

Kanawha County Democratic Executive Committee

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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KANAWHA COUNTY DEMOCRATIC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE UNANIMOUSLY URGES MANCHIN TO SUPPORT TWO VOTING RIGHTS BILLS AND ALLOW THE SENATE TO VOTE ON THEM

The Kanawha County Democratic Executive Committee sent a letter which unanimously urged Senator Joe Manchin to support the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act. The Committee also urged Senator Manchin to support a filibuster carve out or any other measure which will ensure a vote on these measures will not be delayed or denied.

The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act responds to current conditions in voting today by restoring the full protections of the original, bipartisan Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was last reauthorized by Congress in 2006, when Republicans controlled the Presidency and both houses of Congress. It last passed with significant bipartisan support.

This Act provides the tools to address discriminatory voting practices and seeks to protect all Americans' right to vote. It has the following important provisions:

- It creates a new coverage formula that applies to all states and hinges on a finding of repeated voting rights violations in the preceding 25 years. Significantly, the 25-year period "rolls," or continuously moves, to keep up with "current conditions," so only states who have a recent record of racial discrimination in voting are covered. States with repeated and persistent violations will be covered for a period of 10 years, but if they establish a clean record moving forward, they can come out of coverage. This is an update from previous legislation.
- It establishes a targeted process for reviewing voting changes in jurisdictions nationwide, focused on measures historically used to discriminate against voters. The process for reviewing changes in voting is limited to a set of measures, such as the institution of a voter ID law or the reduction of multilingual voting materials – practices that have historically been found to have the greatest discriminatory impact.
- It allows a federal court to order states or jurisdictions to be covered for results-based violations, where the effect of a particular voting measure is to lead to racial discrimination in voting and to deny citizens their right to vote.
- It increases transparency by requiring reasonable public notice for voting changes.
- It gives the Attorney General authority to request federal observers be present anywhere in the country where there is a serious threat of racial discrimination in voting.
- It revises and tailors the preliminary injunction standard for voting rights actions to recognize there will be cases where there is a need for immediate preliminary relief.

In the past year, nineteen states have passed legislation which the independent Brennan Center for Justice has found will make it harder for Americans to vote. Incredibly, some state measures propose to prohibit giving out water or food to persons standing in long lines to vote, criminalize the work of election workers who are doing their statutory jobs by assisting voters, criminalize persons who assist voters with disabilities, and criminalize persons who encourage eligible voters to vote by mail. Further, these measures shorten the window to request or turn in an absentee ballot, reduce polling places by both location and hours, while at the same time increasing the number of voters per precinct. Long, discouraging lines of voters will result.

The 2020 federal election had the highest turnout in American history. After over sixty lawsuits and up to five post-election “audits,” few to no examples of voter fraud were found, and none were sufficient to change the outcome of any election. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act assures access to voting while protecting from fraudulent or criminal activity. It further encourages more, not fewer qualified voters to be engaged in our democracy.

The Committee applauds Senator Manchin’s efforts in crafting the bipartisan Freedom to Vote Act to ensure our voting rights are universally enforced and encouraged, regulating partisan gerrymandering and dark money, while preserving the right of states to enact laws which work for them within those standards. At a time when public faith in elections is at an all-time low, the Freedom to Vote Act helps restore confidence and uniformity in the voting process.

Senator Manchin’s common-sense legislation protects the right of voters by:

- Ending partisan gerrymandering used by both Democrats and Republicans, establishing *independent* redistricting commissions like those adopted in states like Arizona, Idaho, and Michigan.
- Establishing safe, common-sense voting protections, such as early voting and absentee voting, to help vulnerable populations – including veterans, seniors, and Native populations – participate in the democratic process.
- Modernizing the voter registration process and eliminating voter purging, so (for example) if you do not vote in a certain election, you will not be de-registered as a voter in your state.
- Helping states update voting equipment to properly administer elections, to ensure elections are safe, secure, and protected.

The Freedom to Vote Act also enacts long overdue campaign finance, ethics, and anti-corruption reforms by:

- Banning dark money in politics by requiring political groups to disclose their largest donors and improve transparency by disclosing where online ad spending is coming from.
- Elevating the voices of everyday voters, hardworking families, and Main Street small businesses by improving the process for small dollar donations and limiting the power of special interest spenders in places like Hollywood and Wall Street.
- Empowering the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to hold violators of American campaign laws accountable.
- Closing loopholes allowing foreign governments and agents to secretly influence U.S. politics.
- “Draining the swamp” by reducing the power of career lobbyists in Washington.

- Slowing down the revolving door between those who are lobbyists and those writing our laws in public service.
- Establishing stricter conflict-of-interest rules for Members of Congress and the White House.

These two pieces of legislation are too important to be denied debate and votes on passage by an intransigent group who will not negotiate and compromise.

The filibuster was designed to encourage debate, negotiation, and compromise. This was the vision of our late great Senator Robert Byrd when he urged the filibuster to be used to craft bipartisan legislation. Yet, Senator Byrd warned the filibuster should never be used as a tool for pure obstruction of legislation.

Unfortunately, we have seen time and again the filibuster is not being used for its well-intended purposes. Simply put, you can't play ball if the other team won't play. When the filibuster is being used to obstruct and not perfect legislation, it is time to either reform the rule, or establish carve outs for important pieces of legislation like voting rights.

We strongly urge Senator Manchin to remember these important pieces of legislation are important to the integrity of our election, and a legacy to our democracy. Senator Manchin's good faith efforts to craft a bipartisan compromise failed not because of his efforts, but because of the partisan and stubborn obstruction of others to gain political power at any cost. Democracy cannot be the cost of these efforts.

Therefore, the Kanawha County Democratic Executive Committee strongly urges Senator Manchin to work with leaders of both parties who may be willing to craft reforms which allow open, fair debate and votes on important pieces of legislation like the John Lewis Voting Rights Enhancement Act and Manchin's own Freedom to Vote Act. These issues are too important to die on the irrational whims of partisan leaders.

It has been said actions have consequences. Inaction also has consequences. Inaction on these two important initiatives will have grave consequences for voters, voting rights, and democracy itself.

The majority of West Virginians support these proposals. It is time for Senator Manchin to reflect the values and support of his fellow citizens and do whatever is necessary to bring these important bills to a vote.

We know West Virginia has good election laws, but Senator Manchin's bill plus the John Lewis Voting Rights Enforcement Act will safeguard our democracy for the entire country.