

June 25, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
S-221 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
H-204 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

We, the undersigned right-of-center thought leaders or principals of free-market organizations, urge you to provide timely federal funding to ensure that states are able to hold secure and accessible elections in 2020. As the COVID-19 crisis and stay-at-home orders upend life as we know it, there has been an unprecedented strain placed on our election infrastructure and, indeed, our democracy. Greater investment is needed to allow states to modernize their infrastructure, expand options like absentee voting and ensure that Americans are not forced to put their lives at risk in order to participate in the democratic process.

While the \$400 million in election grants provided by the CARES Act is a good starting point to help states prepare for and respond to the coronavirus crisis, it is simply not enough. A recent report from the Alliance for Securing Democracy, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law, the R Street Institute, and the University of Pittsburgh Institute for Cyber Law, Policy and Security found that federal funding covers just 10 to 20 percent of what is needed to provide vital election safeguards during the pandemic. From cleaning polling places and providing PPE to poll workers to educating the public about changes in voting protocols, there are many increased expenditures associated with running a safe and secure election during a global pandemic. States need help to ensure that their infrastructure can support changes in voter behavior, like an increase in the number of voters seeking to register online or vote by mail.

As states confront these challenges, allowing more citizens to vote by mail provides a time-tested way to allow Americans to vote more safely and efficiently, without offering a clear advantage to either party. It's unfortunate that proposals for expanded absentee voting have been politicized in recent years and conflated with a long wish-list of progressive elections priorities. In fact, voting by mail has already been used by tens of millions of Americans, as well as members of the

military, for decades and does not favor either political party. No-excuse absentee voting is used in blue states as well as red states like Utah, a GOP stronghold, where ballots are mailed to every voter. According to the Wall Street Journal, nearly a quarter of all voters in the 2016 cast their ballots by mail. Politically, voting by mail is an extremely popular proposal among voters of all political persuasions; according to Reuters, 72% of U.S. adults support a requirement for mail-in ballots in the 2020 elections, including 65% of Republicans.

Skeptics of vote-by-mail cite concerns about security and voter fraud. Additionally, the recent House Bill HR-6800 creates national election mandates, eliminating election federalism. While there is some reason for concern, voting by mail can be made sufficiently secure and continue to be state managed by providing the \$3.6B election funding to the EAC without strings, keeping clean voter registration rolls, tracking ballots via barcodes, providing ballot drop boxes, verifying signatures on ballots through automation, eliminating opportunities for “ballot harvesting,” and hitting law-breakers with steep fines. With increased resources for these election augmentations, states can better provide the opportunity to ensure that all citizens can perform their civic duty in a safe and secure manner, without antiquated state election practices standing in the way and putting public safety at risk.

As fiscal conservatives, we understand the importance of restraint and sound fiscal policy in times of crisis. However, there is perhaps no investment more worthy than protecting the legitimacy of our democratic process and ensuring that our elections can be held safely and securely. In these unprecedented times, it is incumbent upon Congress to exercise its constitutional “power of the purse” to ensure that democratic elections and our system of self-governance are not casualties of the crisis.

Sincerely,

Eli Lehrer
President, R Street Institute

Michael Steele
Former Lt. Governor of Maryland, Former RNC Chairman

Bob Inglis
Former Member of Congress

Susan Molinari
Former Member of Congress

Sean Parnell
Former President, Center for Competitive Politics, 2007-2011

Stan Veuger
Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute*

Vivek Paul
Entrepreneur, Stanford University*

Evan McMullin
Executive Director, Stand Up Republic

William Kristol
Director, Defending Democracy Together

John Pudner
Executive Director, Take Back Our Republic

R.J. Lyman
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Sarah E. Hunt
CEO, Joseph Rainey Center for Public Policy

Sean Roberts
Chief Technologist, Lincoln Network

Sarah Bonk
Founder & CEO, Business for America

Sarah Longwell
Founder, Republicans for the Rule of Law

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