

H.R. 1, The For the People Act

Key Points:

- This week, the House will consider H.R. 1, The For the People Act, an historic reform package to restore the promise of our nation's democracy, end the culture of corruption in Washington, and reduce the role of money in politics to return the power back to the American people. This groundbreaking bill was introduced at the start of the Democratic-controlled 116th Congress, on January 3, 2019, by Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD) and has 236 Democratic cosponsors.
- H.R. 1 has been the subject of hearings across several committees of jurisdiction including the Judiciary ([January 29](#)), Oversight and Reform ([February 6](#)), Ways and Means ([February 6](#)), Homeland Security ([February 13](#)), and House Administration ([February 14](#)) Committees. The bill was marked up and reported out of the House Administration Committee on [February 26](#) along a party line vote.
- Our political system has become increasingly focused on the privileged and powerful, drowning out the voices, experiences and needs of everyday Americans and their families. When wealthy and well-connected special interests rig the rules – by preventing Americans from voting or flooding our politics with big money – they are diminishing our democracy and weakening our great nation.
- For years, Americans' access to the ballot box has been under attack. Since 2010, 25 states have enacted significant restrictions on voting, including 14 with restrictive voter ID laws, 12 with new restrictions on registration and seven shortening or eliminating early voting. Millions of voters have been removed from voter rolls across the country – at higher rates in the states that were formerly subject to the Voting Rights Act's preclearance provisions – and polling stations have been closed at an accelerated rate.
- Democrats are committed to ensuring that voting is free, fair and easy for all citizens and that every vote by an eligible voter is counted as cast. H.R. 1 incorporates key provisions of Rep. John Lewis' Voter Empowerment Act, and dismantles systemic, discriminatory barriers to voting by ending the indiscriminate purging of eligible voters from the rolls, restores voting rights to individuals with felony convictions after they have completed their prison sentences, establishes automatic voter registration, and expands absentee and early voting.
- Americans should not have to worry that our elections are being influenced by bad actors and foreign governments. H.R. 1 makes long overdue investments to protect the integrity of our elections against foreign interference and ensures confidence in election results by supporting the adoption of paper ballots and risk-limiting audits and by enhancing security requirements to protect our election infrastructure from cyberattacks.
- The For the People Act ends the dominance of big money in our politics and empowers American citizens by establishing a voluntary small-donor matching system funded by wealthy tax cheats and corporate lawbreakers, shining a light on secret money in politics through increased donor disclosure requirements, and strengthening campaign finance oversight. H.R. 1 also reaffirms that Congress and the States have the authority to regulate campaign contributions and expenditures – pushing back on the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* and *Buckley* decisions.
- Americans are also demanding an end to the culture of corruption in Washington. H.R. 1 makes critical changes to fortify ethics laws and increase accountability from public officials to ensure they are serving the public's interests, not special interests. This package prohibits Members of Congress from serving on for-profit, corporate boards, slows the revolving door between public service and special interests and tightens rules on lobbyists and foreign agents, stops Members of Congress from using taxpayer

dollars to settle harassment lawsuits, and requires all Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates to publicly disclose their tax returns.

- **A strong democracy is not a partisan issue.** H.R. 1 is a bold package of legislative reforms that will ensure clean and fair elections, fight back against big money in politics, and demand accountability from public officials. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to restore the faith and function of American democracy.
- The For the People package has broad support from civil rights, conservation, consumer, faith, justice and labor organizations across the country including: [Brennan Center for Justice](#), [Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#), [Common Cause](#), [Communications Workers of America](#), [CREW](#), [Democracy 21](#), [Indivisible](#), [Greenpeace](#), [League of Women Voters of the United States](#), [MomsRising](#), [MoveOn](#), [NARAL Pro-Choice America](#), [NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice](#), [American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee](#), [Coalition to Stop Gun Violence](#), [People for the American Way](#), [American Friends Service Committee](#), [Daily Kos](#), [End Citizens United Action Fund](#), [National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund](#), [National Association of Social Workers](#), [Planned Parenthood Federation of America](#), [POGO](#), [Public Citizen](#), [Service Employees International Union](#), [Truman National Security Project](#), and [Union of Concerned Scientists](#), among others.

SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS OF H.R.1

RESTORING OUR DEMOCRACY: ENSURING CLEAN AND FAIR ELECTIONS

- **Automatic voter registration** – requires state election officials to automatically register to vote any eligible, unregistered citizens while also protecting those who are ineligible to vote and mistakenly registered from prosecution.
- **Promotes online registration** – requires states to make available online voter registration, correction, and party affiliation designation.
- **Same day voter registration** – requires states to permit eligible citizens to register to vote and cast ballots on the day of a federal election, including during early voting periods.
- **Reaffirms commitment to restoring Voting Rights Act** – declares that Congress finds the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County vs. Holder* ushered in a new era of voter suppression and that, per the ruling, Congress should restore the protections of the Voting Rights Act by updating the formula for determining which jurisdictions are subject to federal preclearance.
- **Prohibits voter roll purges** – clarifies for the states that failure to vote is not grounds for removing registered voters from the rolls as was done in Ohio, Georgia and elsewhere.
- **Democracy restoration** – restores voting rights to individuals with felony convictions after they have completed their prison sentences and requires states and the federal government to notify these individuals of their re-enfranchisement.
- **Paper ballots** – requires voting systems in every state to use individual, durable, voter-verified paper ballots that are counted by hand or with an optical recognition device.
- **Expands early voting and voting by mail** – requires states to provide a minimum of 15 days prior to a federal election for early voting and prohibits states from imposing restrictions on a voter's ability to cast a ballot by mail.

- **Promotes voter access** – makes colleges and universities voter registration agencies, requires absentee ballots be posted free of charge, and creates a voter information hotline.
- **Provides Help America Vote Act funds** to states to help implement these voter registration modernization efforts.
- **Ends partisan gerrymandering** – requires states to adopt independent redistricting commissions for the purposes of drawing Congressional districts instead of allowing politicians to pick their voters.
- **Election Assistance Commission** – reauthorizes the Election Assistance Commission, requires states to work with the EAC to determine whether current voting systems will meet the demands of the 2020 election, and requires EAC to carry out an assessment of the security and effectiveness of its IT systems.
- **Election security measures** – requires the Department of Homeland Security to designate election infrastructure as critical and assess threats to the system at least 180 days prior to a federal election; creates a National Commission to Protect United States Democratic Institutions to counter threats; and requires testing of voting systems at nine months before a federal election.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM: ENDING THE DOMINANCE OF BIG MONEY IN POLITICS

- **Foreign money ban** – strengthens foreign money ban by prohibiting foreign nationals from participating in decision-making about contributions or expenditures by corporations and other entities.
- **Unmasks dark money** – requires super PACs, 501(c)4 groups and other organizations spending money in elections to disclose donors who contribute more than \$10,000 and forbids organizations to transfer money to keep the identity of the contributor secret.
- **Honest ads** – requires digital platforms to maintain a public database of political ad purchase requests of more than \$500 and directs online media outlets to implement measures to prevent ads being directly or indirectly purchased by foreign nationals.
- **Supports ending *Citizens United*** – affirms that the Constitution should be amended to clarify Congress and the States have the authority to regulate campaign contributions and expenditures, nullifying the *Citizens United* decision.
- **Publicly financed small donor match** – establishes a voluntary small dollar matching system, funded by wealthy tax cheats and corporate lawbreakers, on donations up to \$200 for House candidates who demonstrate broad-based support and reject high-dollar contributions and provides similar voluntary public matching funds for small contributions to participating presidential candidates.
- **Expands authorized campaign expenses** – allows candidates to use campaign funds to pay for child care, elder care, and health insurance premiums in an effort to make it possible for candidates with modest means to run for public office.
- **Shareholder Right-to-Know** – repeals Trump Administration prohibition on SEC finalizing rules to afford shareholders the opportunity to know about the political spending of politically traded companies.
- **Political spending by government contractors** – repeals Trump Administration prohibition on the Executive Branch putting forward rules to require that government contractors to disclose all their political spending.

- **Presidential Inaugural Committee disclosure** – requires Presidential Inaugural Committees to disclose expenditures and limit aggregate contributions and restricts funds being used on purposes unrelated to the inauguration.
- **Federal Election Commission** – restructures the FEC to have five commissioners in order to break gridlock and makes permanent the FEC's civil penalty authority.

ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY: ENSURING PUBLIC OFFICIALS WORK FOR THE PUBLIC INTEREST

- **Foreign agents** – increases resources for FARA office, creates FARA investigation and enforcement unit within the Department of Justice, and requires all Foreign Agents to disclose transactions involving things of financial value conferred on public officeholders.
- **Expands lobbying disclosure requirements** – requires those that provide counseling in support of lobbying contracts to register as under the Lobbying Disclosure Act.
- **Presidential appointees** – requires all Presidential appointees to recuse themselves from any matter in which a party is the President, the President's spouse, or any entity in which the President or the President's spouse has a substantial interest. Also requires individuals nominated or appointed to Senate-confirmed positions and other senior-level positions to disclose contributions by, solicited by or made on behalf of an individual.
- **Presidential conflicts of interest** – requires the President and Vice President to file a new financial disclosure statement within 30 days of being sworn into office and prohibits both the President and Vice President from contracting with the U.S. government.
- **White House Ethics** – requires all ethics waivers granted to those in the Executive Branch be disclosed to the Office of Government Ethics and the public.
- **Taxes and the President** – requires sitting Presidents and Vice Presidents, as well as candidates for President and Vice President, to make their tax returns public.
- **Slowing the special interest revolving door** – prohibits senior federal officials from leaving government service and attempting to influence employees in their former agency or office for two years and creates a similar "cooling off" time period for federal procurement officers who leave government service from accepting any compensation from a contractor to which the officer awarded a contract.
- **Congressional conflicts of interest** – forbids Members of Congress from serving on for-profit, corporate boards and codifies rules prohibiting Members, their family and staff from using their official position to benefit their own financial interests.
- **Ends taxpayer-settled harassment lawsuits in Congress** – prohibits Members of Congress from using taxpayer funds to settle any case of employment discrimination acts.