

LWVUS Volunteer Lobby Corps on Capitol Hill for “For The People Act”

In January, the U.S. House of Representatives took up “H.R. 1” a.k.a. “For The People Act of 2019.” The bill’s lead sponsor was Representative John Sarbanes, of Maryland’s third congressional district. The bill covered a wide range of topics, many of which had been covered by earlier bills, including same-day voter registration on election day, automatic voter registration (e.g., “motor-voter” and other opportunities to get eligible citizens registered to vote when they interact with government agencies, with an opt-out provision), online voter registration, the DISCLOSE Act (improving transparency in campaign finance after the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision), combating voter suppression, and reintroducing public finance matching funds for small donor campaign contributions, among other provisions. The League’s official memo on the subject is here: <https://www.lwv.org/expanding-voter-access/league-sends-letter-us-house-addressing-hr1>

The Lobby Corps visited the offices of Democratic representatives who had not (as of late January) signed on as co-sponsors for the bill, as well as many Republican representatives who were considered “persuadable” to support the bill. By and large, most Democrats were enthusiastic about most components of the bill, while most Republicans voiced reservations, especially about the public finance provisions, but also about many new requirements that would be “imposed” on all states. The bill ultimately passed the House on a party-line vote, 234-193 on March 8.

Essentially the same bill is now in the U.S. Senate, with Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico as the lead sponsor. Lobby Corps visited all Democratic Senators (thanking those who had already signed on as co-sponsors and encouraging those who had not yet signed on to do so) and most Republican Senators who we thought might be willing to support at least some components of the bill. Lobby Corps discussions with Senate staff have been similar to those in the House.

Unfortunately, Speaker McConnell has already said publicly that he does not intend to bring the bill to the floor for a vote. Therefore, the Democratic leadership in both houses have decided to work on individual pieces of the bill, starting with the “Voting Rights Advancement Act” (which had originally been included in H.R. 1, but then separated into its own bill, No. H.R. 4). This bill would address the Supreme Court’s *Shelby versus Holder* ruling in 2013, which struck down the requirement under the Voting Rights Act for certain states and jurisdictions that had been found to violate the voting rights of minority populations to secure “pre-clearance” from the U.S. Justice Department before making any changes to their voting procedures (e.g., eligibility for voter registration; polling locations or hours, etc.) or to the drawing of Congressional district lines. The new bill would update the criteria for states or jurisdictions to be required to get pre-clearance in the future. The Lobby Corps will be focusing on this bill over the next couple of months.