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US Republicans push ahead with attacks on voting rights

In the latest assault on the democratic rights of millions of people, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Trump acolyte, signed Senate Bill 90 into law Thursday after it passed the Republican-dominated Florida legislature earlier this week. The anti-democratic measure is one of hundreds that have been advanced by Republican-led state legislatures across the country following former President Donald Trump's attempted coup on January 6.



Ron Desantis speaking at the 2018 Student Action Summit hosted by Turning Point USA at the Palm Beach County Convention Center in West Palm Beach, Florida [Credit: Gage Skidmore]

While the specifics in each bill vary, the overall purpose of the bills is to eviscerate the democratic and voting rights of the working class while bolstering Trump's baseless claim that the 2020 election was "stolen." This has not prevented a majority of the Republican

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Party in both Washington D.C. and state governments—with the exception of arch-conservative Liz Cheney—from embracing and propagating Trump’s “Big Lie” of a stolen election.

Testifying to the fascistic character of the bill and the Republican Party as a whole, DeSantis staged a “live-signing” of the bill exclusively on Fox News, in an attempt to enhance his standing with its far-right audience, which includes among its incessant viewers, Trump himself. According to a CNN report, local media outlets were told they were not allowed to go inside to witness the signing of the bill because it was a Fox News “exclusive.”

The Florida bill adds several unnecessary burdens onto the voting process, such as limiting the use of drop boxes and barring volunteers from returning completed ballots on behalf of voters, while also requiring voters who wish to vote by mail to re-register for every election cycle.

According to data from Target Smart, over 9 million Floridians returned an early in-person or mail-in ballot in the 2020 election, up 41 percent from 2016. In Florida, 45 percent of requested mail-in ballots went to Democrats, while 31 percent went to Republicans. However, the number of returned ballots by percentage was nearly identical, with 39 percent of Democrats and 38 percent of Republicans returning their ballots.

DeSantis himself acknowledged in a Fox News interview last week that Florida’s election was “fair and transparent” (because Trump won the state). Despite this, in a statement announcing the signing of the SB 90, the governor claimed the bill would allow Florida to “remain a leader in ballot integrity.” Wilton Simpson, president of the Florida Senate, in the same statement said the new restrictive measures would prevent a “backslide” and that “Florida was a model for the nation in November.”

Unable to make a broader appeal to the working class in defense of democratic rights, the Democratic Party has attacked the measure and similar ones in Texas and Georgia in purely racist terms, while appealing to major corporations and the increasingly right-wing courts for redress. After DeSantis signed the bill, a coalition of Democratic Party-aligned organizations filed lawsuits challenging the anti-democratic provisions within the bill.

Democratic State Senator Shervin Jones called the bill “Jim Crow 2.0,” while at the same time admitting it will “make it harder for voters from low-income rural white communities, to the elderly, to communities of color to have their voices heard.”

Patricia Brigham, president of the League of Women Voters of Florida, said the legislation “has a deliberate and disproportionate impact on elderly voters, voters with disabilities, students and communities of color. It’s a despicable attempt by a one party-ruled legislature to choose who can vote in our state and who cannot. It’s undemocratic, unconstitutional, and un-American.”

The League joined the Black Voters Matter Fund, the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans and others in a joint lawsuit on Thursday against the bill. A separate federal lawsuit was filed in Tallahassee by the NAACP and Common Cause, which claimed that the law targets people who are black, Latino or disabled.

Mirroring Florida, in an early Friday morning vote after only nine hours of debate, the Republican-controlled Texas state House passed a less restrictive version of Senate Bill 7, which included several amendments from Democratic legislators. Because the House version differs significantly from the more restrictive version that had previously been passed in the Texas Senate, it will go to a conference committee of the two houses, whose members, behind closed doors, could strip out the amendments and reintroduce the more restrictive elements of the bill.

These restrictive measures are in direct response to the mass participation of voters in populous urban Democratic counties like Harris County, home of Houston. Restrictions included in the previously passed Senate bill include limiting the hours of early voting, banning drive-thru voting, reducing the number of polling places and restricting election officials from mailing out ballots to voters who did not previously request them.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott hailed the passage of the bill on Friday, writing on Twitter that limiting the access and ability to vote for millions of people would ensure “trust & confidence in the outcome of our elections.” Abbott’s alleged zeal for ensuring “trust & confidence” in elections is rife with hypocrisy, seeing as how Texas was the first state to back Trump’s spurious claims of fraud and led the attempt to overturn the election by

supporting Trump's lawsuit which would have suppressed the votes of nearly 20 million people.

Last December prior to the official meeting of the members of the Electoral College, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton filed a lawsuit seeking to overturn the electoral results of four "battleground" states that Biden had won over Trump: Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Paxton's lawsuit was supported by Trump and 18 other Republican-led state governments. The suit alleged that the shift to mail-in balloting across the country in light of the unchecked spread of the coronavirus, which has killed over 900,000 in the US, was unconstitutional.

While the Supreme Court rejected the suit, more than half of the Republican members of Congress and nearly every Republican state government embraced the lie that Biden was elected through fraud and that Trump was the legitimate president.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, as of March 24, 361 bills with restrictive provisions have been introduced by Republican legislators in 47 states. This confirms that even though Trump lost the 2020 election, the growth of the far right within the Republican Party, and the turn to dictatorial forms of rule by significant sections of the ruling class has not lessened, and in fact, is only accelerating.

In the eyes of the Republican Party, it is not simply that the election was "stolen," but that too many people participated, including immigrants, college students and minorities. This was acknowledged by deputy White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on Friday who commented on the Florida bill saying, "The only reason to change the rules right now is if you don't like who voted."

Despite representatives from the White House openly acknowledging the blatantly undemocratic character of the proposed legislation, Biden and the rest of the Democratic Party continue to appeal to Republicans to work with them to pass a bipartisan class agenda of "herd immunity" at home and imperialist war abroad.

In Florida, Democratic Representative and former Republican Governor Charlie Crist, who announced this week he would be running against DeSantis for governor, stated that

the bill highlighted the differences between the two. He noted that DeSantis “locks out the public and caters to Fox News,” in contrast to Crist, who claimed that as governor he “invited everyone in—Democrats, Republicans and Independents.”

Biden’s continued calls to protect and sustain the Republican Party only demonstrates that the fight for democratic rights cannot be left in the hands of the feckless Democrats, who have done everything in their power to suppress and cover for their “Republican colleagues” even as they seek to eliminate the most basic democratic rights—including the right to vote of Democratic voters.

The Democratic Party’s real attitude toward democratic rights was most clearly shown in its actions against left-wing opponents throughout the 2020 election campaign, as Democratic-controlled state governments did everything in their power to block the efforts of the Socialist Equality Party to place its candidates on the ballot, depriving the voters of a socialist candidate. The same treatment was handed out to Green candidates in several states.

The turn towards fascism and dictatorship by the US ruling class demonstrates that none of the gains won in previous struggles can be defended within the current political framework. Workers and youth who seek to guarantee the democratic rights of all should make a class-conscious decision to break with the two parties of big business and build an independent political movement of the working class to fight for socialism.

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