



March 24, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Klobuchar and Ranking Member Blunt:

Thank you for holding today's important hearing on the For the People Act (S. 1). Attached is a letter signed by over 300 members and partners of the Declaration for American Democracy coalition in support of this critical legislation, representing tens of millions of Americans. This transformational democracy reform package would give power to everyday American families and amplify the voices of communities that have historically been marginalized in our democracy.

For far too long, special interests, wealthy donors, and vote suppressors have dominated our politics and attempted to silence the voices of everyday Americans, especially in Black and Brown communities. The For the People Act would help shift power away from bad actors and transfer it to "we the people."

The 2020 election has underscored the urgent need for transformational democracy reform. Across the nation, Americans experienced unprecedented voter suppression, historic levels of dark money spent to drown out the voices of everyday Americans, and rampant ethical abuses. The For the People Act addresses many of these problems in a comprehensive way.

Common-sense reforms in the For the People Act, most of which are deeply popular across the political spectrum and have passed in many states and localities, aim to accomplish three overarching goals: (1) protecting and strengthening the sacred right to vote, (2) ending

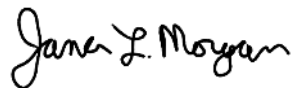
the dominance of big money in politics, and (3) implementing anti-corruption, pro-ethics measures to clean up government.

In addition to this letter of support, please also find attached a report authored by the Declaration for American Democracy, [Fixing Our Broken Democracy](#), that describes in greater detail how the reforms in the For the People Act would pave the way for actions on issues voters care about.

Many of the critical issues that our nation faces -- ensuring quality, affordable health care, creating good paying jobs, combating climate change, and achieving racial justice, to name just a few -- cannot be fully solved until we fix our broken democracy.

We therefore urge you to support and work to pass the For the People Act early in the 117th Congress to restore public faith in our democracy and ensure every voice can be heard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jana L. Morgan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jana Morgan

Director

Declaration for American Democracy



March 24, 2021

RE: More than 300 Groups urge support for the For the People Act (H.R. 1/S. 1)

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the below organizations representing tens of millions of Americans, we write in strong support of H.R. 1/S. 1, the For the People Act. This transformational democracy reform package would help return power to everyday American families and amplify the voices of communities that have historically been marginalized in our democracy.

For far too long, special interests, wealthy donors, and vote suppressors have dominated our politics and attempted to silence the voices of everyday Americans, especially in Black and Brown communities. The For the People Act would help shift power away from bad actors and transfer it to “we the people.”

The 2020 election has underscored the urgent need for transformational democracy reform. Across the nation, Americans experienced unprecedented voter suppression, historic levels of dark money spent to drown out the voices of everyday Americans, and rampant ethical abuses. One bill, the For the People Act, addresses many of these problems. Therefore, we are urging Congress to make this pro-voter, anti-corruption legislation a first priority in the 117th Congress.

Common-sense reforms in the For the People Act, most of which are deeply popular across the political spectrum and have passed in many states and localities, aim to accomplish three overarching goals: (1) protecting and strengthening the sacred right to vote, (2) ending the dominance of big money in politics, and (3) implementing anti-corruption, pro-ethics measures to clean up government.

Many of the critical issues that our nation faces -- ensuring quality, affordable health care, creating good paying jobs, combating climate change, and achieving racial justice, to name just a few -- cannot be fully solved until we fix our broken democracy. Wealthy special interests have too strong of a grip on the status quo, and we need to first unlock this stranglehold that they have on our political system.

We therefore urge you to support and vote for H.R. 1/S. 1, the For the People Act, early in the 117th Congress to help put the people back in charge of our democracy.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Declaration for American Democracy
20/20 Vision
603 Forward
Advancement Project National Office
African American Christian Clergy Coalition
African American Ministers In Action
All On The Line
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
American Friends Service Committee
American Promise
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Americans for Financial Reform
Americans for Tax Fairness
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Beyond the Bomb
Blue Future
Blue Wave Postcard Movement
BOLD ReThink
Brave New Films
Brennan Center for Justice
CASA
Center for American Progress
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Media and Democracy
Center for Popular Democracy
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Clean Water Action
Climate Law & Policy Project
Climate Reality Project
Coalition for Open Democracy
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence
Common Cause
Common Power
Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Decode Democracy
Defend Democracy
DemCast USA
Democracy 21
Democracy Initiative

Democracy Matters
Democratic Policy Center
Demos
Earthjustice
Earthworks
End Citizens United / Let America Vote Action Fund
Endangered Species Coalition
Equal Citizens
Fair Fight Action
Faith in Public Life
Faithful America
Field Team 6
Franciscan Action Network
Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart
Free Speech For People
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Friends of the Earth
Fuerte Arts Movement
Government Accountability Project
GreenLatinos
Greenpeace USA
Herd on the Hill
Hispanic Access Foundation
Hispanic Federation
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC
Indivisible
Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center
International Corporate Accountability Roundtable (ICAR)
Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office
Ladies Who Launch
Lawyers for Good Government (L4GG)
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
League of Conservation Voters
League of Women Voters of the United States
Main Street Alliance
March for Our Lives
Maryknoll Sisters
Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque
Mi Familia Vota
Moms Demand Action
MomsRising
Monadnock United
MoveOn
MPower 360
NARAL Pro-Choice America

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Social Workers
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC)
National Council of Gray Panthers Networks
National Council of Jewish Women
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National Rural Social Work Caucus
National Wildlife Federation Action Fund
Natural Resources Defense Council
Network for Responsible Public Policy
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New American Leaders/New American Leaders Action Fund
Oil Change U.S.
Open Democracy Action
Open The Government
Oxfam America
Pax Christi USA
People Demanding Action
People For the American Way
People's Action
Poligon Education Fund
Population Connection
Pride at Work
Progressive Democrats of America
Progressive Turnout Project
Project On Government Oversight (POGO)
Protect Democracy
Protect Our Commonwealth
Public Citizen
Public Wise
Publish What You Pay-US
Reclaim Our Democracy
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary
RISE for Youth
Rock the Vote
Rooted in Resistance
Secure Elections Network
Secure Our Vote
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sierra Club
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Sisters, Home Visitors of Mary
Small Planet Institute
Stand for Children
Stand Up America
The Kent Street Coalition

The Loyal Opposition
The Workers Circle
Transparency International U.S. Office
Union of Concerned Scientists
Un-PAC
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union
UnKoch My Campus
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Voices for Progress
Vote.org
Voters Not Politicians
Woman's National Democratic Club
Writers for Democratic Action
Young Women for US

State and Local Organizations

350 New Hampshire
Activate Virginia
Adorers of the Blood of Christ, US Region
Alabama Justice Initiative
Alliance of Baptists
Arizona Advocacy Network
Arlington Young Democrats
Bethlehem NY Indivisible
Black Lives Matter Brooklyn
Catholic Committee of Appalachia
Chispa Arizona
Chispa Nevada
Clean Elections Texas
Cloverdale Indivisible
Code Blue Washington
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Congregation of St. Joseph Peace and Justice Team
Courage California
DC Vote
Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids
Dominican Sisters of Houston
Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose
Dominican Sisters of San Rafael
Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa Peace and Justice Office
Dominicans Sisters of Sinsinawa Office of Peace and Justice
Equality California
Fix Democracy First
Freedom North Shore

Greater Andover Indivisible
Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart
Henrico County Democratic Committee
Hispanic Democrats of Westchester
Hope Community Center
Hunter Mill Huddle
Indivisible Hawaii
Indivisible Acton Area (MA)
Indivisible Arcata
Indivisible Beach Cities
Indivisible Below the Beltway
Indivisible California Green Team
Indivisible California Statewide
Indivisible Charlottesville
Indivisible Chicago Alliance
Indivisible Clackamas District 5
Indivisible Fortuna
Indivisible Georgia Coalition
Indivisible Houston
Indivisible Lumpkin
Indivisible Marin
Indivisible Massachusetts Coalition
Indivisible Media City Burbank
Indivisible Napa
Indivisible New Hampshire
Indivisible New Rochelle
Indivisible Nob Hill
Indivisible Normal Heights
Indivisible Northern Nevada
Indivisible Outer Cape
Indivisible Ross Valley
Indivisible San Francisco
Indivisible San Jose
Indivisible Scarsdale
Indivisible Sonoma County
Indivisible We Rise - West Central PA
Indivisible Westchester Districts 6&7
Indivisible White Plains
Indivisible White Plains
Indivisible Windsor
Indivisible Yolo
Indivisible Yorktown, NY
Indivisible Scarsdale
JPIC Committee of USA/Haiti Province of Religious of Jesus and Mary
Knock for Democracy
Lake Oconee Community Church

Leadership Team of Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods
Living United for Change in Arizona (LUCHA)
Madison County Democratic Committee
Maine AFL-CIO
Maine Citizens for Clean Elections
Maine Conservation Voters
Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition
Maine Women's Lobby
Mainers for Accountable Leadership
Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network (MUUSJN)
Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action
Missouri Voter Protection Coalition
National Association of Social Workers West Virginia Chapter
National Council of Jewish Women Arizona
Nebraska Civic Engagement Table
Necessary Trouble Indivisible
Network NOVA
New Hampshire Independent Voters
New Hampshire Voters Restoring Democracy
New Hampshire Youth Movement
Newtown Action Alliance
NH Ranked Choice Voting
NH Sierra Club
North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections
North Shore Indivisible
NYCD16-Indivisible
Occupy Bergen County (New Jersey)
Ohio Voter Rights Coalition
Our Future West Virginia
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Persist Fairfax
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Arizona
Progress Arizona
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada
Progressive Women of Pelham
Putnam Progressives
RepresentUs New Mexico
RepresentUS Virginia - The Clean Money Squad
Rise Up WV
Rural Arizona Action
School Sisters of Notre Dame - Central Pacific Province
Sierra Club - Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter
Silver State Equality-Nevada
Sisters of Bon Secours, USA
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur USA
Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, PA

Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, NY
Sisters of St. Francis - Sylvania, OH
Sisters of St. Joseph Brentwood NY Justice Committee
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, LA Province
Sisters of the Humility of Mary
Society of the Sacred Heart United States Canada Province
SURJ Marin - Showing Up for Racial Justice
SW Poor People's Campaign
Texas Progressive Action Network
Together We Will/Indivisible-Los Gatos
Tree of Life United Church of Christ
Union of Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington Virginia
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax UU the Vote Team
Unitarian Universalist Delaware Advocacy Network
Unitarian Universalist Justice Florida
Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry of North Carolina
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Virginia
Venice Resistance
Virginia Coalition of Human Rights
Virginia Democracy Forward (VADF)
Virginia Justice Democrats
Virginia Political Cooperative
West Virginia Environmental Council
West Virginia Poor People's Campaign
Westchester Citizen Therapists Indivisible
Westchester for Change
Westchester United
Wheaton Franciscans JPIC Office
Winchester Frederick County Democratic Committee
Wisconsin Democracy Campaign
Wolf-PAC Virginia
Women's March West Virginia
WV Citizen Action Group
WV Citizens for Clean Elections
WV Working Families Party

FIXING OUR BROKEN DEMOCRACY

How the *For the People Act* Would Pave the Way for
Progress on the Priorities Voters Care About

March 9, 2020



DECLARATION FOR
AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Acknowledgments

The Declaration for American Democracy would like to thank the following coalition members for their work in crafting these issue briefs:

- Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
- Democracy Initiative
- End Citizens United
- League of Conservation Voters
- Living United for Change in Arizona (LUCHA)
- National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
- National Security Action
- NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
- Sierra Club
- Take on Wall Street
- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
- Union of Concerned Scientists

The Declaration for American Democracy also thanks the following coalition members for their support in editing these briefings:

- Common Cause
- CWA
- Public Citizen
- SEIU

There Is Hope for Change:

How to Fix Our Broken Democracy

Our democracy is in crisis. Each day brings more news of corruption, graft, and shocking lawlessness at the highest levels of our government. Basic transparency and routine oversight are stymied at every turn. Corporations and wealthy interests pay top dollar, often anonymously, to influence elections and lobby officials, drowning out the voices of everyday voters. Instead of taking steps to secure our elections, the President of the United States is inviting - demanding, even - that foreign governments interfere in the 2020 election. Americans are feeling, with good reason, that our democracy is broken.

Seeing that our democracy was in desperate need of change, the [Declaration for American Democracy](#), an unprecedented coalition of more than 145 organizations including democracy, environmental, faith, labor, good government, civil rights, and other groups, is calling for action on a comprehensive and transformational package of democracy reforms.

On March 8, 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives answered this call by passing the *For the People Act* (H.R.1), a once-in-a-generation democracy reform package to clean up Washington and restore Americans' faith in our democracy.

The [For the People Act](#) contains three main pillars:

- **Ensuring all Americans can have their voices heard by reforming our voting and election laws** by strengthening election security, ending partisan gerrymandering, and enacting automatic voter registration;
- **Getting big money out of politics** by creating a new small-donor matching funds system for federal candidates, requiring super PACs and “dark money” political organizations to make their donors public, and strengthening oversight rules to ensure those who break our campaign finance laws are held accountable; and
- **Ending corruption and holding public officials accountable** by expanding conflict-of-interest laws, banning members of Congress from serving on corporate boards, and requiring major party presidential candidates to publicly disclose their tax returns.

This historic bill passed the House, and was introduced in the Senate (S.949), with the unanimous backing of the Democratic caucus, an almost unheard of accomplishment for legislation of this magnitude. Amongst the public, there is bipartisan consensus

that our democracy is in danger, and [82% of Americans](#) want these kinds of reforms to return power to the people. However, for the past year, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has been holding the *For the People Act* hostage in the Senate, vowing never to bring it up for a vote.

Over the past year, while the Senate has failed to advance the *For the People Act*, **progress on the issues that matter most to Americans has stalled**. In this series of issue briefs, we examine important issues that are at the top of voters' minds and outline how and why lawmakers are failing to take those views into account.

If Americans are ever going to see progress on the issues they care about, we must have a democracy that responds to the needs and priorities of voters - not wealthy donors and corporate interests.

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Health Care and the *For the People Act*

More than [27 million Americans are uninsured](#), and those who have insurance are tired of the ever-increasing cost of deductibles, copays, and surprise bills. [Half a million](#) people go bankrupt every year because of high medical bills, while countless others skip taking life saving medications because they can't afford them. People want and deserve a solution to the broken health care system. But in the year since the *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949) passed the House, we have continued to see the interests of pharmaceutical and insurance companies overshadow the needs of voters in America.

What Americans Want:

Americans want Congress to prioritize health care policy, with [70%](#) saying that lowering prescription drug costs should be a top priority. Three in ten people say they haven't taken their medicine as prescribed [due to high costs](#). Eighty-seven percent of African-Americans surveyed by AARP say they are [concerned about being able to afford](#) prescription medications for themselves or their family in the next few years.

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

The prescription drug lobby has spent over [\\$3.7 billion](#) on lobbying efforts in the past 20 years, which is \$1 billion more than any other industry. The money that Big Pharma has infused into politics has [allowed its influence to undermine](#) the needs of ordinary Americans, and this has slowed reform efforts. Rather than prioritizing the development of drugs that maximize monopolies and corporate profits, politicians should listen to the voters who elected them and who have made it clear that we need to lower the cost of prescription drugs now.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

In the year since passage of the *For the People Act*, 10 bills to lower health care and drug prices have passed the U.S. House of Representatives. Many of these proposals are stalled in the Senate, with no indication that Big Pharma's political or financial influence will let up any time soon. For example, in December 2019, the House passed the *Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act* (H.R.3), which would give the government the authority to negotiate drug prices and protect the Medicare program from excessive price increases, among other critical reforms that would help patients. The Senate has refused to take up this bill. This influence extends to the House of Representatives as well; only five House Republicans voted for the *Strengthening Health Care and Lowering Prescription Drug Costs Act* (H.R.987), which would bring generic drugs to the market more quickly - a reform that nearly 88% of Americans support.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

The reforms in the *For the People Act* would strengthen every eligible voter's voice and create a democracy that requires officeholders to respond to voters, not corporate interests like the pharmaceutical and health insurance industries. The bill would establish a small-donor matching system for congressional candidates who demonstrate broad support and reject high-dollar contributions - allowing everyday Americans to have a stronger voice over their representatives in Congress. This bill would give power back to the people, making sure that politicians respond to the concerns of voters about the affordability of healthcare and prescription drugs.

Racial Justice, Voting Rights and the *For the People Act*

[Deliberate](#) and [successful](#) attempts to create barriers to the ballot box date back to the founding of our nation, and the struggle to meaningfully expand the right to vote has been a hallmark of the civil rights movement. Voters across the political spectrum want to enact voting rights [reforms](#), but some elected officials are still working to silence people who have historically been denied their right to vote.

What Americans Want:

- Two-thirds of Americans, including 58% of Republicans, [believe](#) that too few Americans voting is a major problem. Similarly, two-thirds of Americans [believe](#) “everything possible should be done to make it easy for every citizen to vote.”
- Significant majorities in both parties [support](#) the restoration of voting rights to people who complete felony sentences, and a ballot measure to that effect in Florida [passed overwhelmingly](#) in 2018.
- Automatic voter registration has the [support](#) of nearly two-thirds of Americans and outperformed other proposals at the ballot box in [Michigan](#) and [Nevada](#) in 2018.
- 70% of voters believe the U.S. Supreme Court should place limits on [gerrymandering](#).

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

In the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, five justices on the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated key provisions of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) that for decades protected voters in states with histories of pernicious voting discrimination. This [gave state lawmakers](#) license to suppress the vote of communities of color without significant risk of legal challenges, because the Justice Department has [refused](#) to enforce the VRA. Voter suppression laws often deliberately and disproportionately [target](#) people of color and people who are low-income. In 2019, the House [passed](#) the Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4) to [restore the Voting Rights Act](#), but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has refused to bring the bipartisan Senate bill to a vote.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

Between 2017 and 2018 [1,688 polling places](#) in areas that had previously been protected due to a history of discriminatory voter suppression were closed. Meanwhile, other forms of voter suppression continue to run rampant. Lengthy court battles over voter purges in [Wisconsin](#) and [Georgia](#) have left voters unaware of their registration status. Extreme partisan [gerrymandering](#) has weakened voters’ ability to pick their representatives. The practice of felony disenfranchisement, paired with the over-criminalization of communities of color in our justice system, leads to disparities in voter access: [one in every thirteen](#) voting-age African Americans cannot vote.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

The *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949) directly [addresses](#) many of the shortcomings voters see in our elections system by establishing automatic voter registration across the country, fully restoring rights to people who have completed felony sentences and enhancing access to the ballot through early and absentee voting. The bill [also has provisions](#) to increase election security and fight partisan gerrymandering, which would strengthen our democracy.

The Environment and the *For the People Act*

For at least the past decade, it has been abundantly clear that the people responsible for polluting our air, our water, and resisting efforts to combat climate change also are responsible for polluting our democracy with hundreds of millions of dollars to influence policy-makers.

What Americans Want:

The vast majority of Americans (73%) [acknowledge the reality of climate change](#) and want the government to take action to mitigate its impacts. Furthermore, more than half of the people in this country think they and/or people in their community (57%) will be harmed by climate change.

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

Despite the public's steadily increasing concern for our air, water and climate, this growing alarm has been muffled by lavish spending by Big Oil, Gas and Coal in Washington, D.C. Since 2010, extractive companies have given over [\\$600 million in political contributions](#). This spending has a direct effect on legislating - a [recent study](#) showed that the more a member of Congress voted against environmental protections, the more campaign contributions they received from oil and gas companies.

Many of the people most likely to be impacted by climate change also face corporate and government efforts to silence their voices. Low-income communities and communities of color in particular are on the front lines of environmental injustice, which leaves millions to suffer from the effects of unsafe drinking water, harmful air pollution, insufficient access to public lands, and the present and growing threats of climate change.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

In the last year, the *Climate Action Now Act* (H.R.9), and multiple bills preventing offshore drilling across the country, have passed in the House but died in the Senate because of the influence of fossil fuel companies and their lobbyists. Simultaneously, the Trump administration, which is filled with former oil and gas industry lobbyists, has initiated an unprecedented rollback of critical environmental policies, leading to more pollution of our air and water.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

Climate change deniers in the Senate and Trump administration are emboldened to continue these attacks on our environment due to the influence of corporate spending from the fossil fuel industry. We must advance our democracy so that it is responsive to 21st century issues and to the people who are harmed by environmental rollbacks. Fortunately, the *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949) puts necessary [rules of disclosure](#) on donations, preventing the fossil fuel industry from buying votes and elections in secret.

In the democracy we seek, everyone in this country has equitable access to our government and to decision-making processes. Democracy means a government of, by, and for the people. All people.

Fighting for a Living Wage and the *For the People Act*

In every community across our country, people are working hard for their families. But millions of black, brown, and white working people feel they are left out, left behind, and denied a voice in our democracy. Many see a government that responds to the financial demands of corporations and the wealthy but neglects the basic needs of working families.

What Americans Want:

Most Americans support raising the federal minimum wage to \$15/hour; in a 2019 Pew survey, approximately 67% of respondents indicated they supported such a change, and 41% of respondents said they strongly supported it. Dozens of [states and localities](#) have already taken this step for minimum wage earners, many via popular vote measures like ballot initiatives. Americans also support [requiring](#) paid family and medical leave.

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

Those opposed to raising the minimum wage have [flooded the system](#) with money, influencing policymakers and their priorities. This has continued even though [some evidence indicates](#) that *individuals* in the business community - as opposed to influential industry trade associations - also support raising the minimum wage. Congress has not increased the federal minimum wage in a decade even while many lawmakers agree that \$7.25/hour is not enough to raise a family and pay for housing, utilities, health care, and the other costs of living.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

Workers are earning [\\$6,800 less per year](#) to spend on food, rent, and other essentials than hard working Americans did 50 years ago, while the costs of these expenses continue to rise. The *Raise the Wage Act* (H.R.582) would increase the federal minimum wage to \$15/hour by 2025. It passed the House on a bipartisan basis in summer 2019 and is blocked in the Senate by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

Blunting the effect of political spending would create space for lawmakers to respond to the commonsense views of their constituents, allowing broadly popular provisions like the *Raise the Wage Act* to receive a vote. Provisions of the *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949) like those that [increase disclosure](#) of campaign spending and [reinvigorate](#) small donor matching fund systems offset the secret influence of money in politics.

Gun Safety and the *For the People Act*

Nearly 40,000 people [died from guns](#) in the U.S. in 2018. Gun violence is tearing our communities apart, and a record number of Americans want their leaders to act, but the power of gun manufacturers and the National Rifle Association (NRA) is blocking real action in Congress to address this crisis.

What Americans Want:

Eighty-five percent of Americans - including 80% of Republicans - [are concerned about gun violence in this country](#). More than [nine in 10 Americans want](#) universal background checks for gun purchases, and strong majorities of Americans across the political spectrum support other policies like [extreme risk laws](#) (which allow judges to temporarily remove guns from a person deemed a risk to themselves or others), a [ban on people convicted of violent crimes](#) from purchasing guns, and a mandatory three-day waiting period for gun purchases.

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

- From 1998 to 2017, the NRA contributed \$144.3 million to political candidates [in “outside spending,”](#) also known as independent expenditures. It spent a record sum in 2016 - \$54 million - to help elect Donald Trump.
- The gun industry has backed up this big spending with an army of lobbyists. Gun groups have spent \$85 million [on lobbying the federal government since](#) 2013, opposing both common sense proposals to reduce gun violence and policies to improve campaign finance disclosure.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

On February 27, 2019, the House passed the *Bipartisan Background Checks Act* (H.R.8), which would expand FBI background checks of prospective gun buyers to include transactions on the internet and between private parties at venues, including gun shows and parking lots. One year after its passage, that bill is still waiting for a vote in the Senate. Even though over 90% of Americans support expanded background checks, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has refused to allow a vote on the bill and has placed it in what he proudly calls his “legislative graveyard.”

When it comes to gun violence, that phrase is all too real. Every day Americans are being shot and killed while too many in Washington do nothing.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

The *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949) would empower everyday people to have a voice in our politics and reduce the power lobbyists and special interests have over the policymaking process in Washington. When we [end the dominance of big money](#) and make it [easier to vote](#), we can ensure the overwhelming majority of Americans who demand action on gun violence can't be silenced by the NRA's big money political spending.

National Security and the *For the People Act*

The events of recent years, including Moscow's previous and reportedly ongoing efforts to interfere in our democratic processes, have only underscored that our democratic shortcomings at home have the potential to reverberate on our national security. There is no better case in point than the ability - in part because of legislative loopholes - of foreign actors to meddle in our elections.

What Americans Want:

The U.S. Intelligence Community - as well as former Special Counsel Robert Mueller - has determined that Moscow undertook a "sweeping and systematic" effort to undermine our 2016 election. Reportedly, Russia is in the midst of a similar campaign aimed at interfering in the 2020 election. Americans have recognized the threat. [According to a recent NPR poll](#), 41% of Americans say that the U.S. is not very or not at all prepared to keep the 2020 elections safe and secure; further, 38% say that President Trump has done nothing to make sure there is no foreign interference this year.

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

- In July 2019, a bipartisan Senate report [concluded](#) that Russia targeted election systems in all 50 states. That same day, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell [blocked](#) two bills intended to safeguard American elections from foreign interference.
- In September 2019, in the face of months of pressure, Trump and McConnell caved and allowed for additional funding to secure our elections. But the package [fell](#) well short of what experts project is necessary and [failed](#) to include important accountability measures included in the House version of the legislation.
- As of late last year, nine election security bills — four with bipartisan support — [sat](#) on McConnell's desk waiting to be brought to the Senate floor.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

If our electoral processes cannot be secured, our national security is at risk. The chair of the Federal Election Commission [warned](#) of the dangers of dark money, saying that "political money can be weaponized by well-funded hostile powers."

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

One of the bills languishing on McConnell's desk is the *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949). Among the legislation's many important provisions is the requirement that the federal government not only [prioritize the protection of our election infrastructure](#) but also strive to [block the pathways foreign actors have used](#) to inject their voices and dark money into our elections.

Safeguarding the integrity of our elections is a challenging task, especially given the determination of Russia and other foreign adversaries to have their say. Nevertheless, there are several immediate, commonsense steps that experts have urged us to take, many of which are codified within the *For the People Act*. Protecting our electoral processes must be a bipartisan effort, which is why it is well past time for McConnell and Senate Republicans to do their part.

Poverty and the *For the People Act*

More than 43 million Americans are officially poor, and millions more live just above the poverty line in a state of material hardship. Poverty has a significant impact on health care, education, criminal justice, and other social realms and policy domains. The ways our democratic systems are broken limit how low-income Americans can participate in elections and shape federal policies to reduce poverty.

What Americans Want:

In 2016, [over half](#) of respondents to a Pew poll said that dealing with the problems of the poor should be a top priority for the President and Congress; an additional one-third said it should be an important priority. In 2015, only [16% of Americans](#) were satisfied with the work the federal government does to address poverty, a low in a 15-year Gallup study.

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

The vast majority of people living in poverty are the working poor. Their jobs have few protections or benefits, they cannot risk losing them, and they have no control over their schedules. Any minor barrier to voting can easily prevent participation on Election Day. Election administrators in some of the poorest states are deliberately adopting rules and requirements that make it harder for the working poor to cast their ballot.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's disastrous 2010 *Citizens United v. FEC* ruling, there has been a flood of unlimited spending in elections by the wealthy and corporate donors. The spending has given them special access to elected officials and enabled them to influence and drive policy priorities. The concerns of corporations and the richest Americans are very different from the interests of the working poor; lawmakers dependent on large donors do not prioritize poverty reduction.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

When congressional Republicans were negotiating their 2017 tax bill, wealthy donors and corporate interests [told the GOP to pass the bill they wanted or lose campaign funding](#). The tax bill gave 83% of the tax savings to the wealthiest top 1% of Americans and billions to corporations, especially big banks. The law failed to meaningfully expand known poverty-reducing credits for the lowest-earners among the working poor, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit. The bill eliminated critical tax revenue that could otherwise be used to address poverty and economic inequality.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

The *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949) makes it easier to register to vote and cast one's ballot. For example, a provision requiring states to allow [same-day voter registration](#) would help ensure that logistical barriers would not preclude poor workers from voting. Provisions like those that [increase disclosure](#) of campaign spending would offset the secret influence of money in politics and create a space for meaningful participation by low-income individuals and anti-poverty advocates to influence policymakers.

LGBTQ Americans and the *For the People Act*

The Trump administration has aggressively sought to roll back LGBTQ progress, erect barriers, and gut existing legal protections that took many decades to achieve. As with other marginalized communities, the right to be counted, to have a voice, and to have a seat at the governing table is fundamental to effectively fighting back against anti-LGBTQ bias, discrimination, and erasure.

What Americans Want:

Virtually all Americans (93%) [support](#) LGBTQ persons having equal access to employment opportunities, and a majority (53%) [believe](#) new civil rights laws are needed to provide protections for the LGBTQ community. Employment discrimination significantly contributes to [higher rates of poverty and economic insecurity](#) among LGBTQ Americans – more than [half the population](#) live in states that still do not prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

Voter suppression tactics such as strict ID requirements are especially problematic for transgender and gender nonconforming Americans. Many states don't permit transgender people to get an identification card that matches their correct gender unless they can prove they have had costly gender-related surgery, which is undesired or out of reach for many in the LGBTQ community. These requirements can prove daunting - even insurmountable - for members of the transgender community.

Voting restrictions on returning citizens also place an undue burden on LGBTQ Americans. Of the [6.1 million people](#) who are barred from voting due to a previous felony conviction, LGBTQ people, especially black and brown trans and gender nonbinary people, are overrepresented.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

Civil rights bills that would improve the lives of LGBTQ people have been blocked, including the bipartisan [Equality Act](#) (H.R.5), which would give explicit federal nondiscrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity in housing, education, employment, public accommodations and other areas. The bipartisan bill was passed in the House, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has blocked it in the Senate. Other bills, like the *Raise the Wage Act* (H.R.582), which would increase the federal minimum wage and reduce poverty among LGBTQ Americans, passed the House in July 2019, but the Senate has not acted.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

The LGBTQ community has a lot at stake and needs representation in government. The *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949) would make it easier for this community, with a large at-risk population, to vote by [prohibiting states from purging voter rolls](#) based on nonparticipation in previous elections, a practice that places an undue burden on transgender individuals. The *For the People Act* also includes [provisions](#) that would restore voting rights to individuals with prior felony convictions. Restoring those rights would increase access to a functional and inclusive democracy and allow more LGBTQ voices to be heard in the push to end anti-LGBTQ bias, discrimination, and erasure.

Reining in Wall Street and the *For the People Act*

The size of the financial industry as a share of the overall economy has more than tripled since World War II. Wall Street, with an assist from Washington, finds a way to extract profit from every facet of our lives: our housing, health, education, and even our water. We need a financial system that works for black, brown and white working people, not the big Wall Street banks.

What Americans Want:

Voters of all persuasions have [consistently](#) demonstrated support for breaking up big banks and reining in Wall Street. Perhaps most telling is a 2018 poll by the [Koch network](#), which surveyed 1,000 adults and found that 69% of them supported “more regulation of Wall Street.”

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

Some of the most problematic elements of the financial industry would not exist without a political system in which the industry writes its own rules. For example, a major source of income for private equity firms’ is the “leveraged buyout”: investors buy a company and pin the debt for the purchase on the purchased company. Then if the company goes bankrupt, the private equity firm isn’t legally responsible, it doesn’t owe any severance to the workers who are laid off, and it can walk away with millions. Before the private equity firms KKR, Bain, and Vornado bankrupted Toys ‘R’ Us, they collected [\\$470 million](#) in fees and interest.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

As efforts to regulate various elements of the financial industry have ramped up, so too has the industry’s use of political money to influence those regulations. For example, the private equity industry’s campaign spending increased [by a factor of seven](#) from the 2010 to 2018 election cycles. While some in Congress have [investigated](#) abusive practices by these companies, legislation to address these abuses has not moved.

Another example of financial industry abuse is predatory lenders, who target communities of color and military bases with interest rates as high as 300%. A bipartisan bill to establish a 36% interest rate cap and put the most egregious payday lenders out of business has achieved overwhelming popular support from voters across the political spectrum - faith groups, veterans, consumer groups, Republicans and Democrats. Yet the House is having difficulty advancing the bill, in no small part due to [significant](#) campaign contributions from payday lenders.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

The *For the People Act*’s (H.R.1/S.949) [small donor empowerment provisions](#) would greatly reduce the financial industry’s ability to use money to influence legislators. Certain congressional committees are known for being ‘money raising’ committees where both parties are able to raise campaign money from big banks, payday lenders, and other financial companies in exchange for tailor-made legislation that makes the financial industry billions and makes the economy more precarious for the rest of us. If the finance industry’s ability to purchase laws or protection from laws was greatly reduced, the financial system would be less rigged in favor of Wall Street over Main Street.

Science and the *For the People Act*

Strong ethics rules ensure that our officials make decisions in the public interest based on evidence, not the influence of special interests. Heads of federal science agencies, for example, must be free to carry out the missions of those agencies, not pressured to do the bidding of the industry they are meant to regulate.

What Americans Want:

According to a recent [Pew poll](#), Americans broadly trust scientists to act in the public interest, and a majority of Americans agree that “scientists should play an active role in policy debates about scientific issues.” Meanwhile, Washington corruption is one of the top concerns of voters, according to polling by the [Wall Street Journal/NBC](#) and [Fox News](#). Americans of all backgrounds [agree](#) that the government’s role should be to work for the benefit of all, not just those at the top.

How Our Democracy Is Failing:

According to the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#), President Trump has named more former lobbyists to Cabinet-level positions in less than three years than Presidents Obama or George W. Bush did in eight years. Those officials, including [David Bernhardt](#) at the Department of the Interior (DOI), [Andrew Wheeler](#) at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and [Eugene Scalia](#) at the Department of Labor, among others, have paid little heed to conflicts of interest across their respective agencies.

For example, former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke were steeped in ethics scandals during their tenures. In [several instances](#), they used their positions to give favors to their oil and gas industry connections and weakened public health and environmental protections that were inconvenient for regulated industries.

How These Failures Harm Americans:

The Interior Department is pushing ahead with a controversial proposal that would prohibit the agency from considering scientific studies that don’t make all of their underlying data public, even though a great deal of data retain confidential respondent information. A similar rule was proposed to curb the authority of EPA’s independent board of science advisers. These advisers, many of whom were appointed by Trump, have condemned the agency for ignoring important research and the panel’s own advice as the EPA continues rolling back key safeguards.

How the Reforms in the *For the People Act* Would Help:

The *For the People Act* (H.R.1/S.949) would curb abuses by government officials and address conflicts of interest. For example, [the bill](#) would ensure that senior political officials who are former lobbyists do not work on matters they previously lobbied on once they are in government for two years after they take office, and that any senior political official who leaves government does not lobby his or her former colleagues after leaving office. They also would be required to disclose contributions or solicitations made by or on behalf of the entities they regulate. These individuals and their families would also have to disclose certain types of gifts. Together, these reforms would ensure more transparent governance and oversight, and reduce the risk of science being sidelined to the advantage of powerful interests.

Special Focus: The Census and the *For the People Act*

Every 10 years, the government initiates the census process to collect demographic data throughout the United States. The data collected by the decennial census determines the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives (a process called apportionment), and informs the distribution of billions in federal funds to local communities. The count is so much more than just math - and the results will have big impacts on communities across the nation, including how people are represented in government. An accurate census count is therefore critical to the goals of the [For the People Act](#) (H.R.1/S.949): making government work for the people.

Not only does the census affect the number of representatives your state has in Congress, it also affects how your state, city, and federal resources are allocated. For example, in Phoenix, Arizona, an accurate count should result in approximately \$866 million, annually, for important city of Phoenix programs, which include libraries, transportation, education, public health, Head Start, senior services, housing, arts and culture, and so much more that is vital to the community's health and safety. Without an accurate count, these programs risk being underfunded and unable to properly serve the community.

People of color and people in low-income communities are [frequently undercounted](#), which can result in vastly skewed distribution of federal resources. For example, in Arizona, a state with a large Latinx population, the [2010 census undercounted](#) children under age five by 10%.

The conversation in Washington, D.C. has also hurt the ability of communities of color to be counted in the census. While there will be no citizenship question, thanks to a [hard fought battle](#) at the Supreme Court, the conversation around it still reverberates in Latinx neighborhoods, and affects who thinks they matter enough to be counted. An estimated [267,000 undocumented LGBT adults](#) live in the U.S., which means hundreds of thousands of LGBTQ individuals may have been intimidated by the proposed citizenship question despite the fact that it was ultimately removed from the census. Distrust in governmental institutions is at an all-time high, making it difficult for marginalized communities to feel safe engaging with the census process.

That is why validators, like community organizers, are integral to the success of the census. Community groups and organizers are determined to ensure that marginalized communities - which have the most to lose by inaccurate census count - are able to participate in the census process.

The Declaration for American Democracy is a historic coalition of over 145 organizations representing millions of people nationwide.

Our coalition includes groups from the labor, racial justice, faith, women's rights, environmental, good government, and many other important communities, that have come together to demand once-in-a-generation reforms to our democracy to put power back in the hands of the people where it belongs.

DeclarationForAmericanDemocracy.org

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