



## **Policies for fair elections and responsive government**

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Friends of the Earth strives for a healthier and just world. Yet, environmental and social progress on every issue we work on — from curbing climate change to ensuring the safety of the food we eat and the water we drink — is hampered by threats to our democratic system. Together, we must build a democracy where everyone participates, every vote is counted, voting rights are fully enforced and everyone's voice is heard. We deserve to have a say in decisions that affect our lives and our environment. And, we deserve to be fairly represented by elected officials who respect our democratic foundations and institutions and are responsive to our needs.

Friends of the Earth supports efforts to:

- Uphold the right to vote and to have that vote counted
- Secure meaningful participation in our democracy
- Provide transparency into our government and our elections
- Ensure our government is responsive to everyone

### **1. Uphold the right to vote and to have that vote counted**

A strong democracy is one where voting is a fundamental right, civic responsibility and free from discriminatory rules. We support legislation to restore the Voting Rights Act and other policies that incentivize electoral participation. Among other policies, we support:

- Requiring states that have a record of voting rights violations in the past 25 years to obtain preclearance from the Justice Department or a federal court in Washington, D.C., before making any changes affecting voting processes.
- Independent redistricting commissions using criteria that ensure legislators will represent the will of the voters and require transparency and public participation in the process.
- Same-day and automatic voter registration, improving access to polling locations, and early voting
- Restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated people.
- A fair and accurate census, including prohibiting the Department of Commerce from implementing any major operational design that has not been researched, studied and tested for a period of not less than three years before the date on which the applicable census occurs.
- Statehood for Washington, D.C.

### **2. Secure meaningful participation in our democracy**

A strong democracy is one where our influence is based on the strength of our ideas, not the size of our wallets. Our voices and communities should be heard as loudly in our elections and policymaking as wealthy donors and corporate interests that have been unduly influencing our government. We support policies and reforms to end the dominance of big money in politics, empower and incentivize small-dollar fundraising and clarify and strengthen oversight of our campaign finance rules. Among other things, we support:

- Overturning Citizens United by passing a constitutional amendment authorizing Congress and the states to set reasonable limits on raising and spending of money to influence elections and

granting Congress and states authority to distinguish between natural persons and corporations or artificial entities for purposes of campaign spending.

- Creating a small-donor public financing system for House and Senate races that can include innovative programs like matching funds, vouchers, tax credits and other solutions.

### **3. Provide transparency into our government and our elections**

A strong democracy is one where people know who is trying to gain influence over our representatives and our votes. Our government and those trying to influence it should be open, transparent and accountable. We support greater transparency in political spending, ethics and spending decisions being made by the federal government. Among other policies, we support policies that:

- Establish new reporting requirements for Senate-confirmed and other political appointees to disclose whether they have solicited or contributed funds for political purposes to PACs, trade associations and certain nonprofits.
- Enhance transparency and disclosure for online political advertisements to ensure digital ad spending is at least as transparent as requirements for broadcast ads.
- Require shareholder authorization for certain political expenditures by public companies; require certain expenditures to require a board vote; and provide investors and the public with more information about political spending.

### **4. Ensure our democracy is responsive to everyday people**

A strong democracy works to respond to the needs of people and their communities, building trust in governance and equity. Our government and judicial system should be reflective of our communities and responsive to them. We support measures to reduce the power of lobbyists and corporate influence in Congress and the executive branch, as well as to nominate and approve judges who believe our Constitution protects all of us, not just the wealthy and well-connected. Among other policies, we support measures that:

- Establish a five-year ban on individuals appointed to executive schedule positions and on senior congressional staff from engaging in lobbying activities at the federal level.
- Establish a five-year ban on formerly-registered lobbyists from receiving appointments in the executive branch.
- Enact a lifetime lobbying ban on former members of Congress.
- Restrict the total amount of money a lobbyist can donate to, bundle or solicit for a member of Congress or congressional candidate to the individual contribution limit.
- Ban contributions to congressional committee members from entities under the committee's jurisdiction.
- New disclosure requirements mandating that registered lobbyists publicly record meetings with executive branch officials.

*See also Friends of the Earth's related position paper, "Policies for government ethics and accountability."*