



U.S. Senate Committee on

RULES & ADMINISTRATION

U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar | Chairwoman

Rules Committee S.1 Markup Chairwoman Amy Klobuchar

Thank you. We have a quorum present so I call this meeting of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration to order, pursuant to the notice that was circulated last week, pursuant to the committee's rules, we are here today for the purpose of considering S.1., the For the People Act. I will begin by giving a brief opening statement, and I would like to thank Senator Blunt and our colleagues for being here.

Today we will mark up the bill, legislation that I am honored to lead, along with Senator Merkley and Leader Schumer, that has been cosponsored by every Democratic member of this Committee. At our organizing meeting in February, I said this bill would be the subject of our first legislative hearing, which we held in March, and we are here today to move this process forward.

The freedom to vote is fundamental to all of our freedoms. It is how Americans control their government and hold their elected officials accountable.

The For the People Act is about setting basic national standards to make sure all Americans can vote safely in the way that works best for them, regardless of what state or zip code they live in.

The For the People Act is about reducing the power of big money in our elections by ending secret spending by billionaires and special interests.

And the For the People Act is about making anti-corruption reforms to ensure all politicians work for the people, not for themselves.

The stakes could not be higher -- the freedom to vote is fundamental to our nation. It's the bedrock of the system of our government. It was the founding principle of our country, and it has stood the test of wars, economic strife, and a global pandemic.

We were reminded in a very visceral way on January 6th that it is up to us to protect against threats to our democracy, to ensure that our democracy succeeds. Our Committee is doing important work in the aftermath of that horrific day, including with the bipartisan report that we will release this month.

As we move forward, I can think of no more vital task than bolstering our democracy -- and this bill was introduced to do just that, by making sure our government works for the people.

What we've learned from the 2020 election is that you can simultaneously make elections fair and secure while giving voters options that work for them -- in fact the two go hand-in-hand. Many states took steps exactly like that, extending options for voters to vote by mail and vote early.

The result was that nearly 160 million Americans voted--more than ever before and in the middle of a pandemic. And in an election that the Trump Department of Homeland Security declared the most secure in our history, the American people cast their ballots in record numbers.

But in the wake of that historic election, when so many Americans cast their ballots in the middle of a pandemic, the effort to undermine the freedom to vote in future elections has been coordinated and overwhelming -- with over 360 bills introduced in 47 state legislatures this year to roll back voting rights.

Since our hearing in March, we've seen multiple states continue to move to infringe on the freedom to vote. In fact, Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution has prepared us to confront just such a scenario -- it says that Congress can "make or alter" rules for federal elections "at any time," a power the Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld as "broad" and "comprehensive."

Here's why this is so important: The very next day after our hearing, Georgia's infamous bill restricting voting by mail and making it illegal to bring food and water to voters waiting in long lines became law. Last week, Florida's governor signed legislation to limit access to drop boxes and make it harder to vote by mail. Another bill is now advancing in Texas -- and 38 bills to restrict voting have passed at least one chamber of a state legislature.

So these bills that are moving in state capitols across America are not empty threats -- they are real efforts to stop people from voting.

They would limit voting by mail, purge voters from rolls, restrict early voting, or all of the above, making it harder for millions of Americans to have their voices heard in our democracy.

At the same time, the secret money is flooding our elections, denying voters their right to know who is trying to influence their vote.

Spending for the 2020 election cycle was approximately \$14 billion - that's more than double the 2016 election cycle. And while more than 98 percent of Americans who made political contributions last year gave less than \$200, those who gave donations larger than that accounted for nearly three-quarters of all contributions made.

We need to take these threats to our democracy head on with immediate action to restore Americans' confidence in our political system. And that's exactly what the For the People Act does.

These are proposals that a majority of Americans agree with. And with this bill, we can get them done and ensure that Americans have a democracy that works for them.

One poll last month found that 78 percent of Americans, including 63 percent of Republicans, support making early in-person voting available for at least two weeks before Election Day. That's a Pew Poll, April 2021. Another found that 83 percent of likely voters support public disclosure of contributions to groups involved in elections. That's a Campaign Legal Center poll, November 2019.

Many of the bill's provisions have already been adopted in red, blue, and purple states, and have the support of governors and election officials from both parties. Importantly, the bill contains nine bipartisan bills -- including the Honest Ads Act, which I first introduced with Senator Warner, who's here today, as well as Senator McCain. Senator Lindsey Graham has now taken his place on that bill.

Other provisions - like the one to create a code of ethics for the Supreme Court - are based on bills introduced by Republicans alone. This bill was led by Congressman Darrell Issa.

At our hearing, we heard that states that haven't yet put reforms in place but they can do so quickly. We heard it from someone who did it herself, when Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson told us how Michigan successfully implemented many of these reforms during the pandemic leading up to the 2020 election.

We heard from Trevor Potter, a Republican former Chairman of the Federal Election Commission, about the need to limit the influence of money in politics. To my colleagues across the aisle, this is what he said: "This bill does not give power to any particular Party over another; it gives power back to the voters."

Since our hearing, we have worked to make the For the People Act even stronger -- and today I will introduce a manager's amendment that includes improvements to the bill based on the feedback we've heard.

The manager's amendment includes changes that respond directly to points raised by my Republican colleagues and their witnesses, including West Virginia Secretary of State Mac Warner. In fact it includes two amendments led by Republicans that were adopted in the House-passed bill -- one that Senator Warner has filed as a separate amendment as well.

The manager's amendment also incorporates input from state election officials from both parties. It will make it easier for states to implement these reforms, a concern we took seriously.

These reforms are things like giving states more time to provide same-day registration at polling places, while letting voters register same-day at central locations, providing flexibility for small jurisdictions, and shortening the window for accepting ballots after Election Day so states can certify the results.

I could go on, but the point is that we listened to people on both sides of the aisle and made changes based on those discussions. Now, I urge our Republican colleagues to recognize the work we've done and join us in supporting the manager's amendment.

Which brings us to the task at hand: We have a good bill with broadly popular provisions, but more than it being popular, it is the right thing to do.

In the face of these efforts to roll back voting rights in so many states, the bill is based on a simple idea -- that Americans must be able to freely choose their elected officials and government must be accountable to the people. This is not a Democratic or Republican idea -- it is a core American idea.

I look forward to marking up this bill and moving this process forward. With that, I now recognize Ranking Member Blunt for his opening statement. Thank you.