

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

January 3, 2022

Dear Colleague:

As we approach the anniversary of the January 6 attack on our Capitol and our democracy, I am writing to follow up on my last Dear Colleague before Christmas, specifically to outline next steps on urgently-needed voting rights legislation.

One year ago this week, we experienced great sorrow: mere hours after the dawn of a new Congress and a new Majority, our beloved Capitol was attacked. It was attacked in a naked attempt to derail our Republic's most sacred tradition: the peaceful transfer of power. Domestic violent extremists sought to inflict chaos and violence. Fueled by conspiracy and the ravings of a vengeful former President, they sought to destroy our Republic.

Our democracy held – for now.

As we all are witnessing, the attacks on our democracy have not ceased. In fact, they have only accelerated. Much like the violent insurrectionists who stormed the US Capitol nearly one year ago, Republican officials in states across the country have seized on the former president's Big Lie about widespread voter fraud to enact anti-democratic legislation and seize control of typically non-partisan election administration functions. While these actions all proceed under the guise of so-called "election integrity", the true aim couldn't be more clear. They want to unwind the progress of our Union, restrict access to the ballot, silence the voices of millions of voters, and undermine free and fair elections. They wish to propagate the Big Lie perpetuated by the former president that our elections are not on the level.

Make no mistake about it: this week Senate Democrats will make clear that what happened on January 6th and the one-sided, partisan actions being taken by Republican-led state legislatures across the country are directly linked, and we can and must take strong action to stop this anti-democratic march. Specifically, as we honor the brave Capitol police officers who defended us from those motivated by the Big Lie who tried to undo a fair and free election, Senate Democrats will continue to make the case for passing voting rights legislation to counter the Republican voter suppression and election nullification laws with the same anti-democratic motives born out of the Big Lie.

Let me be clear: January 6th was a symptom of a broader illness - an effort to delegitimize our election process, and the Senate must advance systemic democracy reforms to repair our republic or else the events of that day will not be an aberration – they will be the new norm. Given the urgency of the situation and imminence of the votes, we as Senate Democrats must urge the public in a variety of different ways to impress upon their Senators the importance of acting and reforming the Senate rules, if that becomes a prerequisite for action to save our democracy.

Our Caucus has fought back against these assaults, uniting behind comprehensive legislation that would address these threats to our democracy. Sadly, these common-sense solutions to defend our democracy have been repeatedly blocked by our Republican colleagues, who seem wholly uninterested in taking any meaningful steps to stem the rising tide of antidemocratic sentiment still being stoked by the former president today. In June, August, October, and once more in November, Republicans weaponized-arcane Senate rules to prevent even a simple debate on how to protect our democracy.

The Senate was designed to protect the political rights of the minority in the chamber, through the promise of debate and the opportunity to amend. But over the years, those rights have been warped and contorted to obstruct and embarrass the will of majority – something our Founders explicitly opposed. The constitution specified what measures demanded a supermajority – including impeachment or the ratification of treaties. But they explicitly rejected supermajority requirements for legislation, having learned firsthand of such a requirement’s defects under the Articles of Confederation. The weaponization of rules once meant to short-circuit obstruction have been hijacked to guarantee obstruction.

We must ask ourselves: if the right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy, then how can we in good conscience allow for a situation in which the Republican Party can debate and pass voter suppression laws at the State level with only a simple majority vote, but not allow the United States Senate to do the same?

We must adapt. The Senate must evolve, like it has many times before. The Senate was designed to evolve and *has* evolved many times in our history. As former Senator Robert Byrd famously said, Senate Rules “must be changed to reflect changed circumstances.” Put more plainly by Senator Byrd, “Congress is not obliged to be bound by the dead hand of the past.”

The fight for the ballot is as old as the Republic. Over the coming weeks, the Senate will once again consider how to perfect this union and confront the historic challenges facing our democracy. We hope our Republican colleagues change course and work with us. But if they do not, the Senate will debate and consider changes to Senate rules on or before January 17, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, to protect the foundation of our democracy: free and fair elections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Schumer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator