

One Year to Save Democracy

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I first took the oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, in 1987 when I joined the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps. I was deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan, and recently retired after 30 years of commissioned service with the Marines. In all that time, I never imagined that the gravest threat to our Democracy would come from a former president's relentless campaign to end it.

One year ago, an impeached two-time popular vote loser incited a violent attack on Congress in a failed attempt to overthrow a free and fair election. Trump-Republicans spent last year passing laws that will make free and fair elections obsolete. We who love Democracy—Democrats, Independents, and mainstream Republicans, have one year left to save it.

Trump-Republicans Reject Democracy

Former George W. Bush speechwriter David Frum wrote: "If conservatives become convinced that they cannot win democratically, they will not abandon conservatism. They will reject Democracy." Republicans have lost the presidential popular vote seven of the last eight times. As Frum warned, Trump-Republicans have rejected Democracy. Trump explained why: voting is bad for Republicans.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Democrats proposed helping states expand vote-by-mail. Trump refused, warning it would lead to "levels of voting that if you'd ever agreed to it, you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again". Many states expanded vote-by-mail anyway.

Trump couldn't stop people from voting, so he tried to destroy their faith in elections. Throughout his campaign, he said the only way he could lose was if the election was rigged. It wasn't, and he did.

Despite the pandemic, Americans voted in record numbers in 2020. Turnout percentage was the highest since 1900. President Biden defeated Trump by more than seven million votes. Chris Krebs, Trump's cybersecurity official, called the election "the most secure in American history". Trump fired him, baselessly claiming the election was stolen. Trump demanded that Attorney General William Barr investigate. He did, concluded the election was not stolen, and resigned. Trump lost over 60 lawsuits claiming fraud without proof. Some were dismissed by judges Trump appointed.

Role of NC's Trump-Republicans

The lawsuits were part of Trump's coordinated effort to bully election officials into overturning the election. Former NC representative Mark Meadows was Trump's Chief of Staff and

participated in a phone call with Trump and Georgia's Secretary of State, Brad Raffensperger. Trump said "there's nothing wrong with saying that, you know, that you've recalculated... Fellas, I need 11,000 votes. Give me a break." Meadows urged Raffensperger to accommodate Trump in a "spirit of cooperation and compromise." Raffensperger refused. Meadows connected Trump to former NC Chief Justice Mark Martin, who told Trump Vice President Mike Pence had the power to stop certification and throw out results he deemed fraudulent.

Trump then incited the January 6 insurrection, demanding that Pence overturn the election: "All Vice President Pence has to do is send it back to the states to recertify and we become president." Pence refused, but 147 Republicans voted to overturn the election results, including NC's Dan Bishop, Ted Budd, Madison Cawthorn, Virginia Foxx, Richard Hudson, Gregory Murphy, and David Rouzer.

Trump-Republicans Betray the Constitution

Trump's coup failed, and led to his second impeachment. Republican Liz Cheney voted to impeach because Trump "summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack...There has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution."

Fifty-seven senators voted to convict Trump, including NC Senator Richard Burr: "The President promoted unfounded conspiracy theories to cast doubt on the integrity of a free and fair election because he did not like the results...The evidence is compelling that President Trump is guilty of inciting an insurrection."

Cheney was removed as Chair of the House Republican Conference. Burr was censured. His response: "It is truly a sad day for North Carolina Republicans. My party's leadership has chosen loyalty to one man over the core principles of the Republican Party and the founders of our great nation."

Democracy Can Be Saved

Trump-Republicans have filed 389 bills in 48 states that restrict voting and allow them to overturn elections, as Trump tried to do. They want to veto our vote. But we can stop them.

The **Freedom to Vote Act** increases election security, allowing easier voter ID and creating a national standard for voter verified paper ballots, even if you vote by machine. It makes sure everyone entitled to vote can easily register, protects the right to vote early or by mail, and makes Election Day a national holiday. It ends partisan gerrymandering so your vote fully counts. It protects against foreign interference and prevents officials from overturning elections.

The **John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act** stops voter suppression laws preventing minorities, the elderly, and young people from voting. Courts have repeatedly struck down discriminatory laws passed by NC's Republican legislatures: in 2016, because voter ID provisions "target African

Americans with almost surgical precision"; in 2019, because "The 2017 Enacted Maps, as drawn, do not permit voters to freely choose their representative, but rather representatives are choosing voters." On December 8, 2021, the court delayed NC's primaries until May 17 while it determines if the latest redistricting maps are again discriminatory.

What We Can Do

I spent my entire professional life alongside Americans from every ethnic and religious background, every political persuasion, and every corner of this great country. All of us took, and honored, the same sacred oath that Trump betrayed. That's why I am so outraged by the January 6 insurrection and coup attempt, yet remain convinced that there are more Americans prepared to defend Democracy than to watch it die.

I hope you will join me in this crucial election year by doing these three things: 1) Ask Congress to pass the Freedom to Vote Act and John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act; 2) Ask every candidate "Was the 2020 election free and fair?"; and 3) Vote only for candidates who answer "Yes!"

It's our Democracy. Don't let Trump-Republicans take it away.