



PROTECT DEMOCRACY NOW!

The new Administration has already kept two important promises: to get shots into arms and checks into pocketbooks. Families that were on the brink of foreclosure or eviction have a little more breathing room. A mother of two small children can redeem the family car from a title pawn loan. Families who haven't gathered for a year can do so in small groups now that they are fully vaccinated. Clearly, there was a plan in place from the very beginning to address these critical issues.

As important as fighting COVID-19 and stimulating the economy are, there is a crisis more dangerous to our collective well-being and more difficult to solve that cannot be averted and should not be avoided. It is the crisis of democracy. Political scientists categorize the United States as a representative democracy. A defining feature of representative democracy is that citizens normally elect someone to represent them in making decisions at the national, state and local levels of government. The Big Lie that the 2020 election was tainted with fraud has done serious damage to public confidence. It is not enough to consign QAnonists to the looney bin. We must shore up the "infrastructure of democracy" as Georgia Senator Rev. Raphael Warnock elegantly put it in a recent television interview. That infrastructure is in need of repair.

Widespread falsehoods, insurrectionist mobs, opportunistic politicians, repressive state legislation and later this year, legislative reapportionment all present a huge challenge to the system whereby citizens consent to be governed by casting a ballot. One of the reasons 100 million American Rescue Plan Act checks have been distributed is that polls show Americans overwhelmingly approved of the measure. What citizens think still matters. And it matters a lot. But for the election of two Georgia U.S. Senators on January 5, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act would not have become law. Voting is one of the most effective ways that citizens speak to elected officials and hold them accountable. That is why protecting the vote is so important. The Voting Rights Act, weakened by *Shelby v. Holder*, still prohibits the State of Georgia from imposing any practice, standard or procedure that "abridges the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color." Yet, top Georgia elections officials deny that the state's new voting law amounts to "voter suppression." We commend those conscientious companies and corporate executives who refuse to be "bystanders to injustice."

How do we know this outrageous new Georgia voting law is aimed at race or ethnicity? The circumstances give us the motive. In 2020, Georgia voters selected a Democratic presidential candidate for the first time in nearly three decades. Not one, but two Democratic Georgia Senators were elected. It is a curious fact that Mr. Trump began to attack the credibility of the election months before it occurred. No candidate would attack the credibility of an election he expects to win. Black eligible voters in Georgia have played a significant role in driving the growth of the state's electorate over the past two decades. Between 2000 and 2019, Georgia's eligible voter population grew by 1.9 million, with nearly half of this increase attributed to growth in the state's Black voting population, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of new census data. In 2019, the Black

voting population in Georgia reached a record high of 2.5 million eligible voters, making up a third of the state's total electorate. More than 80% of Black voters chose the Democratic Party candidate. In Georgia, 93 percent of Black women supported President-elect Joe Biden in November and the same percentage voted for Georgia's Democratic Senate candidates in January. In Georgia, Black voters make up half of Democratic voters. To attack Democrats is to attack Black voters. Black voters matter.

One of the most disturbing elements of the Jim Crow Georgia voting scheme is the provision permitting state government to take over the operations of county election officials. This could lead to more systematic voting procedures across Georgia's 159 counties, but it could also be used to stifle voter engagement in majority Black/Brown counties.

Now that the Georgia General Assembly has embarrassed itself by outlawing a gift of water to a citizen waiting in line to vote and arrested a legislator for knocking on the door of the Governor's office, people of good conscience (regardless of race or ethnicity or region) must turn to the United States Senate for action to restore and protect the right to vote. Two legislative packages have been proposed and adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives: The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and Senate 1, the "For the People Act." These federal (national) proposals would restore the power of the Voting Rights Act, protect and expand the right to vote and would likely supersede state laws like the one passed by the Georgia legislature. As Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate, New York Senator Chuck Schumer has the power to put both bills on the floor for a vote, but the narrowly divided Senate is not assured to vote in favor.

We call on every NCNW member, affiliate, friend, supporter, and ally to **contact both of their United States Senators** to urge passage of comprehensive legislation to restore, protect and expand access and equity in the electoral process. In the alternative, if the Senate Minority insists on a filibuster, they should stand in the well of the U.S. Senate, hold the floor, and explain to the American people why restoring, protecting and expanding the right to vote is wrong.

Black voters will undoubtedly rise to the occasion and bring their own water, sell water on a nearby corner and buy larger thermos backpacks, but that is not the point. States may not "abridge" the right to vote. That means to hinder, delay, obstruct. It is not so much a matter of whether Black voters are resilient and experienced enough to overcome the barriers. We know from experience that Black citizens are savvy, pragmatic and motivated voters. Nevertheless, some of the worst incidents of domestic racialized terror (like the Mother Emanuel massacre and the demonstration at Charlottesville) occurred in the wake of the election of America's first Black President. The point is that a valuable Constitutional right should not be weakened unless there is a compelling reason to do so. Widespread voter fraud might be such a compelling reason, but such fraud has not been proven to exist.

We the people have a duty to teach elected officials that there is no political or electoral profit in intentionally and falsely attacking election results. Mr. Trump's gambit – to set up an election contest based on false claims of widespread fraud - backfired. His party lost a second term in the White House and control of the United States Senate. There is evidence that one of the contributing factors to the outcome of the Senate races in Georgia was that conservative voters in the northern tier of Georgia counties stayed home, dispirited. They may well have asked themselves, "Why bother to vote if the election is tainted?"

We cannot be complacent about these attacks on the fundamental role of citizens in a representative democracy. Ignored, this trend will spread across the nation and infect the body politic with a virus as deadly and dangerous to democracy as COVID-19 is to the human body. Join with NCNW, our Members Affiliates and Allies in calling on the United States Senate to protect democracy now. #REACH4ncnw

Peace and Power
Janice L. Mathis
Executive Director

