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# Amid The Chaos, Hope From Washington: Election Reform First Up In House

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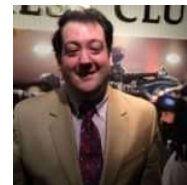
Amidst the chaos of the longest-ever shutdown finally ended, the Russia investigations, and general gridlock, there is hope in Washington. Under the radar of the media reports of the big presidential controversies, the first hearing in the new Congress, in the House Judiciary Committee now chaired by Rep. Gerald Nadler of New York City, was on a terrific bill this week — the “For the People Act”. It even got the number H.R. 1. It includes ethics requirements for the Supreme Court (they are now immune), reversal of the anonymous-dark-money-is-OK decision in Citizens United (former Senate Leader George Mitchell told us, “the worst decision ever by the Supreme Court”), restoration of the protections of the Voting Rights Act, and protections against many states’ voter suppression provisions. To enable officials and judges who protect workers and people who are not the wealthiest in the land, these are all provisions that are long needed.



The House Judiciary Committee provided a rundown. In summary:

## Ensuring Election Access

- Makes it unlawful to hinder, interfere or prevent an individual from registering to vote.
- Prohibits the use of non-forwardable mail as the basis for removing registered voters from the rolls, and prohibits challenges to eligibility from individuals who are not election officials without an oath of good faith factual basis.
- Prohibits providing false information about elections to hinder or discourage voting and increases penalties for voter intimidation, and prescribes sentencing guidelines for those individuals found guilty of such deceptive practices.
- Declares the right of citizens to vote in federal elections will not be denied because of a criminal conviction unless a citizen is serving a felony sentence in a correctional facility, and requires states and the federal government to notify individuals convicted of state or federal felonies, respectively, of their re-enfranchisement.



### Restoring the Voting Rights Act and Protecting the Integrity of our Elections

·Declares that Congress finds that the Shelby County Supreme Court decision ushered in a new era of voter suppression and that Congress should build a record of voter suppression since Shelby, and declares that, per the Supreme Court's ruling in Shelby, Congress should restore the protections of the Voting Rights Act by updating the formula for determining which jurisdictions are subject to federal pre-clearance.

·Declares Congress' intent to protect and promote Native Americans' exercise of their constitutionally guaranteed right to vote, including voter registration and equal access to all voting mechanisms.

·Declares Congress' view that the right to vote is one of the more powerful instruments that residents of the territories of the United States have to ensure their voices are heard.

### Campaign Finance Reform

·Expresses that Congress finds that the Citizens United decision is detrimental to democracy and that the Constitution should be amended to clarify Congress' and the States' authority to regulate campaign contributions and expenditures.

### Enforcing Ethics within the Federal Government

·Requires the development of a code of ethics for Supreme Court justices.

·Increases resources for Foreign Agents Registration Act office, creates FARA investigation and enforcement unit in Department of Justice and provides authority to impose civil penalties, and requires Foreign Agents to disclose transactions involving things of financial value conferred on officeholders.

·Clarifies that counseling in support of lobbying contacts is considered lobbying under the Lobbying Disclosure Act and therefore triggers registration.

·Requires all Presidential appointees to recuse themselves from any matter in which a party is the President, the President's spouse, or an entity in which the President or President's spouse has a substantial interest.

Given the new House, and the fact that it just had a hearing, the bill could pass the House with popular support. It could then become a campaign issue to get through a future Senate and White House, and elections are not that far off. Supporting the changes could make them happen in the not distant future.

Robert Weiner was a spokesman for the Clinton and Bush White Houses as well as the House Government Operations Committee, senior aide to Congressmen Charles Rangel, Claude Pepper, Ed Koch, John Conyers, and Sen. Ted Kennedy. Ben Lasky is senior policy coordinator at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change.

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