



DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

Brian Varela's Plan to Clean Up Washington and Protect the Vote

Democracy only works when the people in charge answer to the people who sent them there. Right now, that basic principle is under attack from two directions: unlimited dark money and corruption rotting Washington from the inside, and systematic efforts to make it harder for working people to vote. These are not separate problems. They feed each other. Corrupt politicians suppress votes because they cannot win fair elections, and they take corporate money because they do not have to answer to the people they disenfranchise. The reforms below cut at both roots. Brian will fight for every one of them.

1. Overturn Citizens United and Get Big Money Out of Politics

The Supreme Court's Citizens United decision opened the floodgates for unlimited corporate money in our elections, drowning out the voices of working people and ensuring Congress keeps answering to the highest bidder instead of the people it is supposed to serve. We need a constitutional amendment making clear that corporations are not people and money is not speech.

Brian was the first candidate in this race to reject corporate PAC money, with a median donation of \$10. Brian is committed to being accountable only to the people of New Jersey's 7th District.

Full transparency is non-negotiable. If someone is spending millions to influence your vote, you should know who they are. Brian supports requiring all groups spending on elections to publicly disclose their real donors, mandating that every political ad identify its funders, cracking down on super PACs that are shadow campaigns for individual candidates, and fixing the broken Federal Election Commission so it can actually do its job.

2. End Stock Trading by Members of Congress

Members of Congress sit in classified briefings. They move legislation that makes certain companies more or less valuable. And under current law, they can legally trade individual stocks based on what they learn in those rooms. That is corruption, plain and simple, and it is one of the main reasons people do not trust their government.

We need to ban members of Congress, their spouses, and their dependent children from trading individual stocks while in office. They can invest in diversified mutual funds or blind trusts, but they should not be able to use their position to enrich themselves at the public's expense.

Brian will not wait for a law to pass. He will place his personal investments in a blind trust and step away from any day-to-day involvement in his businesses before taking office. Public service should mean exactly that: serving the public. Using a seat in Congress as a tool for personal

financial gain is a betrayal of the people who put you there, and Brian will hold himself to the standard he is asking Congress to adopt.

3. Lifetime Ban on Lobbying by Former Members of Congress

Too many members of Congress treat their time in office as an audition for a high-paying lobbying job. They vote the way corporations want, build the relationships K Street is paying for, and walk out the door into a seven-figure salary. The revolving door between Congress and the lobbying industry is one of the most corrosive forces in American politics, and it is destroying trust in government.

We need a lifetime ban on former members of Congress becoming lobbyists. Not a two-year cooling-off period. A lifetime ban. If you serve in Congress, you should do it to serve the country, not to cash in afterward.

This ban would end the corrupt pipeline that turns public servants into hired guns for the same special interests they were supposed to be regulating. It would mean that the relationships members build in office stay in the service of the public, not in the service of whoever can write the biggest retainer check.

4. Expand and Protect Voting Rights: Pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act

The Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder*, and within hours of that decision, states across the country started closing polling places, purging voter rolls, and passing strict voter ID laws designed to suppress turnout in communities of color. That is not a coincidence. It was the intended effect.

Congress needs to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act to restore the full protections of the original law and require federal approval before states can change their voting rules. Every American should have equal access to the ballot box. Voting is a fundamental right, and we need to protect it like one.

5. Ban Partisan Gerrymandering

Politicians should not get to pick their voters. Partisan gerrymandering lets the party in power draw district lines to lock in election results before a single vote is cast. It creates safe seats where representatives never have to compete, never have to listen, and never have to build the kind of broad support that produces real governance.

It also drives polarization. When the only real threat to an incumbent is a primary challenge from the base, politicians stop trying to build consensus and start catering to the most extreme voices in their party. That dynamic is not an accident. It is a feature of a rigged map.

We need independent redistricting commissions in every state to draw fair district lines based on communities, not political advantage. When politicians have to actually compete for votes, voters get real representation and real accountability. That is how democracy is supposed to work.

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