

Rep. Hebl: Voting rights bill is our last, best hope for a sustained American democracy

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I do not often weigh in on federal-level legislation. As a state-level official, I try to stick to state-level business in official press releases and columns and leave federal issues to federally elected officials. However, when it comes to voting rights, I feel as though I must speak up.

We stand on the precipice of turning back the clock on voting rights to the Jim Crow era. I don't make this claim as a fearmongering assertion. It is simple fact. In 2021 alone, 19 states enacted 34 laws to restrict voting. Here in Wisconsin, a judge singlehandedly decided that it was illegal in Wisconsin to use ballot drop boxes- a safe, effective method of turning in completed ballots that Wisconsin has used for years.

Ballot drop boxes had never been an issue until it came under fire when a surge in their use during the COVID pandemic coincided with Republican Donald Trump losing the 2020 presidential race. The blatant hypocrisy of the Republicans is exposed [by their own lawyer](#): "We wholeheartedly support voters' use of any of these convenient, secure, and expressly authorized absentee-ballot-return methods," wrote attorney Misha Tseytlin, representing Assembly Speaker Robin Vos and then-Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald in September of 2020.

Yesterday, January 19, Democratic Senators Joe Manchin (WV) and Kyrsten Sinema (AZ), along with every single Republican senator, voted down a measure to modify filibuster rules that would have led to the passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Act.

The reason Senate Republicans voted against it is obvious- passing a voting rights act would crack down on voter discrimination and voter suppression, both of which are primary tactics Republicans in states across the country use to help ensure they win elections. The reason the two Democrats voted against it- namely, that the filibuster protects minority rights, and Democrats will not always be in the Senate majority- is as frustrating as it is naïve.

The second Republicans have a federal trifecta- controlling the US Senate, US House of Representatives, and the White House- and the filibuster gets in the way of passing their agenda, they will not hesitate to blow it up. They don't do it now, because most of what they want - confirming judges and tax cuts for the wealthy- only requires 50 votes anyway. In the case of confirming judges, Senate Republicans *already* destroyed the filibuster. There's no reason to think that, for example, if the Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*, Republicans will maintain the filibuster. They will get rid of it in a nanosecond if it means that they can enact a nationwide abortion ban.

It is inevitable that one party is going to get rid of the filibuster. The only question that remains is which party, and in pursuit of which cause. It is much better to end the archaic practice to enshrine voting rights across the country than to let an increasingly extremist party destroy it to enact legislation denying rights to Americans.

Voting rights should be one of the foundational rights of this country, not a tool to play with if they get in the way of your party winning elections. I sincerely hope that the US Senate's struggle for voting rights is not over. We must continue the fight, and not back down.