interference from Russia is a hostile act, and leaders must fight against shrugging it off as an inevitability. The announcement that an authoritarian power and those pulling from its playbook tried to undermine more than 500 million Europeans' right to pick their representatives should spark defiance. From President Trump, it has sparked nothing. The lack of outrage is an outrage itself.

PULSE SURVIVOR: TO END GUN VIOLENCE, WE MUST OVERHAUL POLITICS

ORLANDO SENTINEL (OP-ED BY BRANDON WOLF)

Gun violence is an epidemic in this country. Mass shootings have become so commonplace that we barely flinch at reports on them. Yet, despite the overwhelming majority of Americans supporting stricter gun laws, Congress hasn't enacted any new restrictions since 1994. These injustices continue because of sophisticated gerrymandering by elected officials who can ensure that only voters who agree with them (including on gun reform) are allowed to help get them elected and stay in office. They also continue because of the influence of wealthy special interests, like the National Rifle Association (NRA), whose political spending has all but guaranteed that only lawmakers who support their views succeed politically. Together, they have silenced the voices of communities of gun survivors like me, suppressing our votes and our voices.... The more than 36,000 Americans killed by guns each year, and the millions of Americans who know a gun violence survivor, show why the U.S. Senate should pass the For the People Act, a groundbreaking democracy reform package recently passed by the U.S. House of Representatives that would eliminate partisan gerrymandering and barriers to the ballot box, end big money in politics, and curb the culture of corruption.... The For the People Act will curb the money in politics that has stopped lawmakers from enacting laws that might help put an end to the kinds of tragedies that touched my life and the lives of so many Americans. As long as wealthy elites are allowed to place profits over human lives, our country's gun epidemic will only continue.

BUTTIGIEG'S PLAN FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM IS NECESSARY

THE EASTERN ECHO (OP-ED BY AUSTIN ELLIOTT)

Democratic reform is one of the campaign issues that has distinguished Buttigieg from his 23 other competitors. This includes reforming the Supreme Court, ending the corrupt influence of money in politics and ending gerrymandering, among other proposals.... For years now, the American public has overwhelmingly wanted money out of politics. A CBS News poll from 2015 found that 84% of Americans think money has too much influence in our elections and 85% think that either fundamental changes are needed to election financing or that the system needs to be completely rebuilt. In a time when money in politics has such a dramatic impact on our elections, Buttigieg is advocating for a small-donor matching system for federal elections, in which elections will be publicly financed with small donations being matched.... Buttigieg also wants to see Citizens United overturned. The disastrous 2010 Supreme Court case gave corporations first amendment rights as if they are citizens. Corporations can no longer be prohibited from spending money on political causes.... Buttigieg is also proposing an overhaul of the Supreme Court. He wants to depoliticize our judicial system by increasing the number of Justices to 15, with 10 being appointed in the usual way -- with the President nominating the Justice and the Senate confirming them -- and the other five being promoted from lower courts by a unanimous vote from the other 10 Justices. By depoliticizing the Supreme Court, we can restore faith in our judicial system and let the court return to its true purpose: to determine the constitutionality of laws.... These changes are vital to our democracy because they affect every single other issue that we care about. Without restoring power to the people, we can't expect our government to make the fundamental changes that our society needs. If the voice of voters is drowned out by lobbyists, large donors or gerrymandering, government will not work for the benefit of the people.

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