

# NATION/WORLD

## GOP lawmakers seek greater control over local elections

**Anthony Izaquirre**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Partisan takeovers of election boards. Threats to fine county election officials and overturn results. Even bans on giving water to voters while they stand in line.

In addition to their nationwide efforts to limit access to the ballot, Republican lawmakers in some states are moving to gain greater control over the local mechanics of elections, from voter registration all the way to certifying results.

The bills, which already are law in Georgia and Iowa, resurrect elements of former President Donald Trump's extraordinary campaign to subvert his loss, when his backers



Lawmakers in some key states are seeking greater control over the local mechanics of elections, from voter registration to certifying results.

BRYNN ANDERSON/AP FILE

openly floated the notion of having legislatures override the will of the voters and launched legal challenges against measures that made it easier to vote during

the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's an overreach of power," said Aunna Dennis, executive director of the Georgia chapter of the voting advocacy group Common Cause. "They're definitely trying to do an upheaval of our election system."

In a step widely interpreted as a way to check Georgia's Democratic strongholds, Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signed a bill Thursday to give the GOP-dominated Legislature greater influence over a state board that regulates elections and empowers it to remove local election officials deemed to be underperforming.

Other states are moving in similar directions.

In Iowa, after left-leaning counties sent voters ab-

sente ballot applications in 2020, a recently signed law would bar election workers from sending the forms out unless requested and threatens to fine officials for violating rules. A South Carolina proposal would give lawmakers new oversight of the members appointed to the currently independent State Election Commission. In Arizona, a Republican proposal that has since died would have allowed the Legislature to overturn election results and appoint its own Electoral College representatives.

The Brennan Center for Justice, a public policy group that supports expanded voter access, tallied more than 250 restrictive proposals in the states, many of them intended to

roll back voting methods that were expanded because of the pandemic. That includes early and mail voting options, both of which were popular among voters who sought to avoid virus transmission at crowded polling places.

Republicans have said the bills are meant to shore up public confidence in elections, though members of the GOP have been the leading voices spreading baseless claims that the 2020 election was fraudulent. There is universal agreement among experts that the election, in which Republicans performed well in congressional and state legislative races, was free of widespread problems.

Georgia's new law is among the most consequential for future elections.

The measure allows the Legislature to select the chair of the state election board and make the elected secretary of state a nonvoting member of the panel, essentially sidelining a chief election officer picked by voters. The board could then remove local election officials and replace them.

Associated Press coverage of voting rights receives support in part from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for this content.



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Surge

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against the virus. But as new variants take over, some are making the virus more contagious and some are making the vaccines less protective, he said.

A surge of more infectious variants now could reach people before they've had a chance to be vaccinated, Feigl-Ding said.

Still, he's hopeful that the fast rollout of vaccines will be able to control the spread.

"I think the fourth wave is upon us," he said, "but I think the vaccine will hold it back."

Soon, vaccinations and lower case counts will allow Americans to resume traveling and socializing in groups, Walensky said. But not yet.

"I'm asking you to just hold on a little longer, to get vaccinated when you can so that all of those people that we all love will still be here when this pandemic ends," she said.

Walensky did not specify how much longer. Reich said he thinks just another few weeks could do it.

# Time, money, lawyers: Canal calamity aftermath

John Bacon  
USA TODAY

Ships were once again gliding through the Suez Canal on Tuesday, but the impact of the calamity that halted travel through one of the world's most vital shipping passages will be felt for weeks, months or even years.

The mammoth cargo ship Ever Given, wedged across a narrow section of the canal for a week, was finally dislodged Monday. More than 400 ships backed up by the incident have been moving again, but catching up could take a week or more, experts say.

That's just the beginning.

The first priority is normalizing the global shipping industry. Ahmed Bashir, head of Global Execution Centers for global shipping giant Maersk, said his company had 34 ships stalled in the backup. As the company is notified when its ships can pass



The Egyptian coast guard patrols as a ship navigates the Suez Canal Tuesday, a day after a cargo vessel was freed. TAREK WAJEH/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

through, Bashir said, his crisis team is working to mitigate the delays as much as possible.

The canal carries more than 10% of world trade, and the worldwide cost of the blockage has been estimated at up to \$10 billion a day - about \$400 million an hour. Bashir warned the shipping industry will "feel the ripple of this closure for

some weeks to come."

"It will take some time for the effects of this incident to be fully absorbed," Bashir said in a video message to customers. "Aside from the delays directly caused by the closure, there is an inevitable bunching of vessels that occurs as they call their next ports."

William Lee, chief economist at the Milken Institute, said the incident is about more than finally getting goods to their destinations.

"The supply chain shortages that cause assembly

lines to shut down - that will have a greater impact," Lee said.

While Egypt's Suez Canal Authority works on clearing the shipping backlog, investigators are combing the Ever Given for clues as to what caused the grounding. The Panamanian-flagged vessel weighs 220,000 tons, is nearly a quarter-mile long and carries 20,000 containers. The ship spun around and became stuck in the sand in a windstorm March 23.

Workers dredged 30,000 cubic meters of sand - enough to fill about a dozen Olympic-size swimming pools. The ship's stern was freed Sunday, and the bow was removed from the canal bank Monday. A dozen tugboats were finally able to drag the ship back into the middle of the canal.

The ship "came out intact and it has no problems," the canal authority said.

"This was the result of successful push and tow maneuvers, which led to the restoration of 80% of the vessel's direction," the canal authority said in a statement.

Contributing: Associated Press

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