

Politics

'Consensus could prove difficult'

Dems eye new strategy after failure of voting bill

WASHINGTON, Jan 22. (AP): Democrats were picking up the pieces following the collapse of their top-priority voting rights legislation, with some shifting their focus to a narrower bipartisan effort to repair laws Donald Trump exploited in his bid to overturn the 2020 election.

Though their bid to dramatically rewrite U.S. election law failed during a high-stakes Senate floor showdown late Wednesday, Democrats insisted their brinkmanship has made the new effort possible, forcing Republicans to relent, even if just a little, and engage in bipartisan negotiations.

The nascent push is focused on the Electoral Count Act, an 1887 law that created the convoluted process for the certification of presidential election results by Congress. For more than 100 years, vulnerabilities in the law were an afterthought, until Trump's unrelenting, false claims that voter fraud cost him the 2020 election culminated in a mob of his supporters storming the Capitol.

An overhaul of the Gilded Age statute could be Democrats' best chance to address what they call an existential threat to American democracy from Trump's "big lie" about a stolen election. But with serious talks only beginning in the Senate and dwindling time before this year's midterm elections, reaching consensus could prove difficult.

"We know history is on the side of voting rights, and we know that forcing leaders to take stands will ultimately move the ball forward," Senate Majority Leader **Chuck Schumer** said Thursday.

Just weeks ago, many Democrats were adamant that updating the Electoral Count Act was no substitute for their voting rights legislation. Updating the 1887 law, they pointed out, would do nothing to counter the Trump-inspired push in 19 states to make it more difficult to vote.

Options

They still hold that position, but after the defeat of their marquee elections bill, they are running out of options. Meanwhile, Trump loyalists are girding for the next election, working to install sympathetic leaders in local election posts and, in some cases, backing political candidates who participated in the riot at the U.S. Capitol.

Biden conceded this week that updating the electoral bill may be Democrats' best opportunity to pass voting rights legislation through a 50-50 Senate, where much of his agenda has stalled.

"I predict to you they'll get something done," Biden told reporters Wednesday.

Any legislation would have to balance Democrats' desire to halt what they view as a GOP plan to make it more difficult for Black Americans and other minorities to vote with Republican's entrenched opposition to increased federal oversight of local elections.

"What other things could be put in there?" said South Carolina Rep. Jim Clyburn, the No. 3 House Democrat and a senior member of the Congressional Black Caucus. "I want to deal with more than just counting the votes for the president. I want to be sure that we count the votes for everybody else. So voter nullification like they're doing in Georgia, I think it can be addressed."

Republicans involved in the effort to update the Electoral Count Act acknowledge that the bill would need a wider focus.

Sen. Susan Collins of Maine is holding bipartisan talks with Republican Sens. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Mitt Romney of Utah, as well as Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona.

"It's such a needed thing," said Manchin, who added that the narrower scope was "the first place" Democrats "should have started."

Manchin and Sinema effectively tanked Democrats' marquee bill Wednesday, joining Republicans in voting against a rule change that would have allowed the party's voting rights legislation to pass with a simple majority.

Collins has proposed new protections for poll and election workers, some of whom received chilling threats to their safety after the 2020 election. She has also called for more funding for local elections. Manchin wants harsh criminal penalties for those convicted of intimidating or threatening poll and election workers.

"It's a heavy lift, but if we continue to get people to talk there's a path," said Tillis, who said tensions over the Democrats' failed voting bill will need to cool before coalition building can seriously begin. "We are going to have to have more Republicans get on board because there are going to be protest votes."

Focus

But at its core, many Republicans want any legislation to primarily focus on the Electoral Count Act.

"This is directly related to Jan. 6," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Thursday. "It needs fixing."

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy on Thursday called it "an old piece of law, so you can always modernize it."

The bipartisan House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection is also working on a proposal.

As Trump's legal appeals and efforts to pressure state and local officials ran out of steam, he began to focus on Mike Pence, who presided over the certification in Congress of the Electoral College results. Trump spent days in a futile bid trying to convince Pence that the vice president had the power to reject electors from battleground states that voted for Biden, even though the Constitution makes clear the vice president's role in the joint session is largely ceremonial.

Separately, he encouraged Republican lawmakers to take advantage of the low threshold to lodge objections to the outcome. Even after rioters fought in brutal hand-to-hand combat with police as they lay siege to the Capitol on Jan. 6, 147 Republican lawmakers later voted to object to Biden's win.

Sen. Angus King, a Maine independent who caucuses with Democrats, is working on a bill that would shore up several key vulnerabilities in the Electoral College process.

Any legislation should make clear the vice president holds only a ceremonial role, limit the scope of Congress' involvement in the certification of the election and narrow the grounds for raising an objection to a state's results, according to a summary provided by his office.

Civil rights activists don't object to the revisions. But they question the value of the effort if Republican-controlled states can still enact voting restrictions.

"It doesn't matter if your votes are properly counted if you cannot cast your vote in the first place," said Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., who is also pastor at the church Martin Luther King Jr. once led.



Schumer



Richard Fuller, 45, shovels a sidewalk in Norfolk, Va. A winter storm left as much as six inches of snow in parts of coastal Virginia and North Carolina as well as ice further south in parts of North Carolina and South Carolina. (AP)

Weather

Authorities urge drivers to stay off roads and highways

Coast along Virginia, Carolinas gets snow, ice

NORFOLK, Va., Jan 22. (AP): A layer of ice and a blanket of snow covered coastal areas stretching from South Carolina to Virginia after a winter weather system brought colder temperatures and precipitation not often seen in the region.

Authorities urged drivers to stay off the roads and highways, which forecasters said are slick and snow-packed in the storm's aftermath. They also warned of black ice.

Temperatures were cold for the Southeast states. Meteorologists said they likely won't rise above the 30s in Virginia and much of North Carolina during the day and will drop into the 20s and even teens in some places on Saturday night.

By about 7 a.m. Saturday, the storm had mostly blown off the Atlantic Coast, leaving as much as six inches of snow in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, meteorologists said.

"The snow has stopped, the sun is up, temps remain below freezing and roads remain hazardous to motorists. Stay home and avoid travel today," the Virginia Department of Transportation tweeted on Saturday morning.

Further south, there was ice in parts of coastal North Carolina, which stretched along much of the South Carolina coast as well, although in much smaller amounts.

"There was basically a glaze reported as far south as Charleston," said Carl Morgan, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Wilmington. "We're talking less than a 10th of an inch of freezing rain."

The snowfall in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Caro-

lina mirrored the forecast of 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 centimeters), said Mike Montefusco, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Wakefield, Virginia. He said Saturday's cold temperatures would keep the snow from melting at least until Sunday, when temperatures were expected to reach the 40s.

The snow prompted some restaurants along the touristy Virginia Beach oceanfront to close on Saturday. But two eateries, Commune and Prosperity Kitchen, opened their doors in the hopes that people would brave a walk from nearby residential neighborhoods.

"We've had storms like this in the past, and either we're completely dead or super busy because everyone just wants to get out in the snow and have a fun day," said Kevin Jamison, who owns both restaurants.

Trickling

Jamison said customers were already trickling in Saturday morning.

"Just to be in a nice, cozy cafe and getting coffee — there's something romantic about that," Jamison added. "And I think maybe other people are feeling the same way."

But further south, the ice in the Carolinas has already caused headaches for some.

About 6,000 customers were without power in the area around Morehead City, North Carolina, which is south of the Outer Banks, Duke Energy reported on its website. Another 1,000 lost power in the Wilmington area.

About 4,500 had lost power in coastal South Carolina on Friday night, including in Myrtle Beach.

But most were back online Saturday morning, according to utility Santee Cooper.

In coastal Onslow County, North Carolina, officials said that several highway bridges remained closed Saturday morning, and urged drivers to stay off even the ones that are open.

"All bridges in Onslow County are hazardous to traverse, even the ones that aren't closed to traffic," the county government said in a Facebook post.

A Delta Air Lines plane with 19 passengers on board skidded off the runway and rolled into mud while taxiing at North Carolina's snowy Raleigh-Durham International Airport on Friday night, according to airport officials. No injuries were reported aboard the flight from Washington, D.C.

Earlier that day, an ambulance transporting a patient near Raleigh slid off an icy road, injuring two workers aboard, according to North Carolina's state Highway Patrol. The patient died after the crash, but the cause of death hasn't been confirmed. The governor's office said numerous crashes were reported Friday morning after the storm's first wave.

Officials in all three states have warned people to stay off the roads a much as they can.

In the Myrtle Beach area, a fire chief warned that even walking out the front door could be treacherous.

"One of our biggest concerns are slips, trips and falls. We're not used to the ice around here as much. Be very careful just stepping out of your own home," Horry County Fire Chief Joey Tanner said.



In an undated photo released by the NYPD, New York Police Department officer Jason Rivera who was killed in a police shooting, Friday, Jan 21, 2022, in New York City, is seen. (AP)



Sinema



Harris

America

NYC police officer killed: A New York City police officer lay in a hospital Saturday after being critically wounded in a shooting in a Harlem apartment that left a fellow officer dead, authorities said.

The man who shot them with a stolen gun was also in critical condition, wounded by a third officer who fired at him as he tried to flee, officials said.

The two officers were shot Friday night while answering a call about an argument between a woman and her adult son, Officer Jason Rivera, 22, was killed, and Officer Wilbert Mora, 27, was critically wounded, authorities said.

Police had no update on Mora's condition Saturday morning but said he remained hospitalized. The man police say shot them, 47-year-old Lashawn J. McNeil, also was critically wounded and hospitalized, authorities said.

Authorities said the three officers went to the apartment after a call came in from a woman needing help with McNeil, her son. Officers spoke with the woman and another son, but there was no mention of a weapon.

Rivera and Mora walked from the front of the apartment down a hallway, and McNeil swung open a bedroom door and opened fire, Chief of Detectives James Essig said.

As McNeil tried to flee, a third officer who had stayed with McNeil's mother in the front of the apartment shot at McNeil and wounded him in the head and arm, Essig said. (AP)

Astrophysicist killed: A stray bullet struck and killed an English astrophysicist while he was inside an Atlanta-area apartment, authorities say.

Matthew Willson, 31, of Chertsey, Surrey, England, was visiting his girlfriend in the United States when he was hit by a bullet that pierced the wall of the apartment. The shooting happened early Sunday morning, only three days into his visit.

"He was supposed to be here for three months because we've been long distance for a while," Katherine Shepard, his girlfriend of three years, told WSB-TV. "I picked him up from the airport, took him to his favorite eating location, and the next day, he's gone."

Shepard, whose apartment is in the Atlanta suburb of Brookhaven, who told the television station that the couple woke up on Jan. 16 to the sound of more than 30 gunshots coming from an apartment complex directly behind Shepard's. A bullet traveled through Shepard's wall, hitting Willson, she said.

"I held him for another 20 minutes while we waited for the ambulance," she said. "And while we were waiting, there were more gunshots fired."

Police were in the vicinity pursuing reports of gunfire when the 911 call from Shepard came in. Sgt. Jake Kissel of the Brookhaven criminal investigations division said that once officers arrived at the scene, they rendered aid until paramedics

arrived. (AP)

Protesters optimistic: The annual anti-abortion rally in the nation's capital sounded more like a victory celebration as speakers expressed a growing sense of optimism that their long-sought goal, a sweeping rollback of abortion rights in America, was finally in reach.

Thousands of protesters rallied in the bitter cold Friday and marched to the Supreme Court, which has indicated it will allow states to impose tighter restrictions on abortion with a ruling in the coming months — and possibly overturn the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that affirmed the constitutional right to an abortion.

"It doesn't feel real. There's so much

hope and vibrancy and happiness and joy at this thing," said Jordan Moorman of Cincinnati. "I really do believe that we're in a post-Roe generation."

The annual March for Life rally, held one day before the 49th anniversary of the Roe decision, took place amid a COVID-19 surge that limited turnout at the National Mall. Some abortion opponents posted on the event's Facebook page that they would not attend because of vaccine mandates for people going to restaurants and other places in the District of Columbia.

Still, the rally drew a crowd of thousands, with a heavy contingent of young people and students bussed in by schools and church groups. The mood was overwhelmingly upbeat, with many treating the end of Roe v. Wade as inevitable.



In this file photo, Assemblywoman Rebecca Bauer-Kahn, D-Orinda, flanked by other members of the Legislative Women's Caucus to discuss the groups efforts to strengthen women's reproductive rights at the Capitol in Sacramento, Calif., Thursday, Jan 20, 2022. State-by-state battles over the future of abortion in the US are setting up across the country as lawmakers in Republican-led states propose new restrictions modeled on laws passed in Texas and Mississippi even as some Democratic-controlled states work to preserve access. (AP)

President Joe Biden and Vice President **Kamala Harris**, in a statement released Saturday, said the right established under Roe "is under assault as never before" and they said they were committed "to ensuring that this country is not pushed backwards on women's equality."

"We must ensure that our daughters and granddaughters have the same fundamental rights that their mothers and grandmothers fought for and won on this day, 49 years ago," they said. (AP)

Sinema faces blowback: U.S. Sen. **Kyrsten Sinema** is growing increasingly isolated from some of her party's most influential officials and donors after playing a key role in scuttling voting rights legislation that many Democrats consider essential to preserving democracy.

Sinema faces a vote of disapproval and possible censure from leaders of the Arizona Democratic Party on Saturday, a symbolic condemnation for the woman who just three years ago brought the party an Arizona Senate seat for the first time in a generation.

Donors are threatening to walk away. Several groups are already collecting money for an eventual primary challenge, even though she's not on the ballot until 2024. Young activists are holding a second hunger strike to draw attention to Sinema's vote.

The moves offer a preview of the persistent opposition Sinema will likely face within her own party in the two years before she next appears on a ballot. The independent streak that has given her tremendous leverage over the agenda in Washington has enraged many Democrats back home who are intent on preventing her reelection.

"Any reservoir of goodwill that she had is gone," said Rep. Ruben Gallego, an Arizona Democrat who may challenge Sinema from the left.

Sinema's defenders say nobody who's watched her for the past decade would be surprised by her position. She often bucked her party in the House, ran an aggressively moderate campaign for Senate and has never wavered in her support for upholding the filibuster. (AP)