

## FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY: JANUARY 2021

### NOVEMBER ELECTIONS / IMPEACHMENT

A [Jan. 5 letter](#) from NEA to Congress anticipated that the certification of Joe Biden as the 46th of the United States would not be the usual ceremonial event:

[W]e write to express alarm at the attempt by some members of Congress to subvert the 2020 presidential election results by blocking formal certification of President-elect Joe Biden's victory. This threatens the will of the voters, the democratic principles our nation was founded upon, and the values we cherish as Americans.

The charges of fraud in the 2020 presidential election have been investigated and litigated. Thus far, those challenging the results have lost before more than 90 state and federal judges—including U.S. Supreme Court justices. It is clear that members of Congress who will attempt to block formal certification are ignoring the courts, an equal branch of government, as well as the voters.

Moreover, it is not unnoticed that these members are most focused on disregarding the votes cast in communities of color. In fact, the loudest accusations of voter fraud have been aimed at cities in which the majority—or high proportions—of voters are Black or Brown. When viewed through the lens of America's history of subjugating and denying the vote to people of color, the attempt to silence these voters is a stain on our progress, and a clear rebuke of the martyrs who died fighting to expand voting rights and protect the franchise in all communities.

In the early morning hours of Jan. 7, [147 Republicans](#)—8 senators and 139 representatives—voted to overturn the results in Arizona, Pennsylvania, or both, perpetuating lies told for months by Trump and his enablers in Congress and the right-wing media. They cast their votes hours after the deadly insurrection and attack on the Capitol fomented by those same lies.

A week later, on a bipartisan vote of [232-197](#)—every Democrat and 10 Republicans—the House impeached Donald Trump for inciting the violent insurrection against the U.S. Capitol that cost five people their lives. He is the third president to be impeached in the 244-year history of the United States, and the only one to be impeached twice.

Many of those who voted against impeaching Trump voted against certifying the victory of Biden and Harris after joining lawsuits to overturn the election and disenfranchise their constituents. Publicly, they said they opposed impeachment because it would further divide the

nation. Privately, many admitted the real reason was fear of retaliation against themselves, their families, and their staffs.

A [Jan. 13 letter](#) from NEA President Becky Pringle to the entire Senate said: “We urge you in the strongest possible terms to vote to impeach President Trump because he is a clear and present danger to the American people and our democracy... NEA members teach students about the beauty and power of our Constitution and democracy every day, and they know that our students are watching what you do now.”

Donald Trump’s trial in the Senate starts Feb. 9.

## **RACIAL JUSTICE & POLICE REFORM**

NEA joined 151 organizations in signing a [Jan. 29 letter led by the Leadership Conference on Human and Civil Rights](#) urging Congress “[to] use its oversight and appropriations powers to demand that federal agencies make public how they have and are now using resources to fight white supremacist violence. Moreover, Congress should support other efforts to address the white supremacy at the core of these violent attacks. At the outset, Congress should identify ways to address the white supremacist infiltration of law enforcement that was documented by the FBI. This a clear and present danger, which was highlighted at an Oversight Committee hearing last year, puts lives at risk and undermines the criminal legal system.”

## **RETIREMENT SECURITY**

Rep. Rodney Davis (D-IL) reintroduced the **Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82)**, which would fully repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) that unfairly deny educators and other public servants of Social Security benefits they have earned.

Education and Labor Committee Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA) introduced the **Emergency Pension Plan Relief Act (H.R. 423)**. The bill would create a [special partition relief program](#), administered by the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC), for multiemployer pension plans.

## **SECRETARY OF EDUCATION**

A [Jan. 29 letter](#) from NEA to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee urged quick action on Dr. Miguel Cardona’s, President Biden’s nominee for Secretary of Education. The letter said:

As an educator and as Connecticut’s education commissioner, Dr. Cardona would bring to the Education Department desperately needed firsthand experience. He would

advance the department’s mission of “fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” because he has devoted his career to these goals. His commitment stems not only from professional expertise, but also from an understanding of the hardships students who are learning English face—hardships he dealt with as a child whose family moved to Connecticut from Puerto Rico. Those struggles helped him to become the dedicated, compassionate, and forceful advocate for students that he is today.

Dr. Cardona is known as a consensus builder and problem solver who listens to and actively collaborates with educators, families, and communities. Whether as a classroom teacher, principal, or state education leader, he has pressed for the resources students deserve. Additionally, he has worked with higher education leaders to secure and expand students’ opportunities for postsecondary education.

## **VOTING RIGHTS**

On Jan. 4, Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD) reintroduced the **For the People Act (H.R. 1)**, the most comprehensive democracy reform bill in decades. Passed by the House nearly two years ago, H.R. 1 was among hundreds of measures consigned to the legislative graveyard of then-Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

H.R. 1 rests on three pillars: reaffirming and expanding voting rights, strengthening oversight to end big money in politics, and ensuring an ethical government. Measures to achieve these goals include automatic voter registration, voluntary public financing of campaigns, placing new limits on partisan practices like gerrymandering and purging voter rolls, and requiring candidates for president and vice president to release their tax returns for the previous 10 years. H.R. 1 also makes a strong argument for the District of Columbia to become a state.

NEA joined 82 organizations in signing a [Jan. 25 letter led by the Leadership Conference on Human and Civil Rights](#) that said: “The For the People Act represents a transformative vision for American democracy. It would create a democracy that welcomes every eligible voter’s chance to participate in civic life and a democracy that demands integrity, fairness, and transparency in our nation’s elections.”

## **OTHER LEGISLATIVE NEWS\***

Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) and Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) reintroduced the **D.C. Admission Act (S. 51/H.R. 51)**, which would make Washington, D.C. a state and ensure equal representation for its 700,000 residents.

Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) reintroduced the **Census Improving Data and Enhanced Accuracy (Census IDEA) Act (S. 358)** to ensure that untested and last-minute changes to the decennial census do not impact its accuracy.

Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL) reintroduced the **Public Service Appreciation Through Forgiveness Act (H.R. 251)**, which would allow employees who enter public service to be eligible for increased student loan forgiveness under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) reintroduced the **Raise the Wage Act**, which would gradually raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2025 and increase pay for nearly 32 million workers.

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) introduced the **Emergency Pension Plan Relief Act**, which would create a special partition program that would expand the authority of the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC), increase the number of eligible plans, and simplify the application process.

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) reintroduced the **National Apprenticeship Act (H.R. 447)**, which would amend the existing national apprenticeship program to include both pre-apprenticeships and youth apprenticeships, while also defining guidelines for registered apprenticeship programs.

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) reintroduced the **Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act (H.R. 604)**, which would provide \$130 targeted at high-poverty schools to help reopen public schools and give students and educators a safe place to learn and work.

Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-CT) reintroduced the **Save Education Jobs Act (H.R. 542)** to preserve nearly 4 million education jobs, spur economic growth, and help mitigate the impact of students' lost opportunities to learn during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Jan. 25, Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) reintroduced the **National Apprenticeship Act (H.R. 447)**, which recognizes that programs offering on-the-job training and mentoring pave the way to successful careers, and helps bring these programs into the 21st century. On Feb. 5, the House passed the bill by a vote of [247-173](#).

*\*This list is a snapshot, not comprehensive*