

The Delray Democrat

It's the Republicans, Stupid¹

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Voting Rights legislation is critically important, so much so that it likely should have been the first issue the new administration and Democratic Congress addressed. With years of blatant efforts by Republicans to subvert elections and prevent citizens from casting their lawful ballots and the January 6 Insurrection to overturn a valid election, our very democracy rests on the ability of the federal government to preserve the most sacred of rights – the vote.

Regardless of whether this should have been addressed earlier, and to be fair, there is little basis to believe the outcome would have been different, it is extremely pressing now. Democrats have spent so much time and energy focusing on recriminations of Senators Manchin and Sinema over their opposition to eliminating the filibuster they have lost sight of the real objection and the real fight. The issue is passing at least one of the two major voting rights bills passed by the House and waiting for Senate action.

Because of the spectacle of Democratic infighting over the filibuster, this is the narrative covered by the media and what the American people see. Rightly or wrongly, it not only fosters perceptions of incompetence in governance, but at a minimum makes the Democrats look bad, not all of which is undeserved. There are certainly valid criticisms about how Manchin and Sinema have conducted themselves, but without them Mitch McConnell and the Republicans own the Senate. If Democrats want to win and maintain control of the Senate, especially to have any ability to pass legislation, they are going to need to win more Senate races in red states. To do that, they must welcome more Manchins and Sinemas, because that is who can win in those states. Chasing them away is throwing away any chance to have a majority.

Manchin and Sinema have consistently supported voting rights legislation. What they do not support is eliminating the filibuster, a wholly different issue. They actually have some strong arguments as to why. If and when Republicans win control of the Senate, which is historically and practically something we need to accept as likely, without the filibuster rule and 60 vote requirement imagine the extremely damaging legislation they can jam through, including more dangerous tax cuts, health care cuts, elimination of critical environmental protections, etc. Anything Democrats pass now; they will quickly eliminate. In any event, this is not the fight Democrats need to be having. The focus must be on the actual Voting Rights legislation.

Ultimately 50 Democrats would vote for the legislation (Manchin, Sinema, et al, proposed minor changes to one bill) and 50 Republicans would vote against both bills. THAT is the real issue and THAT needs to be the narrative covered by the media and perceived by the American people. 16 current Republican Senators voted in 2006 for the previous iteration of Voting Rights, but now they plan to vote against what is essentially similar protections. What has changed is obvious – they are incredibly afraid that if they vote to support voting rights, they will be successfully

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primaried. Before we say “good riddance,” keep in mind these primary challengers will assuredly be extremist candidates committed to Republican plans to undermine our democracy. Although that should be disqualifying to voters, it is more likely that most of these candidates will win their general election.

In any case, Democrats need to be pressing the narrative of Republican political cowardice in not supporting basic voting rights for all citizens. These bills do not promote democratic voters, they protect all voters. Anyone who thinks it is an appropriate strategy to disenfranchise millions of lawful voters for the sole reason of lowering their opponents’ vote counts in upcoming elections is unqualified and unfit to serve in government. I am not sure enough Republican Senators have the capacity to feel shame anymore, but at least 10 must be pressured to support basic voting rights for all American citizens and they should be willing to negotiate meaningful legislation to accomplish this rather than lining up lock step with all 50 vowing to vote against it. Manchin and Sinema are allies, Republicans are the ones opposing our most fundamental right.