

Democrats drop defense of voting rights after Biden's Philadelphia speech

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Only days after President Joe Biden declared that the United States was facing “the most significant test of our democracy since the Civil War,” the White House and the Democratic Party have effectively abandoned any effort to protect voting rights.

In his July 13 speech in Philadelphia, Biden cited the passage of 28 laws by Republican-controlled states restricting the ability of poor and working class voters to cast ballots and making it easier for state legislatures to overturn election results certified by local election officials. He linked this systematic assault on voting rights to Donald Trump's attempted coup of January 6, calling it the greatest threat to American democracy since the Civil War.

Since then, however, Biden and the Democratic leadership have made it clear that they will take no meaningful action to override Republican opposition to passage of voting rights legislation in the evenly divided Senate.

In a town hall event on CNN Wednesday night, Biden was directly challenged by a member of the audience to explain his insistence on “bipartisanship” and his opposition to exempting the defense of the right to vote from the Senate's anti-democratic filibuster rule, which effectively requires a supermajority of 60 votes to pass legislation, in light of the Republicans' unanimous vote to block any such legislation.

Biden flatly rejected changing the filibuster rule and reiterated his commitment to “unity” with his “Republican colleagues,” ignoring their overwhelming support for Trump and the ex-president's ongoing efforts to build a fascist movement based on the lie of the “stolen election.”

“I want to make sure we bring along, not just all the Democrats, we bring along Republicans, who, I know, know better than this,” he said. “What I don't want to do is get wrapped up right now in the argument about whether this is all about the filibuster.”

On Thursday, 150 organizations signed an open letter calling on Biden to reaffirm his commitment to passing voting rights legislation, specifically the “For the People Act” and the “John Lewis Voting Rights Act,” both of which have been passed by the Democratic-controlled House

of Representatives.

The For the People Act includes provisions to expand early voting and implement automatic voter registration. The core of the John Lewis Voting Rights Act is to restore the “pre-clearance” enforcement powers of the federal government under the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which were struck down by the US Supreme Court in 2013. Under the now defunct Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, any changes in voting rules proposed by former Jim Crow states had to be pre-cleared by the Justice Department.

The open letter stated: “Congress has the power and duty to stop this anti-democratic and discriminatory assault on Americans' voting rights. Indeed, only federal legislation can ensure that our elections are safe and free and fully protect the franchise.”

It continued, “While we fully support the ideal of bipartisan cooperation on voting rights, the partisan political agenda of some in the Senate cannot be allowed to block passage of legislation that has broad bipartisan backing. And we certainly cannot allow an arcane Senate procedural rule to derail efforts that a majority of Americans support... We urge you to work closely with Congress to support the passage of these bills by whatever means necessary.”

Organizations that signed the letter include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Brennan Center for Justice, End Citizens United, and the AFL-CIO.

The fact that organizations within and around the Democratic Party feel obliged to publicly call on the president to fight for legislation proposed and supported by his own party is a measure of the cowardice and duplicity of the Biden administration and the Democratic Party as a whole.

The capitulation of the Democratic Party to the assault on voting rights was further highlighted by press conferences held Thursday by White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Psaki was asked just one question on the issue of the filibuster and voting rights legislation. She replied with a

stock statement that the president would continue to advocate for the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act.

At her weekly press conference, Pelosi never even mentioned the voting rights bills.

These press briefings followed the withdrawal of all five congressmen chosen by House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy from a House select committee established to investigate the January 6 coup attempt. McCarthy, after consulting with Trump at the ex-president's golf resort in New Jersey, had named Trump's leading congressional pit bull, Representative Jim Jordan of Ohio, to the committee.

This was a provocation, designed to either blow up the committee or turn it into a forum to defend the attempted overthrow of the 2020 presidential election and criminalize left-wing anti-police violence protests. When Pelosi rejected Jordan and Jim Banks of Indiana, another strident defender of Trump and the "stolen election" lie, McCarthy pulled his nominees and announced he would set up a separate Republican investigatory panel.

Meanwhile, both Biden and the Democratic congressional leadership have dropped the case of more than 50 Democratic state senators from Texas who fled to Washington D.C. to deny a quorum and delay passage of a Republican bill restricting voting in the state. Their declared aim was to use their time in the nation's capital to lobby the White House and Congress to pass the voting rights bills, which would override the reactionary Texas legislation. Democratic leaders hailed the Texas lawmakers as civil rights heroes upon their arrival, and then proceeded to ignore them.

Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia met with the Texas Democrats on July 15, two days after Biden's voting rights speech. Emerging from the meeting, he reaffirmed his opposition to changing the Senate filibuster rule to enable passage of the Democratic bills. He also proposed that the Democrats drop the For the People Act and focus solely on a narrow version of the bill to restore the pre-clearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act. He ignored the fact that even the latter measure has little chance of passage in the Senate under the current filibuster rule.

Manchin's insistence on this issue, in which he is joined by Arizona Democratic Senator Krysten Sinema, has doomed passage of the Democratic bills. Last month, Manchin refused to vote in favor of the House version of the For the People Act and instead put forward a compromise proposal. His alternative stripped the bill of its most expansive provisions, including a ban on state laws denying the franchise to felons who have served their sentences, and introduced reactionary provisions such as a national voter ID

requirement.

The Biden administration and the Democratic leadership hailed Manchin's olive branch to the Republicans and used it to push for a procedural vote to override a Republican filibuster and bring the watered-down version up for a floor vote, which would require only a majority for passage. In the event, not one of the 50 Republicans in the Senate voted in support of the motion, thereby blocking the measure.

The White House responded by signaling its readiness to throw in the towel. Vice President Kamala Harris gave a speech in which she promised just \$25 million from the Democratic National Committee for a voter education and registration drive. The clear implication was acceptance of the reactionary anti-voting rights bills being passed by Republican-controlled states and an effort to minimize their impact of the Democratic vote.

Voting rights groups have denounced this overt capitulation. Nsé Ufot, the executive director of the New Georgia Project, said, "We need them to do their jobs. I can't write legislation. I can't whip votes. I don't have 47 years in that body, in the United States Senate. I'm not the president of that body. But they are."

These developments underscore critical political realities that must be grasped by the working class: (1) There is no section of the ruling class or either of its political parties that maintains a genuine commitment to the defense of democratic rights, and (2) the danger of dictatorship and fascism can be defeated only through the independent mobilization of the working class in opposition to the existing political and economic system.



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