

U.S. Congress election reform: Political strategy or foolish mistake?

By Steve Bakke, May 18, 2021



Many republicans have trouble accepting some election realities, and many democrats struggle with others.

It's time for republicans to stop wasting energy jousting at windmills of "stolen elections." The 2020 election is official. Joe Biden is president. Post-election lawsuits failed because complex claims of material fraud couldn't be fairly and conclusively addressed given the evidence available. A quick but thorough examination "on the merits" was too much to expect.

Democrats should quit resisting fair and necessary election controls that are the foundation of fair and honest elections, such as voter identification and ballot control. And controls must be established in advance of problems. Otherwise, minor mischief inevitably grows into significant problems.

It matters not if you believe a combination of fraud and errors affected the 2020 election. It's over. But expressing the sentiment that problems occurred in 2020 is not a crackpot conspiracy theory. Common sense leads us to conclude that human nature, combined with opportunity and a righteous desire to win, makes election mischief inevitable. That's especially true because controls were reduced for 2020 COVID concerns.

Complicating matters, the passage of HR1, the "For the People's Act," by the U.S. House of Representatives is an attempt by democrats to formalize and federalize the "COVID relaxation" of election controls. It cancels states' influence on elections that is stipulated in the Constitution, substituting full federal control. The Act now awaits Senate action, with SR1 as its Senate label.

Those opposing HR1 are accused of promoting the "stolen election" argument. That's fiction. Opposition to HR1 is legitimate opposition to making permanent the temporary relaxation of 2020 election rules. Democrats want to retain many of those changes, and permanently reduce or

eliminate important voter identification and ballot controls. It's done in the interest of "easier voting." For democrats, it seems that anything that doesn't make voting easier is voter suppression.

Election security concerns caused by HR1 include: prohibiting voter identification requirements; allowing voters without IDs to merely provide written declaration of eligibility; allowing, even promoting, bulk distribution of unsolicited mail-in ballots and ballot harvesting; and automatically registering voter using public data bases, resulting in duplicate, underage, and illegal immigrant registrations.

The 2005 bipartisan Commission on Federal Election Reform, co-chaired by former President Jimmy Carter and former Secretary of State James Baker, provide us with good advice about election security. For example: voter ID requirements are important; mail-in ballots require controls because the practice makes fraud easier; and voter registration lists should be regularly updated.

HR1 largely ignores that advice. If it passes the Senate, we'll soon hear about a growing body of evidence supporting a course correction to prevent a pandemic of sloppiness, errors, and potential for fraud. Some evidence will be trivial. Much, however, will be valid, potentially material, and worthy of attention.

Individual states are reacting to 2020 election problems and the pending HR1 legislation by redeploing state election laws after the 2020 relaxation of controls. Georgia is an early example. Georgia's new rules, now signed into law, are being feverishly and unfairly criticized by democrats and President Biden. Even Washington Post factcheckers assigned "4 Pinocchios" to Biden's off-target accusations.

Biden and democrats incorrectly claim Georgia's absentee/mail-in ballot requirements cause voter suppression. In fact, there are no signature verification or ID presentation requirements other than providing a number from their driver's license or state ID. 97% of Georgians have a qualifying ID, and free IDs are readily available. Democrats claim voting hours were shortened to suppress working voters. In fact, election day voting hours are unchanged and weekend voting hours are extended,

Biden labeled Georgia's reforms "Jim Eagle" racism - "Jim Crow on steroids." He declared Georgia is reentering the Jim Crow era when Black voters had to guess the number of jellybeans in a jar." Those comments are foolhardy misstatements.

Effective election controls don't create voter suppression. Of course, corrections should be made if a state's reform legislation goes too far. But we must work against HR1/SR1 reforms that deemphasize fair and legitimate controls.

Considering the ease and low, often no cost of obtaining an official ID, Senator Tom Cotton's recent comment is appropriate: "If you're not trying to cheat, there's no reason to oppose voter ID laws."

Is the rush to federalize election reform, rather than sharing responsibility with the states, a political strategy, or a foolish mistake? Probably both. The United States will be forever diminished if election integrity and voter confidence deteriorate further.