



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

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NATIONAL NEWS

[PENCE'S STAY AT TRUMP HOTEL IN IRELAND AND TRUMP'S G7 PLANS DRAW DEMOCRATS' SCRUTINY](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

House Democrats, furious over President Trump's continued promotion of his branded properties for government business, said on Friday that they would scrutinize whether two recent cases would violate the Constitution's ban on presidents profiting from domestic or foreign governments. Two chairmen acting in tandem sent letters to the White House, the Secret Service and the Trump Organization asking for documents and communications related to Vice President Mike Pence's decision to stay this week at Mr. Trump's resort in Ireland during an official visit, as well as Mr. Trump's recent statements promoting Trump National Doral, near Miami, as a possible site for the Group of 7 summit of world leaders next year. In both cases, the Democrats argued, Mr. Trump stands to benefit financially from American taxpayer dollars, and in the case of the potential summit in Doral, from foreign funds as well. The Constitution's emoluments clauses prohibit presidents from accepting any payment from federal, state or foreign governments beyond their official salary.

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WHY HAS TRUMP'S EXCEPTIONAL CORRUPTION GONE UNCHECKED?

THE NEW YORK TIMES (OP-ED)

While Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, nationally famous and in a safe Democratic district, can avoid active fund-raising and devote more time to constituents and committee work, her little-known colleagues from swing districts, facing tough races for re-election, have few alternatives but to attend those fund-raisers in law-firm conference rooms and fancy homes. The solution to corruption of that kind involves making it easier for candidates to run and be heard without reaching out to megadonors, such as through public financing that matches small contributions. Lobbyists will be less influential if Congress and state legislatures have more resources to make their own decisions, including more independent, long-term staff members with issue expertise. Some of those ideas are found in the Democrats' For the People Act — but campaigns, particularly Ms. Warren's and Mr. Sanders's, still seem to speak in the language of universal condemnation. Solutions that might require expanding government and providing more support for politicians will be a hard sell in an atmosphere in which everyone in the system is perceived as corrupt. Indeed, for Mr. Trump, "drain the swamp" has in practice meant gutting those very sources of independent expertise and analysis, on issues from climate change to student loans. This further empowers lobbyists and the already powerful, continuing a trend started by Newt Gingrich in the 1990s when he eliminated sources of independent information such as the congressional Office of Technology Assessment. When corruption is perceived as universal, those in power can use investigations and allegations of corruption as a weapon.... American politics is in urgent need of repair, but the idea of the swamp feeds a cynicism that's not only inaccurate but also makes it harder to distinguish between decent people who are trying to do the best they can in a difficult system and real malfeasance — and even allows the latter to flourish unchecked.

CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS PLAN TO LAUNCH INQUIRY INTO TRUMP'S ALLEGED ROLE IN SCHEME TO SILENCE AFFAIR ACCUSATIONS

THE WASHINGTON POST

House Democrats plan to make President Trump's alleged involvement in a 2016 scheme to silence two women who claimed they had affairs with him a major investigative focus this fall, picking up where federal prosecutors left off in a case legal experts say could have led to additional indictments. The House Judiciary Committee is preparing to hold hearings and call witnesses involved in hush-money payments to ex-Playboy model Karen McDougal and adult-film star Stormy Daniels as soon as October, according to people familiar with the plans who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe internal discussions. Democrats say they believe there is already enough evidence to name Trump as a co-conspirator in the episode that resulted in his former attorney, Michael Cohen, pleading guilty to two campaign finance charges.... The hush-money inquiry will open a new chapter in the House's months-long consideration of whether to draft articles of impeachment against the president.... The new congressional inquiry will reopen questions about the extent of Trump's involvement in the episode — and whether he would have been charged if not for Justice Department opinions that a sitting president cannot be indicted.

**Related Story: [The Trump Hush Money Mystery House Democrats Should Try to Solve.](#)*

JUDICIARY PANEL ISSUES SUBPOENA ON TRUMP'S ALLEGED OFFER TO PARDON DHS OFFICIALS

POLITICO

The House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday subpoenaed the Department of Homeland Security for documents connected to President Donald Trump's alleged offer to pardon officials who break the law while carrying out his immigration agenda. Trump has denied making such an offer, and his allies have reportedly claimed his closed-door comments — revealed in media reports — were jokes. But Democrats say they want to see the records from inside the department, particularly as the Judiciary Committee weighs the prospect of impeachment. "The Framers did not envision the use of the presidential pardon power to encourage criminal acts at the president's



direction," House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler said in a statement. "As the committee continues its investigation into whether to recommend articles of impeachment, it is imperative that we are able to obtain information about ongoing presidential misconduct and abuses of power." Nadler said his panel will also hold hearings in the coming months related to the issue of pardons as it continues its sweeping investigation into possible obstruction of justice, corruption and abuses of power by the president.

THE TRUMP ASSOCIATES BENEFITING FROM A TAX BREAK FOR POOR COMMUNITIES

THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Trump has called it "the hottest thing going," a multibillion-dollar tax break designed to channel investments into poor neighborhoods, leading to new housing, businesses and jobs. The tax benefit allows people to delay paying taxes on profits from stocks or other investments for years. To qualify, they have to direct their untaxed gains into federally certified regions known as opportunity zones. Profits on those investments are then tax-free. While some money is flowing to poor communities, the most visible impact so far has been to set off a feeding frenzy among the wealthiest Americans. They are poised to reap billions in untaxed profits on high-end apartment buildings and hotels in trendy neighborhoods, storage facilities that employ only a handful of workers or student housing in bustling college towns.... Here are four high-profile beneficiaries of the tax break who have personal or professional connections to Mr. Trump.... The former White House communications director [Anthony Scaramucci] runs an investment company, SkyBridge Capital, that is using the opportunity-zone program to help build a new hotel, outfitted with an opulent restaurant and a rooftop pool, in the trendy Warehouse District of New Orleans.... Mr. Richard LeFrak, a longtime confidante of Mr. Trump's and a major campaign donor, is building a sprawling luxury residential community in the middle of an opportunity zone in Miami, though it's unclear how much of the development's funding will end up being tax-advantaged.... Jared Kushner's family company owns or is in the process of buying at least a dozen properties in New York, New Jersey and Florida that are in opportunity zones.

[TOP INTERIOR OFFICIAL WHO PUSHED TO EXPAND DRILLING IN ALASKA TO JOIN OIL COMPANY THERE](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

Last summer, Scott Pruitt left his job heading the Environmental Protection Agency and within a few months had started consulting for coal magnate Joseph W. Craft III. Three weeks after leaving the Interior Department, energy counselor Vincent DeVito joined Cox Oil Offshore, which operates in the Gulf of Mexico, as its executive vice president and general counsel. Now, Joe Balash — who oversaw oil and gas drilling on federal lands before resigning from Interior on Friday — is joining a foreign oil company that is expanding operations on Alaska's North Slope. Balash, who had served as the Interior Department's assistant secretary for land and minerals management for nearly two years, confirmed in a phone interview Tuesday night that he will begin working for the Papua New Guinea-based Oil Search, which is developing one of Alaska's largest oil prospects in years.

[WATCHDOG SAYS INTERIOR DEPARTMENT BROKE THE LAW BY USING PARK FEES DURING SHUTDOWN](#)

ABC NEWS

An independent government watchdog says the Interior Department violated spending laws by using money meant for maintenance and improvements in national parks to pay for day-to-day operations during the government shutdown. During the shutdown in December and January, the Interior Department decided to tap into a fund of money collected from fees in National Parks to pay to keep the parks open and help collect trash and protect them from damage.... The Government Accountability Office found the department violated laws on the use of appropriated funds by using that fee money for operations that normally would have been part of its congressionally appropriated budget, specifically trash collection and restroom maintenance. Violations of the Anti-Deficiency Act are technically a criminal violation but are not frequently prosecuted.... According to the GAO finding the department will have to officially report the violation, identify the officials responsible and adjust its accounts to correct the violation.

[AS FEC NEARS SHUTDOWN, PRIORITIES SUCH AS STOPPING ELECTION INTERFERENCE ON HOLD](#)

NPR

"To not have the FEC able to take action right now is deeply concerning," says Daniel Weiner, a former senior counsel at the FEC, who's now with the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University law school. In particular, Weiner is concerned about another attempt by Russia or other actors to interfere in the 2020 election. "After 2016, it's become very clear that it is almost certain that the Russian government and potentially other U.S. rivals will seek to interfere in the U.S. election, including through online propaganda, cybersecurity incursions and other tactics," Weiner told NPR. As the regulator for campaign spending, he describes the FEC as one of the "front-line" agencies combating foreign interference. The FEC has been in the midst of strengthening disclosure and transparency requirements for online political ads of the sort that Russian operatives used to manipulate voters in 2016. The lack of a quorum, Weiner says, "will make that impossible until that seat is filled." ... The FEC is not the only government agency unable to act because of a lack of a quorum. The Merit Systems Protection Board, which investigates allegations of violations of federal personnel practices, including the Hatch Act, hasn't had one for over two years.

[U.S. OFFICIALS HUDDLE WITH FACEBOOK, GOOGLE AND OTHER TECH GIANTS TO TALK ABOUT THE 2020 ELECTION](#)

THE WASHINGTON POST

Federal law enforcement officials huddled with Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Twitter on Wednesday to discuss election security ahead of the 2020 presidential race, according to several U.S. and industry sources, amid heightened concerns that social-media sites are still vulnerable to the spread of disinformation online. The meeting at Facebook's headquarters in Silicon Valley included security officials from each of the four tech companies as well as representatives from the Department of Homeland Security, the Director of National Intelligence and the FBI, the sources said, requesting anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the meeting on record.... Google, Microsoft and Twitter each confirmed their attendance, without elaborating on the subject of their discussions. The gathering marked the first such meeting involving industry and government of its size this year to address 2020 election security, according to one of the sources



familiar with the proceedings. There “was a high degree of interest” to do similar meetings in the future and continue the joint coordination that began last year to prepare for the midterms, the person said.

THE FUTURE OF ELECTION MEDDLING IS AMERICANS VERSUS AMERICANS

ROLLING STONE

Deepfakes are just one of the growing threats to the integrity — and potentially the outcomes — of U.S. elections, starting with 2020. So says Paul Barrett, the deputy director of New York University’s Stern Center for Business and Human Rights. In a new report, Barrett describes what election interference might look like in the upcoming 2020 elections and what tech companies, state and federal government, and regular citizens can do about it. Barrett spoke with *Rolling Stone* on Monday about Russia’s next moves, why Instagram and WhatsApp are of particular concern, and why we should expect election interference to be more domestic — think Americans vs. Americans — than foreign in 2020. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

GREGORY CRAIG ACQUITTED ON CHARGE OF LYING TO JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Gregory B. Craig, one of Washington’s most prominent Democratic lawyers, was acquitted on Wednesday of a felony charge that he lied to federal authorities about work he did seven years ago for the Ukrainian government. The jury returned the verdict after fewer than five hours of deliberation. It was a blow to the Justice Department’s effort to more aggressively crack down on undisclosed foreign influence in Washington as well as a vindication of Mr. Craig’s high-risk decision to face a jury and testify in his own defense. The case filings exposed in detail how a foreign government was able to harness Washington’s industry of lawyers, lobbyists and public relations experts, an unflattering portrait that included at least \$4 million in secret offshore bank transfers from a Ukrainian oligarch to Mr. Craig’s law firm. But Mr. Craig’s guilt or innocence turned solely on the question of whether he deliberately misled Justice Department officials who were investigating whether he should register

as a foreign agent. his case was viewed as a test of the Justice Department's new campaign to enforce a once-obscure foreign lobbying law. Until about two years ago, violators of the statute, known as the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA, typically received only an administrative slap on the wrist. While Mr. Craig, 74, who served as White House counsel in the first year of the Obama administration, was not accused of violating FARA, he was accused of deceiving the officials who enforce it in an effort to avoid registering as a foreign agent.... The Justice Department's focus on foreign influence cases has contributed to a wave of disclosures by lobbyists and lawyers. The number of people who have newly registered as foreign agents so far this year is more than twice the number of new registrants in all of 2010.

ADVOCATES PUSH CENSUS BUREAU TO PREPARE FOR SECURITY BREACHES, DISINFORMATION AHEAD OF 2020 COUNT

SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

As the first U.S. census to be conducted mainly online gets underway in the coming months, warnings from the Government Accountability Office about “substantial cybersecurity challenges” and disinformation campaigns raise concerns about how such a massive operation - collecting the names, addresses and birth dates of more than 300 million people - could be undermined by malicious actors on social media. Analysts monitoring the internet say they see no evidence of concerted efforts to sow bad information about the 2020 count. Yet in one instance, a post on a neo-Nazi website encouraged people to seek temporary Census Bureau employment in order to turn in immigrants who are living in the country illegally. Census workers are sworn to protect such information.... The Census Bureau has been working for months with Facebook, Twitter and Google, but advocates for counting everybody in the country as the Constitution prescribes point to the need for vigilance given the fact that the census depends on people's faith that they can fill out questionnaires without fear of reprisals from the government.... Tech companies, pressing to address failures in 2016, are working with the Census Bureau. Facebook is preparing a “census interference policy” for release this fall, and the company says it is tailoring algorithms to detect false information.... The spokesperson pointed to Twitter's broader efforts that include publishing an archive of foreign information

operations seen on its platform. Twitter has continued to update that archive and this week announced that it had suspended some 200,000 accounts believed to be part of a Chinese-government backed drive to undermine the protest movement in Hong Kong. Google issued a statement in response to questions: “The accuracy of the 2020 census is extremely important, and Google is committed to combating misinformation and fraudulent activities to help ensure the integrity of the count.”

MAR-A-LAGO, \$20K WORTH OF FLOWERS AND LOTS OF CONSULTING: WHEN JOINT FUNDRAISING MONEY GOES BEYOND CAMPAIGNS

OPEN SECRETS

Joint fundraising committees are growing increasingly common as candidates and parties seek out big checks from wealthy donors. But while millions of dollars might flow into these committees on a single night, some of them fail to pass along much of this money to the campaigns for which they are supposedly fundraising. According to Federal Election Commission guidelines, joint committees are supposed to pass the net proceeds of any fundraising event to their affiliated committees within 10 days. Of the 204 joint committees that raised at least \$10,000 during the first half of 2019, three quarters allocated at least 80 percent of their disbursements to their affiliated campaigns. But the ability of most joint committees to successfully transfer funds to their affiliates raises questions as to why some don’t do the same. And an OpenSecrets analysis of FEC filings found more than a dozen examples of joint fundraising committees diverting a substantial portion of their money away from campaigns. Some spent lavishly for administrative purposes. Others paid large sums to political consultants with whom they were closely connected. Such disbursements are not illegal. Campaign finance laws only bar spending campaign funds for personal use. But as joint fundraising committees have grown rapidly since the *McCutcheon v. FEC* decision in 2014 removed the cap on the total amount of money an individual can contribute in a given election cycle, they raise questions about who stands to benefit from massive campaign contributions.

[ETHICS COMMITTEE RELEASES MORE DETAILS ON ALLEGATIONS AGAINST DAVID SCHWEIKERT](#)

ROLL CALL

The House Ethics Committee has released information on an expanded list of allegations against Rep. David Schweikert. The Arizona Republican is under investigation by the panel, which made public a second referral from the Office of Congressional Ethics. Under House Ethics rules, the committee is required to release OCE referrals one year after they are sent to the House. The OCE previously found “substantial reason” to believe Schweikert authorized expenditures from his Members’ Representational Allowance, or MRA, that his former chief of staff, Richard Oliver Schwab Jr., made outside the scope of permissible official expenses. The new OCE report includes allegations that Schweikert may have received gifts or loans from a congressional employee that were later reimbursed from his official office account. The latest allegations prompted the panel to expand the scope of its inquiry. The report shows that the OCE board voted unanimously to recommend an expanded inquiry into Schweikert.

IN THE STATES

[STATES UPGRADE ELECTION EQUIPMENT — WARY OF 'A RACE WITHOUT A FINISH LINE'](#)

NPR

With five months before primary season begins, election officials around the country are busy buying new voting equipment. Their main focus is security, after Russians tried to hack into U.S. election systems in 2016. Intelligence officials have warned that similar attacks are likely in 2020, from either Russia or others intent on disrupting U.S. elections. Federal, state and local authorities are trying to improve the security of the nation's voting systems before that happens. One way they're doing that is by purchasing more machines that produce paper ballots, which can be used to verify results in the event of a cyberattack on electronic systems. The Brennan Center for Justice estimates that nearly 90% of Americans will cast their ballots on paper-based systems in 2020, compared with 80% in

2016. That still means about 16 million voters will use paperless machines.... Like other election officials, [Pennsylvania Acting Secretary Kathy] Boockvar says Pennsylvania could use more resources. Congress approved \$380 million last year for election security, but Pennsylvania received only \$14 million of that. Liz Howard of the Brennan Center, says her group estimates that states could easily use another \$2 billion over the next five years, especially to protect local election offices which tend to be more vulnerable. "With over 8,000 election jurisdictions across the country, there's some not insubstantial portion of them that do not have IT support at the local level," she says. Howard also notes that some states have used their security funding to hire specialists they call "cybernavigators," IT professionals who travel to local election offices to help them figure out whether their systems are vulnerable — and what steps need to be taken to close the gap.

[YOUR ELECTRIC BILLS WOULD RISE UNDER TRUMP PLAN THAT COULD HELP COAL INDUSTRY](#)

NJ.COM

Electric rates for New Jersey homeowners could rise more than \$4 a month under a Trump administration proposal that opponents said also could help a coal industry that was among the president's top 2016 campaign contributors. The Republican-controlled Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is considering whether to require carbon-free energy sources such as solar, wind and nuclear to charge higher prices when trying to sell their power to the regional energy grid that includes New Jersey, thus providing a cost advantage to fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas. The proposal threatens to jeopardize the efforts of New Jersey and other states that are trying to combat climate change through encouraging clean power sources, as well as thousands of jobs in the renewable energy industry, opponents said.

[INTERVIEW WITH REP. JASON CROW](#)

INTERMOUNTAIN JEWISH NEWS

What is your Number 1 policy priority? Campaign finance reform and democracy reform — redistricting reform, ethics reform. We [the House] passed H.R. 1. It aims to bolster the ethics laws and rules governing current and former officials, such as members of Congress sitting on for profit, corporate boards On campaign finance reform, H.R. 1 closes loopholes for Superpacs, allowing public financing for campaigns, allowing people running for office to focus on their

voters. My first bill in Congress is called “End the Dark Money Act.” It closes the loophole that enables 501c4s to hide donations to Superpacs. Now, under IRS law, a 501c4 cannot be used for campaigns or be election-related. It can’t be used for political purposes. But the Republicans put a rider on that that says the IRS can’t spend money to enforce that law. My bill removes that rider, so that the IRS can enforce existing law — can use existing resources to enforce the law. On gerrymandering: take politics out of the redistricting process. Colorado is a model for the country. We have to look at different models of having non-partisan commissions. H.R. 1 has taken up that general concept. Through it and whatever version of it the Senate would come up with, we will end up with a different system that prevents the current partisanship in the process.

THE GRASSROOTS BATTLE TO SAVE DEMOCRACY

THE NEW REPUBLIC

The filibuster will make the passage of constructive legislation impossible without a sixty-seat Democratic supermajority in the Senate or the assent of Republicans from disproportionately empowered conservative states. Moreover, the Supreme Court and broader federal judiciary have been stacked with conservative justices and judges—all well positioned to weaken, if not derail, ambitious progressive legislation. And while Democrats won the House and several state legislative chambers in 2018, gerrymandered Republican districts have proven to be a durable challenge for the party to surmount over the past decade. Should Democrats fare poorly in the redistricting fights set to unfold after the 2020 census, they will remain that way. These are among the reasons why several of the Democratic candidates have proposed bold ideas to retool American democracy, including ending the Senate filibuster and reforming the Supreme Court. Earlier this year, House Democrats kicked off the conversation with the passage of H.R. 1, a large package of reforms that included ending partisan gerrymandering. Out of the spotlight, a number of progressive groups have taken up the cause at the grassroots level.... Indivisible’s filibuster campaign, and their new focus on democracy reforms in general, arose after the organization asked its members about their priorities. Enacting pro-democracy reforms was a clear winner.... While ideas such as packing or remaking the Supreme Court still reside well outside the political mainstream, ending the practice of gerrymandering has been a project of broad public interest for some time. That project gained a prominent new advocate in 2016, when it was announced that Obama Attorney

General Eric Holder would chair the National Democratic Redistricting Committee (NDRC), an effort to unwind the gerrymandered districts that have advantaged Republicans in Washington and at the state legislative level.

REPUBLICANS FEAR DRUBBING IN NEXT ROUND OF REDISTRICTING

POLITICO

Democrats were caught napping in the 2010 election ahead of the last round of redistricting — and it cost them control of Congress for nearly a decade. Now Republicans are warning the same thing could happen to them. Senior Republicans concede they're at risk of losing dozens of state-level elections that will determine who wields power over the post-2020 congressional map — and potentially which party controls the chamber for the following 10 years. While Republicans are establishing a massive national infrastructure devoted to reelecting President Donald Trump and winning congressional majorities, party officials say the state legislative races are being overlooked. The trepidation comes as an array of well-funded Democratic groups — including one with the backing of former President Barack Obama and ex-Attorney General Eric Holder — are flooding cash into Virginia, a key redistricting battleground that's holding state legislative elections this fall. Democrats are expected to plow tens of millions into races next year. On Thursday morning, Chambers' group will unveil an initiative to preserve the party's fragile majorities in states like Pennsylvania, Florida and Texas. With multiple states closely divided between the two parties, he noted, the outcome of fewer than 50 legislative seats across the country could determine how a wide swath of congressional districts are redrawn.... This time around, it's Democrats who are playing big. The Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee outraised the RSLC during the first half of 2019. And unlike a decade ago, Democrats are getting help from a galaxy of outside groups and allies, especially Obama.

THE BATTLE OVER THE FILES OF A GERRYMANDERING MASTERMIND

THE NEW YORK TIMES

At the heart of a decisive court ruling on Tuesday striking down North Carolina's state legislative maps was evidence culled from the computer backups of the man who drew them: Thomas B. Hofeller, the Republican strategist and master of gerrymandering, who died last year. Documents from the backups, which surfaced after his death, were also central to the legal battle over adding a citizenship question to the 2020 census. An enormous stash of digital files, covering Mr. Hofeller's work in almost every state, has yet to be examined. But in a state court in Raleigh, N.C., another courtroom battle is underway. Its aim is to ensure that those files are never publicly scrutinized. Republican political figures filed a flurry of motions on Friday in the same court that issued the gerrymandering decision, all seeking to seal or destroy the 75,000-plus files that contain more than 100,000 documents and thousands of maps. Among them were a South Carolina lawyer, Dalton L. Oldham, who was a partner with Mr. Hofeller in a consultancy, Geographic Strategies L.L.C., that advised the Republican Party and party leaders nationwide on redistricting.... Mr. Oldham argues that Mr. Hofeller's digital archive contains confidential work for clients like the Republican National Committee and that it includes trade secrets and information covered by lawyer-client privilege that should be erased or kept secret.... Whatever the merits of that argument, the decision to disclose the files or keep them private carries potentially weighty political consequences, said David Daley, whose 2016 book on gerrymandering helped shape a national debate on the practice. The few documents released so far "have transformed the national conversation about the citizenship question and helped overturn a set of statewide maps in North Carolina," he said, adding, "There are tens of thousands of documents left to go. Think of the impact."

NORTH CAROLINA'S LEGISLATIVE MAPS ARE THROWN OUT BY STATE COURT PANEL

THE NEW YORK TIMES

In a major blow to Republicans who control the Legislature in one of the nation's most bitterly divided states, a state court panel threw out North Carolina's state legislative maps as an unconstitutional partisan gerrymander and ordered



lawmakers to draw up new ones in two weeks. The ruling on Tuesday by a three-judge panel in Raleigh had the potential to bring to a decisive end a yearslong battle over gerrymandering in a critical swing state and indicated that state courts could act to rein in patently partisan electoral maps after the United States Supreme Court ruled in June, by a 5-to-4 margin, that federal courts could not. The Republican leader of the State Senate, Phil Berger, cast the decision as part of a national Democratic strategy to overturn Republican rule via the courts, but said the Legislature would not appeal the ruling. The North Carolina Supreme Court, which would hear any appeal, has six Democratic justices and one Republican.... “It contradicts the Constitution and binding legal precedent, but we intend to respect the court’s decision and finally put this divisive battle behind us,” Mr. Berger said in a statement. “It’s time to move on.” But Democrats and the voting rights advocacy groups who challenged North Carolina’s maps were giddy over what they depicted as a vital victory for fair electoral maps.

STACEY ABRAMS’S FIGHT FOR VOTING RIGHTS MATTERS MORE THAN HER POLITICAL FUTURE

VOX

In August, Abrams announced that she would not seek the presidency and would instead spend the coming months working on Fair Fight 2020, an initiative that will seek to create and support voter protection efforts in 20 battleground states. While that decision has been met with a sort of begrudging acceptance from some Abrams supporters, it is likely that Abrams will have a far greater impact in her current work than in running for office.... Abrams’s experience dealing with these issues predates her gubernatorial run. As the New Yorker’s Jelani Cobb noted in a recent profile of Abrams, she has been involved in electoral reform and voter registration efforts for more than a decade. And during the 2018 election in Georgia, her campaign worked with voters caught up in a number of voting rights difficulties, including the closure of hundreds of polling places, voter roll purges, and Election Day voting issues.... Fair Fight 2020’s new voter protection initiative could help address some of these issues on the front end. As the Washington Post reported, Fair Fight will spend \$4 million to \$5 million on its upcoming initiative, and “will target 20 states, most of them battlegrounds in the Midwest and Southeast, and three states with gubernatorial elections this year: Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi.” This money will be used to help set up



and support local voter protection programs, helping local groups and organizers with voter hotlines, raising money for staffing, and educating the public about their voting rights, all in an effort to ensure that all eligible ballots cast are counted. In doing so, Abrams joins a number of efforts to promote voting rights ahead of the 2020 elections. In Florida, Andrew Gillum, another prominent 2018 gubernatorial candidate who lost his bid, is working on Bring It Home Florida, a voter registration campaign that hopes to help Democrats turn the state blue next year.... Collectively, these efforts could help voters, particularly voters of color, young voters, and other marginalized groups disproportionately affected by voting restrictions. And Abrams hopes her work in particular will also do something else: ensure that people who want to vote are able to do so, and that all votes count like they should.

NEW YORK'S ELECTION LAWS CONTINUE TO SUPPRESS VOTERS

ALBANY TIMES UNION

Like the 36-day recount madness that left Americans wondering who the next president was, it took 43 days from the recent June Democratic primary election to settle the outcome of the Queens County race for district attorney. We finally know who the winner is — Melinda Katz by 55 votes over Tiffany Caban and five other candidates — but we also know who the real losers were: scores of otherwise eligible voters who never had their ballots counted. The culprit? New York's infamously arcane and hyper-technical election laws. Most followers of New York elections have a pretty good idea of how far behind our state is: Thirty-seven states enacted early voting before we did; 28 states and Washington, D.C., routinely allow no-excuse mail-in voting, but we still do not; and 16 states and D.C. have enacted automatic voter registration, but New York sticks to its clunky, error-prone procedures. For good measure, ask any voter about their experience at the polls, and you will hear tons of horror stories.... And while New Yorkers decry restrictive voting practices in Florida, Georgia or Texas, a close reading of our election law uncovers many such hurdles here at home. This is not acceptable. Picayune rules that stand in the way of a full and fair franchise should be eliminated.

COMMISSION TO DECIDE ON HISTORIC PUBLIC FUNDING OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

NEWSDAY

New Yorkers will soon provide up to \$100 million in public financing to help fund candidates' campaigns, but exactly how the landmark reform legislation will be implemented is up to a special commission. And what it does will help determine whether it will succeed in reducing the influence of big-money donors or whether it will turn into what critics fear will be a taxpayer-paid boondoggle. The Public Financing of Elections Commission met for the first time last month and will hold four public hearings in the fall, including an Oct. 22 session in Smithtown. The commission has the potential to drastically change New York politics more than at any moment in decades by making races more competitive and reducing a pipeline for money that has played a role in corruption scandals. The commission will consider ideas that include reducing the nation's highest campaign contribution caps and banning lobbyists' donations, while prohibiting companies seeking or doing business with the state from contributing to candidates for up to a year. Campaign donations from companies with state contracts have long been an issue in Albany's corruption scandals. Most of these proposals have been bottled up in Albany for a decade, with the State Legislature and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo unable to reach agreement.... Studies have concluded that public financing of campaigns works to increase participation by voters and candidates, said Michael Malbin.... The key question is whether incumbents with reliable, big-money donors will join a public financing system with all its restrictions, additional audits and paperwork.... If most candidates skip the public financing system, the system would likely remain in place but its goals of limiting the influence of wealthy special interests, making more races competitive and making the whole electoral process more transparent could be lost.

PORTLAND'S NEW PUBLIC CAMPAIGN FINANCING SOFTWARE FACES LOOMING DEADLINES

KOPB-FM (ONLINE)

With just weeks to go until candidates can opt in to a new public campaign financing program, the city of Portland, Oregon, is still testing the software that will run it. A recent oversight report shows the software, developed by the nonprofit Civic Software Foundation, is at risk of not being delivered on time

before the 2020 primary election cycle kicks off in September. That prompted concern this week from Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, who has at least one opponent planning to use public financing.... But city staff and technology advisors said the project is in better shape than the oversight report suggests. They said the software should be ready in time to handle the influx of candidates, and the project — though not without risk — has been a significant innovation. The new elections software has been developed in about six months for a lean \$155,000. The key: volunteer coders working alongside a few paid project managers.... The new software — if it works — will provide a first line of defense against any candidates trying to manipulate the system. But necessity drove Portland's unusual decision to acquire critical software for an elections program from a volunteer-driven nonprofit. The software, when complete, will collect campaign finance data from candidates who are opting in to Portland's new public financing program, known as Open and Accountable Elections. The software will automate some of the steps city staff take to verify if donations to a candidate are eligible for public matching dollars, and power a website with visualizations that show the public where each candidate's money comes from.... Ready or not, the software will debut to the public on Sept. 11, when the Civic Software Foundation hosts a public demonstration for all its projects at Portland's Revolution Hall.

KEY OPINION

[RESTORE THE FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION FOR THE SAKE OF OUR DEMOCRACY](#)

THE SEATTLE TIMES (OP-ED BY REP. DEREK KILMER)

Last week, the agency reached a new low, as the vice chairman of the FEC announced his resignation, leaving the agency with just three of six seats on the commission filled. Without a quorum, the FEC is unable to take any official commission action, and unable to enforce or regulate the nation's campaign finance laws. In other words, the referee has officially left the field.... But as important, Congress should move to enact legislation to make the commission function better. Earlier this year, I sponsored the Restoring Integrity to America's Elections Act, a bipartisan bill to fundamentally reform the FEC and enable it to more effectively carry out its mission to oversee and enforce campaign finance



laws.... This bill has already passed the House as part of broader democracy reform bill (known as H.R. 1). The Senate should take action on this bipartisan proposal and make meaningful, lasting progress to protect our democracy. Meaningful, substantial reforms at the commission need to happen so it can get back to weeding out campaign finance abuse and holding those who skirt the rules accountable. It's time to get the referee back on the field.

THE COMING RECKONING OVER THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

SLATE (OP-ED BY RICK HASEN)

But whether you like the Electoral College in theory or not, it turns out that the actual rules used to implement its use are creaky and dangerous. Indeed, thanks to new conflicting rulings, the institution could generate chaos and confusion in 2020 or in a future presidential election. In August, the United States Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit held that the state of Colorado violated the Constitution in 2016 when it removed Micheal Baca, a presidential elector who acted “faithlessly” and voted for John Kasich over Hillary Clinton, who was chosen by the state’s voters. It followed a contrary ruling from the Washington state Supreme Court, which held that the state could fine electors \$1,000 for being faithless. Now, Harvard Law professor Larry Lessig is planning to bring the Washington case to the United States Supreme Court—and in doing so, hopes to blow up the current Electoral College system. It’s a well-intentioned, audacious gambit. And it could backfire spectacularly.... Here’s why I believe Lessig is playing with fire. There is a reasonable chance that the Supreme Court, if it reached this issue, could decide that, under the original understanding of the Constitution, electors are in fact free to vote their consciences. This would put tremendous pressure on the parties to choose electors who will be faithful and not be swayed, but the kind of lobbying and pressure that would come to bear on each of them would be tremendous in a close election. We would have weeks of national anxiety after the election awaiting a resolution.

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