

Chairwoman Amy Klobuchar - Opening Statement (as delivered)
Full Committee Hearing on S.1
March 24, 2021

I call to order this hearing of the Rules and Administration Committee on S. 1, the For the People Act.

Today we are here to consider the For the People Act, legislation that I am honored to lead with Senator Merkley and Majority Leader Schumer, which has been cosponsored by every Democratic member of this Committee.

I would like to thank Senator Blunt, our colleagues, and our witnesses for being here today. I would also like to acknowledge, in addition to Senator Merkley, two of our other members who are new to this committee and are new to the Senate: Senator Ossoff, who along with Senator Warnock was elected in Georgia, where we all know election issues were front and center, as well as Senator Padilla, who has his own extensive experience with these issues from his time as California's Secretary of State.

Last month when we held this Committee's organizing meeting, I announced that the For the People Act would be the subject of our first legislative hearing. I am also pleased that we took part in very constructive hearings along with the Homeland Security Committee on the January 6 attack on the Capitol and our productive work Senator Blunt and I are doing together on oversight and investigations of that day is continuing. In the end that insurrection was about an angry mob working to undermine our democracy and it reminds all of us how very fragile our democracy truly is, and how it is on all of us to not just protect that democracy, but to ensure that it thrives. And that democracy is due for some rejuvenation.

This bill is essential to protecting every American's right to vote, getting dark money out of our elections, as well as some very important anti-corruption reforms. It is about strengthening our democracy by returning it to the hands of its rightful owners: the American people.

As I said from the stage on the Inauguration Day, on that beautiful day which Senator Blunt did so much to make a success, under that bright blue sky at the

very place where you could still see the spray paint on the bottom of the columns and the makeshift windows that were put in place, I said: This is the day our democracy picks itself up, brushes off the dust, and does what America always does: goes forward as one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Well we can't do that if anyone's vote is suppressed.

At a time when the right to vote is under attack and special interests and dark money are drowning out the voices of the American people, we need to take action.

Last November, in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of a public health crisis, nearly 160 million Americans voted – more people than ever before. In part because the methods of voting – specifically ways that we made it easier to vote – were extended in states across the country. That was an extraordinary thing.

That was progress. But what was the result? Well just since the beginning of this year, now over 300 bills have been introduced in state legislatures across the country in nearly every state, including my own home state of Minnesota, efforts have been made to suppress the vote. Efforts have been made to introduce bills that would suppress the vote. So, as Senator Warnock said in his maiden speech on the Senate floor last week, what's happening? "Some people don't want some people to vote." That's what's happening.

To take two examples: A dozen states, including Arizona, Georgia, and Pennsylvania, have introduced legislation to limit access to vote by mail, which is how 45 percent of voters cast their ballots in the last election. And 14 states have introduced legislation to make it easier to purge voters from the rolls.

At the same time, the huge sums of money spent on elections are drowning out the voices of voters. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, spending for the 2020 election cycle was approximately \$14 billion dollars – more than double the 2016 cycle. And dark money also continues to flood our elections, denying voters their ability to know who is trying to influence their vote.

These are real threats to our democracy and the For the People Act takes them head-on in a common sense way to return power to the people.

That is why the American people overwhelmingly support the provisions of this bill.

According to a Pew poll from last year, 65 percent of respondents said the option to vote early or absentee should be available to any voter. A poll from the Campaign Legal Center found that 83 percent of likely voters support public disclosure of contributions to organizations involved in elections. A recent Morning Consult poll found that 57 percent of voters support requiring states to establish non-partisan redistricting commissions.

These are not new ideas. Many of the provisions in this bill have already been adopted across the country in red, blue, and purple states and have the support of Republican and Democratic governors and election officials. They should be extended to all people in America.

21 states have same-day voter registration, including red states like Idaho, Wyoming, and Iowa. Kentucky's Republican Secretary of State just recently praised a bill that would make early in-person voting permanent. He called it the "most significant election-reform legislation in the past quarter-century."

20 states have automatic voter registration laws, including Alaska and Georgia. Even Ohio's Republican Secretary of State has called for automatic voter registration in his state.

45 states allowed all voters to vote by mail in the November election and 43 states have early voting. They should all have early voting.

What this bill does is to take the best of the best and simply puts in place minimum standards.

And I note, it's not just bipartisan support in the states: there are nine bipartisan bills that are part of the For the People Act, including the Honest Ads Act, a bill that Senator Graham and I have long tried to get passed along with Senator Warner, a member of this committee.

I am focused on having a productive discussion of what is in the bill before us and how we will address the real challenges our democracy is facing.

Based on what some of my colleagues say, I think I want to briefly respond ahead of time to that.

We may hear about voter fraud – despite the fact that experts have found that voter impersonation fraud is so rare that an American is more likely to be struck by lightning than to commit voter impersonation fraud.

We may hear about alleged problems with the 2020 election – despite the fact that in November the Trump administration’s Department of Homeland Security, along with state and local officials across the country, called the 2020 elections “the most secure in American history.”

We may hear about federal overreach – despite the fact that Article I, Section 4, of the U.S. Constitution empowers Congress to “make or alter,” those are the words of the Constitution, rules for federal elections “at any time.”

We may hear about alleged violations of the First Amendment – despite the fact that the Supreme Court has repeatedly held that disclaimer and disclosure requirements are constitutional, and that the Court has never held that there is a constitutional right to spend anonymously on elections.

And we may hear about taxpayer funding of campaigns – despite the fact that this bill includes a provision stating explicitly that no taxpayer money should be used to fund campaigns.

The subject of this hearing – the very health of our democracy – is simply too important to allow these types of misrepresentations go unaddressed.

At its core, the For the People Act is about three simple ideas: making voting easier, getting big money out of politics, and strengthening ethics rules. These are not radical proposals. These are ideas that nearly everyone in this country agrees with. And this bill, we can make them a reality and ensure that Americans have a democracy that works for them.

With that, I am honored to turn it over to Ranking Member Blunt. Thank you.

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