

Statement of Congressman Jamie Raskin

January 6, 2023

To My Friends at Public Citizen:

I'm sorry I can't be there with you and only doctors' orders would keep me away.

January 6th was the first time in American history that coup-plotters and insurrectionists attacked the constitutional transfer of power in Congress and almost overthrew a presidential election.

Trump and his accomplices made common cause with extremist groups steeped in racism and hellbent on insurrection; assembled a mass of followers into a giant surrounding crowd and mesmerized them with a Big Lie; incited the mob into a blinding antidemocratic fury, unleashing them on his own Vice-President and the Joint Session of Congress as we counted Electoral College votes at the Capitol; and continued to inflame his followers throughout the riot and praise them effusively afterwards, giving them aid and comfort all the way until today.

We survived because of people like Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who refused to commit election fraud by just finding Donald Trump 11,780 votes. People like Shay Moss, who did the essential work of being an election official in the face of vicious attacks. People like Arizona Secretary of State Rusty Bowers who refused to exchange his constitutional Oath of office for a mafia-style Oath to Donald Trump and his cowardly Kingdom of fraud, deceit, and depravity.

We were saved by the astounding courage of people in law enforcement like Sergeant Aquilino Gonell and Officers Michael Fanone, Daniel Hodges, and Harry Dunn. We were saved by political leaders like Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Caucus Chairman Hakeem Jeffries, and Republican Conference Chair Liz Cheney, who refused to back down in the face of violent insurrection.

The heroes of this debacle insisted upon respecting and implementing the will of the people as expressed through our constitutional system.

Our Constitution knows how to deal with the enemies of our constitutional order. Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment states that no one who has "previously taken an oath...to support the Constitution" but violates it by engaging in "insurrection or rebellion" shall

ever hold public office again, federal or state, civil or military. That's a categorical ban that can only be lifted by a two-thirds vote in Congress.

Donald Trump's central role in inciting insurrection against the Constitution has already been established by concurrent bipartisan majorities of both Houses of Congress in his second impeachment and Senate trial. Trump is not just *ethically unqualified* to hold office, but *constitutionally disqualified*.

My friends, Tocqueville observed in *Democracy in America* that democracy and voting rights are either shrinking and shriveling away or expanding and growing. After years of voter suppression, gerrymandering of our state and federal districts, and sinister blockades against voting rights and redistricting reform by use of the filibuster, we hit rock-bottom two years ago with a full-blown insurrection and coup, systematic electoral sabotage conducted by the president of the United States and the unleashing of political violence against Congress and the constitutional system.

But the world's greatest multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious constitutional democracy is a fiercely resilient and formidable nation, and we have it within our history, within our senior generation and our young people, within our hearts and minds, to keep democracy moving forward.

John Dewey said that the only solution to the ills of democracy is more democracy. And what we are suffering from today are the obstructions and hindrances to democracy, not democracy itself. The great challenge of this century is to use the remarkable technological progress of our civilization to make democracy more participatory, more universal and more effective for all.

It is time to start electing the President the way we elect Governors, Senators, Representatives, Mayors and everyone else: every vote counts and every vote counts equally, and whoever gets the most votes wins.

It's time for America to adopt the National Popular Vote interstate compact and begin the process of leaving the relic of the Electoral College behind in the same way we brushed away other antidemocratic filters from the original design, like state legislatures choosing U.S. Senators, the disenfranchisement of women and African-Americans, and poll taxes as a condition for voting.

The Electoral College has given us five popular vote losers as president in our history, twice in this century alone. The 2020 election showed that this undemocratic institution is also dangerous because strategic bad faith actors like Donald Trump can plant booby traps in every dark corner of its obsolete operations. We spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year promoting American democracy to other nations remaking their political institutions and the one thing they never seem to tell us is how impressed they are by our electoral college system and how eager they are to bring it to their own land.

We need to reform our corrupted redistricting process which has politicians choosing their voters before the voters choose the politicians.

We haven't admitted a new state to the Union in more than a half-century, but statehood admission has been another essential way to move disenfranchised populations into the circle of complete democratic membership and equality. Nearly three-quarters of our 50 states today entered after the Union was formed and they almost always faced fierce controversy and opposition.

The logic of democratic inclusion has proven irresistible in a country that loves democracy, freedom and equality. So let's begin again with the District where the insurrection took place. Let's approve the statehood petition of the 713,000 taxpaying, draftable citizens in Washington, D.C., the only residents of a national capital on earth locked out of their own Congress. Unlike the bloodthirsty mob that descended on our police officers and broke up the peaceful transfer of power for the first time in our history, the people of Washington have a *real* political grievance, not an imaginary one. They have no voting representation in Congress, which governs them federally and often controls them locally too. The House has now voted twice to admit the new state and this must be high on a democracy agenda.

Congress must also act to empower more than 3.5 million American citizens in Puerto Rico, who are disenfranchised not just in Congressional elections but in presidential elections too. The House has finally acted to give the people of Puerto Rico the right to a binding plebiscite on their future, and the equal empowerment of Puerto Rico too must quickly become a bicameral democracy agenda.

Democracy is not just a set of static practices and institutions; it is the never-ending journey to link the people with the power in a "more perfect Union."

One day, historians will look back on this moment and regard with amazement the fact that America's usually durable and vibrant constitutional democracy was brought to the precipice of a coup and civil war at a time when we needed maximum unity and focus to address the catastrophe of climate change. At a moment when we have needed science, reason, common sense, and effective democratic discussion and unity the most, we have had all of them disrupted by extremism, racism and fanaticism.

We must save American democracy quickly by making sure it keeps growing and improving. In the absence of resurgent strong democracy, it will be difficult to escape the civilizational collapse that awaits us with climate change. The autocrats in Moscow, the theocrats in Saudi Arabi and Iran, and the kleptocrats in Mar-a-Lago will never save us from the calamities of climate change. Only strong democracy and strong democrats can do that. This is the deep mission that awaits all of us, and we dare not fail.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to working with you all in the days ahead.

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