



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

**DECEMBER 20, 2019**

**NATIONAL NEWS**

[TRUMP IMPEACHED FOR ABUSE OF POWER AND  
OBSTRUCTION OF CONGRESS](#)

**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

The House of Representatives on Wednesday impeached President Trump for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, making him the third president in history to be charged with committing high crimes and misdemeanors and face removal by the Senate. On a day of constitutional consequence and raging partisan tension, the votes on the two articles of impeachment fell largely along party lines, after a bitter debate that stretched into the evening and reflected the deep polarization gripping American politics in the Trump era.... The impeachment votes set the stage for a historic trial beginning early next year in the Senate, which will have final say — 10 months before Mr. Trump faces re-election — on whether to acquit the 45th president or convict and remove him from office. The timing was uncertain, after Ms. Pelosi suggested late Wednesday that she might wait to send the articles to the Senate, holding them out as leverage in a negotiation on the terms of a trial.

[FIGHTING CORRUPTION IS THE MOST ELECTABLE THING A  
DEMOCRAT CAN DO IN 2020](#)

**THE HUFFINGTON POST**

Over the past year, every member of the often-ballooning and occasionally

shrinking field of Democratic presidential candidates has tried to convince an uncommitted and nervous electorate that they are the candidate to defeat President Donald Trump. Every candidate has their own theory of how to effectively oust the incumbent.... Last Thursday, at St. Anselm College in New Hampshire, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren finally unveiled her theory: The candidate who can defeat Trump is the one who will put the focus on the long-standing political corruption that helped sweep Trump into office and that his administration has only exacerbated. “That’s our path to beat Donald Trump in 2020,” Warren said. “Americans of all political stripes are looking for a candidate who is serious about fighting Washington corruption. They know until someone is willing to do that, nothing else will get done. Demonstrating a real commitment to reform is our best general election contrast with a corrupt president. It’s how we win moderates, independents and disaffected Republicans.” ... To Warren and her team, a believable promise to battle corruption is the best way to win over swing voters. Both recent political history and polling suggest they might be right: A survey conducted for the Democratic campaign finance reform group End Citizens United found that 89% of voters in 26 congressional swing districts rated cracking down on political corruption as either a “top” or “major” priority. That was higher than for any other issue, even making health care more affordable or protecting Social Security and Medicare. But winning the argument, Democratic operatives say, will require a focus on the issue, particularly against a Republican president who was able to convince many voters in 2016 that he planned to crack down on corruption.

*\*Related Story: [Presidential Candidates Bennet and Steyer Talk Democracy Reform at Democracy Town Hall Series Events Friday & Saturday.](#)*

## CONGRESS TO APPROVE \$425 MILLION FOR ELECTION SECURITY UPGRADES

### **CNN**

Congress will approve a total of \$425 million in election security funding, according to two sources familiar with the deal. The money, which comes in the appropriations bill set to be released Monday, is a compromise: significantly higher than the \$250 million Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had initially backed in September, but far below the more than \$1 billion that the Democrat-controlled House had passed in H.R. 1 in March. It's the biggest influx of cash to bolster US election infrastructure since the 2016 election, which prompted a gradual national

consensus that voting machines that don't use paper ballots or receipts -- and thus can't be independently verified with an audit -- are outdated. Congress also passed \$380 million for election security in the appropriations bill of 2018.

*\*Related Story: [\\$425M Allocated for Election Security in Government Funding Deal](#).*

## DHS WAS FINALLY GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT CYBERSECURITY. THEN CAME TRUMP.

### **POLITICO MAGAZINE**

The catastrophic government failures around the Russian attack on the 2016 election left America playing catch-up on a brand-new geopolitical frontier—and DHS continues to face questions on whether it's prepared for next year's election, especially as the department has been consumed over the past year by a deadly immigration crisis, a White House-led purge of its leadership and deep uncertainty about its path forward. As 2020 approaches amid reports of renewed Russian efforts to influence the election, those challenges have left industry and government officials wondering: Is DHS' newfound seriousness over cybersecurity too little, too late?

## VOTING-MACHINE PARTS MADE BY FOREIGN SUPPLIERS STIR SECURITY CONCERNS

### **THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

A voting machine that is widely used across the country contains some parts made by companies with ties to China and Russia, researchers found, fueling questions about the security of using overseas suppliers, which has also sparked scrutiny in Washington. Voting-machine vendors could be at risk of using insecure components from such overseas suppliers, which generally are difficult to vet and monitor, said a report released Monday by Interos Inc., an Arlington, Va.-based supply-chain monitoring company that has consulted for government agencies and Fortune 500 companies. The findings are likely to fan worries about whether voting-machine vendors are doing enough to defend themselves against foreign interference ahead of the 2020 U.S. elections, which U.S. intelligence officials say hostile powers could try to disrupt.

## HOW NEW VOTING MACHINES COULD HACK OUR DEMOCRACY

### **THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS**

The United States has a disturbing habit of investing in unvetted new touchscreen voting machines that later prove disastrous. As we barrel toward what is set to be the most important election in a generation, Congress appears poised to fund another generation of risky touchscreen voting machines called universal use Ballot Marking Devices (or BMDs), which function as electronic pens, marking your selections on paper on your behalf. Although vendors, election officials, and others often refer to this paper as a “paper ballot,” it differs from a traditional hand-marked paper ballot in that it is marked by a machine, which can be hacked without detection in a manual recount or audit. These pricey and unnecessary systems are sold by opaquely financed vendors who use donations and other gifts to entice election officials to buy them.

## BRENNAN CENTER RELEASES GUIDE FOR ELECTION OFFICIALS TO PREPARE FOR CYBERATTACKS AND MALFUNCTIONS

### **BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE**

The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law has released a guide for state and local election officials about how to prepare for and recover from cyberattacks and technical failures during the primaries and on Election Day. “Election officials have enormous responsibility in 2020. They must keep the vote secure despite cyberattacks by foreign governments, and they need to start now,” said Liz Howard, a co-author of the guide released today, former deputy commissioner for the Virginia Department of Elections, and counsel in the Brennan Center’s Democracy Program. “We have compiled real-life, practical guidance for preventing election interference and recovering from it quickly if it does occur.” ... Preparing for Cyberattack and Technical Failures: A Guide for Election Officials covers supplies and technology that many jurisdictions lack and might purchase with the federal funding, should the spending deal be passed by the full Congress and signed by the President.

## [A GREAT BIG GIFT NOT ON TRUMP'S DISCLOSURE FORM: GIULIANI'S LEGAL ADVICE](#)

### **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

For the past 20 months, President Trump has received free personal legal services from one of America's highest-paid lawyers, who has traveled around the country and across the ocean to defend him in the special counsel's inquiry and press Ukraine to investigate a political rival and unfounded conspiracy theories. The lawyer, of course, is Rudolph W. Giuliani, but Mr. Trump did not mention Mr. Giuliani or his unpaid labor on the annual financial disclosure he filed in May, which requires that the value and source of gifts — including free legal work — be publicly listed.

*\*Related Op-Ed: [Rudy, Inc.](#)*

## ['THESE PEOPLE ARE PROFITABLE': UNDER TRUMP, PRIVATE PRISONS ARE CASHING IN ON ICE DETAINEES](#)

### **USA TODAY**

The use of private prisons to detain immigrants is not new, but the business has exploded under Trump. At least 24 immigration detention centers and more than 17,000 beds were added in the past three years to the sprawling detention system run by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). A USA TODAY Network investigation found that the companies operating those centers have generated record-setting revenue since 2016 while making record-setting political donations — primarily to Republicans, including Trump — as political figures moved freely between government policy roles and jobs in the private immigration industry. The booming business spends \$3 billion a year housing a record high of roughly 50,000 people, the majority of whom have no criminal record. The investigation revealed more than 400 allegations of sexual assault or abuse, inadequate medical care, regular hunger strikes, frequent use of solitary confinement, more than 800 instances of physical force against detainees, nearly 20,000 grievances filed by detainees and at least 29 fatalities, including seven suicides, since Trump took office in January 2017 and launched an overhaul of U.S. immigration policies. Network reporters interviewed 35 current or former detainees and reviewed hundreds of documents from lawsuits, financial records and government contracts and toured seven ICE facilities from Colorado to Texas to Florida. They found that

private prison companies established close ties with officials from the very top of the federal government all the way down to the local level, currying favor with sheriffs and city officials who often serve as middlemen to secure big-money ICE contracts. The private prison industry set highs for federal campaign contributions in the 2016 presidential election cycle, spending more than \$1.7 million, then again in 2018 by spending more than \$1.9 million. Most of the money went to Republican causes, according to data from the Center for Responsive Politics and the Federal Election Commission. Trump has received more than 25 times the amount of contributions that President Barack Obama received over his entire eight years in office – \$969,000 to Trump and \$38,000 to Obama. The industry donated to people inside Trump’s inner circle, including Vice President Mike Pence, former Energy Secretary Rick Perry and former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley while each served as governor of their home states. Private prison companies spent millions more in federal lobbying efforts and hired people in Trump’s orbit, including former Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi, who works at the White House, and Brian Ballard, Trump’s former campaign finance chief in the critical swing state of Florida. “This is their moment,” said Silky Shah, executive director of the Detention Watch Network, a group that advocates against detaining migrants. “They’re thinking, ‘We don’t know how long Trump is going to be in office, so let’s get all the money to him and to Republicans and solidify ourselves.’ ”

## THE DECADE OF CITIZENS UNITED

### **SLATE**

In 2010, the largest reported individual contributors to federal campaigns in American politics were Robert and Doylene Perry, owners of Perry Homes, who donated about \$7.5 million to support Republican and conservative candidates. In 2018, the largest reported contributors were casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and his wife, Miriam, who contributed about \$122 million in outside money to support such candidates, representing a 16-fold increase over the Perrys’ 2010 contributions, according to data collected by the Center for Responsive Politics. What explains this dramatic shift in American elections, where the wealthiest Americans get to have even greater influence over who is elected and what policies elected officials pursue? The Supreme Court’s 2010 opinion, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*.

## [2020 CAMPAIGNS THROW THEIR HANDS UP ON DISINFORMATION](#)

### **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

The examples are numerous: A hoax version of the Green New Deal legislation went viral online. Millions of people saw unsubstantiated rumors about the relationship between Ukraine and the family of former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. A canard about the ties between a Ukrainian oil company and a son of Senator Mitt Romney, the Utah Republican, spread widely, too. Still, few politicians or their staffs are prepared to quickly notice and combat incorrect stories about them, according to dozens of campaign staff members and researchers who study online disinformation. Several of the researchers said they were surprised by how little outreach they had received from politicians. Campaigns and political parties say their hands are tied, because big online companies like Facebook and YouTube have few restrictions on what users can say or share, as long as they do not lie about who they are. But campaigns should not just be throwing their hands up, said some researchers and campaign veterans like Ms. Kaplan, who now runs a start-up that helps fight disinformation. Instead, they said, there should be a concerted effort to counter falsehoods.

## **IN THE STATES**

## [22,000 REINSTATED TO VOTING ROLLS AS GEORGIA ATTORNEYS DEFEND PURGE](#)

### **THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION**

The Georgia secretary of state's office announced Thursday that it would reinstate about 22,000 voters that it had removed from the rolls earlier this week. The announcement came two hours before state attorneys returned to federal court to defend the cancellation of more than 300,000 voter registrations Monday night. Those reinstated to "inactive" voting status will have until the next state-scheduled update to the voter list in 2021 to contact election officials or vote to become "active." Josh Belinfante, an attorney representing Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, told U.S. District Judge Steve Jones that the office



chose to re-evaluate when a voter's inactivity started after receiving documents from a voting rights organization that is suing the state. Jones is considering whether to restore the registrations of about 120,000 infrequent voters who were removed from the state's voting rolls Monday night.

## KEY OPINION

### HOW PARTISAN GERRYMANDERING LEADS TO MORE GUN VIOLENCE

#### **CNN (OP-ED BY AG ERIC H. HOLDER JR. AND NEERA TANDEN)**

Too often in the United States, our lawmakers prize their own reelection more than actually doing the work that matters for their constituents or their policy preferences. This problem is exacerbated by politicians who use partisan gerrymandering to hand-pick their voters instead of allowing the people to choose their representatives. Once their reelection is assured, these politicians frequently ignore the voters' concerns about some of the most pressing issues of our time -- including curbing the epidemic of gun violence.... The composition of our state legislatures should more accurately reflect the results of our democratic elections -- and their policy agendas should follow the beliefs of the people they represent. But in order for that to truly happen in the United States, we need to end the scourge of partisan and racial gerrymandering. To fully address the threat of gerrymandering, both Congress and the state legislatures need to act. In every state -- and at every level of government -- districts should be drawn by nonpartisan, independent commissions, and they should be required to fairly represent the population of the state. Fortunately, a number of states, like Michigan, have taken the critical step of putting the power to draw districts in the hands of an independent commission -- taking that power away from incumbent politicians who abuse the process. Democrats in Congress have also recognized the need for independent commissions; the For the People Act (H.R. 1) that passed the House would require independent commissions to draw federal districts.



## WHERE DO DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES STAND ON GERRYMANDERING? WHAT ABOUT HR1? LET'S ASK THEM

### **CALMATTERS (OP-ED BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CALIFORNIA COMMON CAUSE KATHAY FENG)**

With California's new relevance in the presidential primary, it is absolutely critical that we ask candidates how they plan to lead the country out of the political impasse and take-no-prisoners battle ground that America has become. Much of the analysis has centered on who can win against Trump, and some of the candidates have made this their only measuring stick. But if we are to defend our republican democracy for the next generation against internal chaos and foreign interference, the real question is, after the election, what does group therapy for our national trauma look like? California has a lot of lessons to offer the nation on how to walk that path toward national healing.... At the national level, there is a bill, The For the People Act, H.R. 1, by Congressman John Sarbanes, a Maryland Democrat, and 236 co-sponsors. H.R. 1 would make these reforms that already are law in California a national standard. It passed the House, where Democrats are in control, but stalled in the Republican-controlled Senate. Do any of these Democratic candidates have a plan for how to bridge the partisan canyon in Congress to pass important bills such as H.R. 1? We are in a time when there are so many people who seek to sow divisions among Americans. I'm looking for the presidential candidate who presents a vision for how people can find common ground through uncommon solutions to create a democracy that works for all of us.

★★★