



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shadow Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Defending Democracy: Protecting Elections from Federal Overreach

Tuesday, April 28

Before I begin, I would like to express my gratitude to the United States Secret Service, Capitol Police, and local law enforcement for their heroic work in disrupting an attack the White House Correspondents' Dinner over the weekend. I am relieved that the Secret Service agent who was injured is recovering and that none of the dinner's attendees were harmed. There is no room for political violence in this country, and we must not tolerate it.

In less than three months, we will observe the 250th anniversary of our Nation's founding. This country was founded on an idea – that we are all free and equal, and, therefore, each of us has a right to participate fully in governing ourselves. It was also founded on a promise – that our laws would enshrine and protect these rights. These founding principles have yet to be fully realized, but each generation has fought to advance them.

My initiation into activism was born of necessity. A child of the Jim Crow South, I never had a new textbook, I didn't get to use the same restaurants or water fountains as white kids my age, and there were a great many people who didn't think Black people should be voting. As a college student, I worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to make sure this country lives up to the promises made in the Constitution.

And the FBI created a file on me that I discovered 30 years later only because of my position in Congress. Unfortunately, I was not the only civil rights advocate the FBI was tracking. The FBI was actively monitoring a number of organizations involved in the civil rights movement and their leaders. Despite government opposition, we made progress by, among other things, getting the Voting Rights Act enacted into law and, later, enacting policies like early voting and mail-in voting that made voting more accessible.

Those of us who have been committed to protecting voting rights have always had to be vigilant to protect them against those who believe free and fair elections don't serve their political interests.

Never has this been truer than when Donald Trump made his foray into presidential politics. Since the Donald Trump decided to make the transition from mediocre game show host to abysmal President, the integrity of our elections has sustained one blow after another. From self-serving conspiracy theories of voter fraud and non-citizen voting to efforts to impose new barriers to registering to vote, the President has pursued his voter suppression campaign with reckless abandon.

In the over five decades I have spent fighting for and protecting voting rights, I have never seen an assault on democracy more frightening, or more shameful, than what we experienced on January 6, 2021.

As the Chief Congressional investigator into the attack on the Capitol and the President's broader scheme to overturn the 2020 Presidential election outcome, I know all too well how close the President

and his co-conspirators came to stealing an election and tearing our Constitution to shreds. But for a handful of people of goodwill, hundreds of brave law enforcement officers, and Members of Congress and staff committed to certifying the election results, we would have had a constitutional crisis on our hands.

To this day, Donald Trump continues to spew lies about the 2020 election and — having been entrusted once again with all the powers of the presidency – has directed both the FBI and Office of the Director of National Intelligence to re-investigate it.

As a result, Tulsi Gabbard seized voting equipment from Puerto Rico, the FBI demanded election materials from Maricopa County, Arizona, and Tulsi Gabbard joined the FBI as it raided an election center in Fulton County, Georgia.

As the President dispatches the FBI and ODNI to relitigate the 2020 election result, he is trained on preserving Republican majorities in the House and Senate, which he apparently believes is aided by voter suppression policies.

Ripping a page out of the 2020 “Big Lie” playbook, the President has been pedaling conspiracy theories about massive numbers of non-citizens voting and mail-in voting fraud to justify his most outrageous anti-voter policies.

He has issued unconstitutional executive orders that would, among other things:

- require citizenship documents to register to vote
- direct DoJ to sue states that count mail-in ballots received after election day
- require Federal access to voter rolls
- and order DHS and the Social Security Administration to develop a national voter list and prohibit the Postal Service from mailing a ballot to anyone not on that list.

His executive orders are the subject of numerous lawsuits, leaving election officials in limbo and draining resources as they prepare for the 2026 midterms. Individuals close to the Administration have floated deploying ICE to polling locations – even the idea that could occur could make naturalized citizens and people of color reluctant to vote given that ICE’s use of profiling has resulted in the detention of US citizens.

At the end of the day, Donald Trump’s election policies serve two ends: the President’s fragile ego and his self-serving political prerogatives. They cast aside the very constitutional principles he has sworn twice to defend.

Donald Trump’s crimes against democracy are too many to list, and the way we stand up to him and preserve our democracy is at the ballot box. So, we must protect access to it. Free and fair elections are at the core of our democracy, and we must be vigilant in protecting them.

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