

from all parts of this city and all different backgrounds coming together to support those families impacted by the fire. At the Federal level, we will do whatever we can—housing assistance, disaster assistance, and help for all immigrant families.

Many of those affected by the fire came from Gambia and other West African countries on a program called Diversity Visa, which I was proud to author. I say to these immigrant families: Do not hesitate to reach out to local and Federal authorities. You will find nothing but a helping hand.

When tragedy strikes our city, New Yorkers come together. We embrace one another. We help however we can. And we always find ways to come back stronger than before. That has been true throughout our city's history, and it shall remain true as we get through this latest, awful tragedy.

#### DEMOCRACY

Madam President, now on defending democracy, last week, the Nation observed the 1-year anniversary of the greatest violent assault against our democracy since the time of the American Civil War. Though the Capitol attack of January 6, 2021, was confined to a single day, the attacks on our democracy have not ceased. The Big Lie—the terrible fantasy that our elections are rife with voter fraud and that Donald Trump won the 2020 election—lives on to this day and is spreading throughout our country, used to undermine our democracy.

Donald Trump has such an infantile ego that he cannot accept that he lost. So he spreads the Big Lie. But just as bad—or almost as bad—are all those in politics, in the media, and elsewhere who know it is a lie but continue to spread it, to the grave detriment of the fundamental roots of this country, its democracy.

Tomorrow, President Biden will travel to Georgia and make the moral case to the Nation that the time has come to act to defend democracy and protect voting rights, even if it means changing Senate rules to restore the Senate.

Every single lover of democracy across America, especially those of us in this Chamber, should take heart of the President's message and ask ourselves: What can we do to protect free and fair elections in this country?

The Senate, I believe, stands ready to follow through on the President's call. Later this week, we will hold a vote yet again on legislation to protect our democracy and protect the sacred right to vote. Everyone in this Chamber will have a chance to go on record. Will Republicans join Democrats in a bipartisan manner to move forward on defending democracy or will they once again mount a filibuster and offer their implicit endorsement of the Big Lie?

I hope they join us, but to date, unfortunately, I have seen precious little suggesting they will do so.

On the contrary, our Republican colleagues have gone to great lengths recently to distract from the dangers of

Donald Trump's Big Lie. Senate Republicans are so stung by our arguments about voter fraud and the Big Lie that the Republican leader has actually tried to argue that it is actually Democrats pushing a big lie when we warn about voter suppression.

The threats of voter suppression are not false; they are dangerous. The Republican leader's line of argument is gas-lighting, pure and simple. The Republican leader has pointed repeatedly to the experience of the 2020 election as proof, somehow, that there exists no effort to suppress the vote. But he ignores that the problem today is not just about what happened during the 2020 election. It is about what happened after, and it is happening today.

If Leader McCONNELL doesn't want to get into specifics about the laws passed by Republican legislators across this country to limit the right to vote, then we Democrats will. Despite the fact that the 2020 election was free, fair, and accurate, in the year that followed at least 19 States suddenly decided to rewrite the rules that govern the way people voted in their respective States. At least 33—33—new laws have passed across the country that will make it harder to vote, harder to register to vote, and, worst of all, potentially empower partisans to arbitrate outcomes of future elections instead of non-partisan election workers. And that may be just the beginning because legislatures in various States are preparing new laws as they enter the 2022 sessions of their legislatures.

I ask my Republican colleagues: Take a look at what has happened in many of the Republican-led State legislatures. When Republicans in States like Texas reduce polling hours and polling locations, how does that not make it harder for people to vote? When Republicans in States like Florida, Kansas, Iowa, and Texas make it harder for people to even register to vote—even to register to vote—how is that not suppressing their fundamental right to vote at all? What does that have to do with election security?

When Republicans in States like Georgia, Indiana, and Florida cut back on the number and availability of locations where people can drop off their absentee ballots, how can Republicans say that voting hasn't been made harder? And when Republicans in States like Georgia make it a crime to give food and water to people waiting in line at the polls, how is that not making it harder for them to cast a ballot?

Some of the examples are especially egregious. According to one recent report, Lincoln County in Georgia is looking to eliminate all but one polling location in the entire county before the next election—one location in a whole big county. That is disgusting.

Some voters who live in the county would have to drive 23 miles just to drop off a ballot. This in no way makes voting more convenient. It makes it an enormous burden.

Let's be abundantly clear. These new anti-voter laws are on the books today

because their authors cited the Big Lie, cited the fictitious bugaboo of voter fraud, and are trying to succeed where the insurrection failed. It is a slow-motion insurrection but a very, very pernicious one.

We have yet to hear, on substance, any serious attempt from Senate Republicans defending these terrible new laws. They don't mention them. The truth is our Republican colleagues cannot defend them because the goal of these laws is very clear: They are deliberately targeting all the ways that younger, poorer, and non-White Americans typically access the ballot.

And by blocking this Chamber from taking any action, Senate Republicans are implicitly offering their own endorsement of the Big Lie.

Senate Democrats have been clear of our intentions from the start: The Senate must pass legislation that will safeguard our democracy and protect people's right to vote. It is why we have pushed the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act numerous times here on the floor, only for Republicans to filibuster them and prevent the Chamber from having so much as a debate.

By hijacking the rules of the Senate and preventing any movement, Republicans are saying they oppose policies that guarantee same-day voter registration, policies that safeguard against election subversion, policies that protect poll workers, and policies that prevent faulty and dangerous voter roll purges.

By blocking action in the Senate, Republicans are saying they oppose efforts to fight the power of dark money and efforts to end partisan gerrymandering. Senate Republicans are saying they are perfectly fine with laws that limit voter registration, limit early voting, and limit the number of polling places and drop boxes. They are even fine with policies that criminalize giving food and drink to voters at the polls.

These laws are anathema to the very spirit of our democracy. They are Jim Crow 2, and it is the Republican Party, by and large in this Senate, supporting the reenactment of those Jim Crow laws.

If Republicans refuse to join us in a bipartisan spirit, if they continue to hijack the rules of the Senate to turn this Chamber into a deep freezer, we are going to consider the appropriate steps necessary to restore the Senate so we can pass these proposals and send them to the President's desk.

On this month—the same month we mark the 1-year anniversary of an armed insurrection at the U.S. Capitol—the question before the Senate is a simple one: How will we find a path forward on protecting our freedoms in the 21st century?

Members of this body must now face a choice: They can follow in the footsteps of our patriotic predecessors in this Chamber or they can sit by as the fabric of our democracy unravels before their very eyes.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

VOTING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, this week on this floor, we are poised to witness something that has never happened before in living memory: an attempt to attack the core identity of the Senate by a sitting majority leader.

The senior Senator from New York once said nuking the filibuster would “turn what the Founding Fathers called the cooling saucer of democracy into the rubber stamp of dictatorship.” He said it would “make the country into a banana republic . . . a doomsday for democracy,” he said. Now, he wants to trigger that doomsday himself.

When I was majority leader, some of my own party urged me to break the Senate for our own party’s short-term gain. My answer was a simple word: “no.”

Less than 4 years ago, the senior Senator from Illinois said nuking the legislative filibuster “would be the end of the Senate as it was originally devised and created going back to our Founding Fathers.” Now, he wants the Senate to end on his watch.

The last time Senate Democrats were in the minority, 32 of them signed a letter demanding the legislative filibuster stay in place. Now, many of them say they want to break this institution. The excuses put forward for this behavior are entirely fake. The supposed justifications are simply false. The Senate Democratic leaders are trying to use a big lie to bully and berate their own Members into breaking their word, breaking the rules, and breaking the Senate.

We are going to spend all week sounding the alarm on the radical takeovers that some Democrats want to pull off. They want to silence millions of Americans and take over the Senate so they can take over elections so they can take over America.

Leading Democrats say they want to break the Senate because of the sinister anti-voting plot that is sweeping America. Of course, this is totally fake. It does not exist. The current control of Congress and the White House were decided in 2020 by the highest turnout in 120 years. Ninety-four percent of voters said voting was easy. More Americans say current voting laws are too lax than say they are too restrictive.

Confronted by the facts, the Democratic leader says they are, of course, irrelevant. He says the entire nuclear push is occasioned by what a few States did in 2021. This is utter nonsense. The Senator from New York has been publicly laying groundwork to nuke the Senate rules since back in 2019, before the 2020 election. More than a year before the 2020 election, the Democratic leader was openly flirting with nuking the Senate rules if he got the power so he would be able to

ram through bigger changes. Now, none of this was occasioned by what State legislatures did in 2021. This is actually a yearslong quest for power in search of a pretext.

Their hysterical attack on State laws are fake as well. The State of Georgia passed a voting law providing for more in-person early voting than New York provides. It allows for no-excuse absentee voting, which New York prohibits. If there was not a voting crisis in Democrat-run New York 6 months ago, there is no crisis in Georgia now. If Georgia is a banana republic today, then New York has been and still is a banana republic. There is zero logic here, zero consistency.

In the State of Texas, Democrats are hysterical because the State rolled back some unusual COVID-specific exceptions to their prior procedures, such as universal drive-through voting and 24-hour voting. So if the bar for voting rights now requires the possibility of voting in person at 3 a.m., how many blue States in America meet that bar? Neither of these things existed in Texas before 2020, and neither widely exists in blue States.

Every hysterical claim that our democracy is in crisis rings hollow. More Americans today say that President Biden’s election was legitimate—now listen to this—than said the same thing about the prior President in late 2017. More Americans today say that President Biden’s election was legitimate than said the same about the prior President in late 2017. Yet Democrats are trying to use their fake hysteria to justify breaking Senate rules so they can seize control of elections in all 50 States. That is what they are up to.

Historically, the Senate has taken up elections legislation on a careful, bipartisan basis. We have made sure not to trample on the rights of voters and the proper roles of local officials.

In 2002, we passed the Help America Vote Act by a vote of 92 to 2—92 to 2. Chris Dodd and I authored that bill. Interestingly enough, the only dissenting votes came from then-Senator Hillary Clinton and the current Democratic leader, CHUCK SCHUMER. Ninety-two to two.

Well, that is how you pass election reform if there are actual issues that need tackling. You do it carefully; you do it thoughtfully; bipartisan committee work; regular order. Our colleagues aren’t doing anything like that. They are trying to ram through a sweeping, partisan legislation that they first drafted and introduced in its first iteration back in 2019.

Democrats say they are concerned about efforts to disempower the appropriate local elections officials. Well, it is actually their bills that would disempower local officials, by Washington Democrats appointing themselves the entire country’s board of elections on steroids.

Democrats say they are concerned about overturning election results.

Well, it is their bills that would overturn election results, overruling the commonsense voting laws that citizens across the country pick for their own States.

A case in point: The Democrats’ latest bill would force the entire country to adopt two practices—same-day registration and no-excuse absentee voting—that the citizens of New York State had as ballot measures last November. Deep-blue New York rejected them both. So you have to ask yourself, why are Washington Democrats refusing to accept the decision of New York voters? Why are they trying to set aside these election results and overturn the people’s will?

Our Democratic colleagues also talked about a so-called voting rights bill. This is a bill to turn the partisan Attorney General into a national elections czar. The Attorney General would no longer have to sue States to win in court; he could end up doing an end run around the legal system and push States around without having to persuade a judge first. I am sure our Democratic colleagues would have reacted well if Republicans had tried to break Senate rules so that Bill Barr could micromanage elections in blue States. I am sure that would have gone swimmingly on their side of the aisle.

But, ultimately, the issues at stake this week run even deeper than this fake hysteria, even deeper than voting laws. Breaking the Senate itself and nuking the filibuster would cause a massive political power outage for many millions of American citizens, for entire States.

So the filibuster is not just about what bills are blocked; it is also the sole feature that gives millions of Americans any voice at all in the legislation that does pass whenever there is one-party control. Annual appropriations, government funding bills, the NDAA, rescue packages like the CARES Act—all of them could be done on a one-party basis, thereby eliminating the influence of every State in America represented by a Member of the minority.

For decades, both Senators and citizens have been able to take for granted that everybody gets a voice, even when they don’t have divided government. If this unique feature of the Senate is blown up, millions and millions of Americans’ voices will cease to be heard in this Chamber—a radical Senate takeover, for a radical elections takeover, for a radical takeover of our Nation’s future.

What the Democratic leader wants to do would not protect our democracy or our system of government. It would destroy a key feature of American Government forever, and the Senators on both sides know it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I listened carefully to the Republican leader’s statement about the institutions of the Senate, the traditions of the