

Last year I published an editorial about voting during the pandemic, contrasting states trying to make voting more accessible, with states that were fighting efforts to enable ways citizens could vote safely.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately greater voting access is under more attack now. The Brennan Center for Justice noted as of March 24th, “361 bills with restrictive provisions in 47 states. That’s 108 more than the 253 restrictive bills tallied as of February 19, 2021—a 43 percent increase in little more than a month.”<sup>2</sup> This is very disappointing, and once again my home state of Texas is restricting access, trying to ban methods of voting that local officials allowed during the pandemic in last year’s general election. The Texas Senate recently passed Senate Bill 7, which would limit extended early voting hours, prohibit drive-thru voting, and make it illegal for local election officials to proactively send applications to vote by mail.<sup>3</sup> Here’s hoping the Texas House will stand up to the Texas Senate and not restrict the ways citizens of Texas can vote. I think it also demonstrates that the U.S. Supreme Court was premature in its 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* ruling removing the requirement that states with a history of racial discrimination in voting get pre-clearance from the Justice Department before making changes in voting procedures.<sup>4</sup> With so many states trying to restrict voting, and limit the powers of election officials, the U.S. House has passed H.R. 1, For the People Act of 2021, in early March.<sup>5</sup> This bill addresses voter access, election integrity and security, and more. Hopefully this will pass the U.S. Senate and allow the citizens of the United States the right to vote without undue burdens.

The reason for focusing on easier voting access, is because it is time for citizens to look hard at those who represent them and decide if their representatives are truly representing them, or their own personal interests. This is especially relevant to how government officials are handling the pandemic crisis and how well they are trying to protect the health of their constituents, such as keeping mask mandates in place until a majority of a population are vaccinated.

Citizens have other health needs as well as demonstrated in my home state of Texas in February. Many Texans were without power, or were under long rolling blackouts, and then there was a water shortage and many areas had unsafe water for days. To address the devastating power outages that occurred in Texas, The Texas Senate has put forward Senate Bill 3 to overhaul the Texas electricity market and would require upgrades for extreme weather, but has not allocated funding to pay for

the upgrades, and leaves what upgrades should occur to the Texas Railroad Commission, Texas’ oil and gas industry regulator that critics complain is too cozy with the industry.<sup>6</sup> This almost sounds like a repeat of what happened after the last major winter event when the Texas Legislature made winterization upgrades voluntary. Texans would benefit more if the Texas Legislature focused on ensuring power utilities are outfitted to perform during extreme weather events, and can follow guidelines established by a report completed in 2011 on how to keep the Texas power grid from collapsing rather than restricting how and when citizens can vote.<sup>7</sup>

I would like to thank everyone in the GODORT community, the GPO, and the Depository Library Council who reached out to those of us in Texas who were affected by Winter Storm Uri. It was a stressful and crazy week during an already stressful time.

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## Notes

1. Laura Sare, “Editor’s Corner,” *DttP: Documents to the People* 48, no.3 (Fall 2020): 3-4, <https://journals.ala.org/index.php/dttp/article/view/7415/10229>.
2. “Voting Laws Roundup: March 2021,” Brennan Center for Justice, April 1, 2021, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-march-2021>.
3. An Act Relating to Elections, Including Election Integrity and Security; Creating Criminal Offenses; Providing Civil Penalties. SB 7, Texas Legislature, 87th Regular Session (2021), <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=87R&Bill=SB7>.
4. *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013).
5. An Act to expand Americans’ access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, strengthen ethics rules for public servants, and implement other anti-corruption measures for the purpose of fortifying our democracy, and for other purposes, H.R. 1, 117th Cong. 1st Sess. 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1>.

6. Shawn Mulcahy and Erin Douglas, "Sweeping Legislation to Overhaul State's Electricity Market in Response to Winter Storm Heads to Texas House after Senate's Unanimous Approval," *Texas Tribune*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/03/15/ERCOT-winter-storm-pricing/>; "An Act Relating to Preparing for, Preventing, and Responding to Weather Emergencies and Power Outages; Increasing the Amount of Administrative and Civil Penalties." SB 3, Texas Legislature 87th Regular Session, <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=87R&Bill=SB3>; Rachel Adams-Head, "Why a Texas Oil Regulator Could Play the Role of OPEC," *Bloomberg Green*, March 20, 2020 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-20/why-a-texas-oil-regulator-could-play-the-role-of-opec-quicktake>; Kate Galbraith, "At Railroad Commission, A Push to Modernize," *Texas Tribune*, January 25, 2013, <https://www.texastribune.org/2013/01/25/texas-railroad-commission-takes-steps-modernize/>.
7. "Report on Outages and Curtailments During the Southwest Cold Weather Event of February 1-5, 2011," Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, August 2011, [tps://www.ferc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/08-16-11-report.pdf](https://www.ferc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/08-16-11-report.pdf).

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