FIXOURSENATE

Thursday, April 8, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Majority Leader Schumer,

Thank you for your hard work and strong leadership in passing the American Rescue Act through the Senate in the face of unanimous partisan opposition by Senate Republicans. We commend you for reaching across the aisle to work with Republicans on legislation that had overwhelming and bipartisan support across the country, and for pushing past the partisan obstruction and delivering on your promises when that outreach was rejected.

Now that the American Rescue Act is signed into law and delivering benefits to workers, families, and communities, we urge the Senate Democratic majority, under your leadership, to move quickly to address another major crisis facing our nation by passing S.1, the For the People Act. And to make sure that can get done, we call on you to eliminate the filibuster as a weapon that a minority of senators can use to overturn the will of the majority and prevent the For the People Act from even getting an up-or-down vote.

The crisis facing our democracy couldn't be more real, and addressing it couldn't be more urgent. Just this month Republicans passed a bill through the Georgia House that would roll back voting access and rights, including blatant attempts to specifically target and suppress Black voters. Similar attempts are being made in Arizona to suppress the vote and make voting more difficult for communities of color. And according to the Brennan Center, "as of Feb. 19, 2021, legislators in 43 states have carried over, prefiled, or introduced more than 250 bills that would make it harder to vote — over seven times the number of restrictive bills as compared to roughly this time last year. These bills primarily seek to limit mail voting and impose stricter voter ID requirements." As the Washington Post notes, the "measures are likely to disproportionately affect those in cities and Black voters in particular."

This shouldn't be a partisan issue, and for the Republicans and independents across the country who support the For the People Act in poll after poll, it's clearly not. So while the For the People Act faced unanimous partisan opposition in the House of Representatives, Republicans in the Senate should do the right thing and support it as it moves through the Senate – or at least allow the bill to move to an up-or-down vote. But we also know that the similarly popular American Rescue Act only passed because it was exempt from the partisan filibuster and could advance with a simple majority. And we know that if Minority Leader McConnell can use the filibuster as a weapon to keep our democracy rigged and prevent President Biden and Senate Democrats from delivering on their promises, then the For the People Act is unlikely to become law.

The filibuster has a long history of being used to block voting rights, civil rights, and democracy-protecting bills like the For the People Act. In fact, for most of Senate history, this was the filibuster's primary purpose. Invented by pro-slavery senators before the Civil War, the filibuster prevented the passage of over 200 anti-lynching bills over the years. Between the end of Reconstruction and the passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the filibuster prevented numerous civil rights bills from passing – including several that had majority support in the House of Representatives, majority support in the Senate, and presidents ready to sign them into law. In fact, until 1964, civil rights bills were the only category of bills routinely stopped by the filibuster. Even the Civil Rights Act of 1964, one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation in American history, was blocked for more than two months before the filibuster was finally broken. In his case for eliminating the filibuster, columnist Ezra Klein notes that "filibusters were rare in the midcentury Senate, but when they happened, it was primarily for one purpose: the preservation of racial segregation, hierarchy, and violence in the South."

President Barack Obama highlighted this fact last year in his powerful eulogy for Representative John Lewis at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church. He talked about the need to build on Representative Lewis' legacy and continue his work fighting for civil rights, voting rights, and racial justice, and said "if all this takes eliminating the filibuster, another Jim Crow relic, in order to secure the God-given rights of every American, then that's what we should do."

We agree with President Obama that the filibuster is a "Jim Crow relic" that should not be allowed to stop the For the People Act from becoming law. We agree with President Biden that "democracy is having a hard time functioning" and the Senate must take action. We agree with Senator Amy Klobuchar, Chairwoman of the Senate Rules Committee, who recently said "I'm not going to let an antiquated Senate rule undermine the foundation of our democracy" and that she would "get rid of the filibuster" to pass the For the People. Act. We agree with Senator Jeff Merkley, lead Senate sponsor of the For The People Act, who said "we must not let America's constitutional promises be held hostage in the Senate" and who understands that the filibuster cannot be an "excuse" for inaction. And we agree with you, Majority Leader Schumer, when you said "the bottom line is we're going to come together as a caucus and figure out a way to get the bold action that the American people demand...we're not going to be the legislative graveyard."

Senate Democrats will soon face a choice: Protect our democracy and pass the For the People Act, or protect the filibuster – an outdated and abused "Jim Crow relic" that deserves to be tossed into the dustbin of history. We strongly urge you and the Senate Democratic caucus to do the right thing and not allow the filibuster to once again stand in the way of civil rights, voting rights, racial justice, and the strengthening of our democracy.

Sincerely,

Fix Our Senate
Battle Born Collective
Common Cause
Democracy Initiative

Indivisible
Public Citizen
Stand Up America
America's Voice
American Family Voices
Be A Hero
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Blue Future
Blue Wave Postcard Movement
Boone County Democratic Women's Club
Brave New Films
Broward for Progress
Build Back Better USA
Businesses for a Livable Climate
Call to Action Colorado
Campaign for America's Future
CatholicNetwork.US
CBFD Indivisible
Center for International Environmental Law
Center for International Policy
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College
Center for Popular Democracy
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Clean Elections Texas
Climate Action Now Western Massachusetts
Climate Crisis Policy
Climate Hawks Vote
Climate Reality Project
Colorado Businesses for a Livable Climate
Common Defense
Communications Workers of America
Conejo Climate Coalition
Decode Democracy
Demand Justice
DemCast USA
Democracy 21
Democracy for America
Democracy North Carolina
Demos
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Dutchess County Progressive Action Alliance
Earth Action, Inc.
Empire State Indivisible
Equal Citizens

Equality California
Face the Music Collective
Faith for Black Lives
Faith in Public Life Action
Feminist Majority
Fix Democracy First
For All
Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard
Free Speech For People
Friends of the Earth
Future Coalition
Generation Vote
Geos Institute
Glen Echo Heights Mobilization
Greater NYC for Change
Greenpeace USA
Herd on the Hill
Indivisible Main Line South
Indivisible Georgia Coalition
Indivisible Marin
Indivisible Northern Nevada
Indivisible Sonoma County
Indivisible Ulster / NY19
Indivisible: Narberth and beyond
Knock for Democracy
Let NY Vote Coalition
Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy
Maine People's Alliance
Mainers for Accountable Leadership
March For Our Lives
Marion County Federation of Women Democrat
Marshall County Democratic Women's Club of West Virginia
MomsRising
MoveOn
NAACP New York State Conference
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of Social Workers West Virginia Chapter
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC)
National Employment Law Project
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights
National Rural Social Work Caucus
National Women's Health Network
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

New Energy Economy
New York Immigration Coalition
Newtown Action Alliance
Northridge Indivisible
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
OHIO COUNTY DEMOCRATIC WOMEN
Oil Change U.S.
Our Future West Virginia
Our Revolution
Our Revolution Michigan
Our Revolution South Central Virginia
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
People for the American Way
People's Action
People's Parity Project
Persist NY
Progress Arizona
Progressive Democrats of America
Progressive Turnout Project
RapidShift Network
RepresentUs New Mexico
Rise Up WV
Secure Elections Network
Silver State Equality-Nevada
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Small Planet Institute
SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION-LA (SEE)
Social Security Works
Southern Christian Coalition
Sunrise Movement
Supermajority
Take Back the Court
The Workers Circle
TN Small Business Alliance
True Blue NY
Un-PAC
Unitarian Universalist Association
Upper West Side MoveOn/Indivisible Action Group
Voices for Progress
We Testify
West Virginia Federation of Democratic Women,Inc
Women of Color Coalition
Women's March
Working Families Party

Writers for Democratic Action
WV Citizen Action Group
WV Working Families Party
#NoRA
198 methods
20/20 Vision
2degrees Northampton
350 Butte County
350 Eugene
350 Ventura County Climate Hub
350Kishwaukee (Illinois)
350Merced