

## **Michelle Obama wades into 2022 midterm elections with urgent message on voting**

By CNN's Rachel Janfaza January 9, 2022

Former first lady Michelle Obama has a message for Americans ahead of the 2022 midterm elections: "We've got to vote like the future of our democracy depends on it."

In a letter titled "Fight For Our Vote," which was published Sunday as an ad in the New York Times, Obama and her voting rights organization When We All Vote called on Americans to continue engaging in democracy amid a historic attack on voting rights.

The letter -- which comes as Congress has yet to move on voting rights legislation at the federal level -- was signed by 30 other civic engagement, voting rights and voter mobilization organizations including the NAACP, Stacey Abrams' Fair Fight Action, Voto Latino Foundation, NextGen America, LeBron James' More Than A Vote and Rock the Vote.

"We stand united in our conviction to organize and turn out voters in the 2022 midterm elections, and make our democracy work for all of us," Obama wrote in the letter.

The former first lady laid out a plan of action and said within the next year, When We All Vote and the coalition of other organizations will work to "recruit and train at least 100,000 volunteers" and "register more than a million new voters."

Obama said the coalition will also enlist thousands of lawyers to protect American voters, work to educate Americans on how to ensure their vote is safe and encourage at least 100,000 Americans to call on their Senators in support of the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, two proposed pieces of legislation that have stalled in the Senate as a result of the filibuster, which requires 60 votes to overcome.

Obama's letter -- published days after the one-year anniversary of the US Capitol riot -- referenced the insurrection and the slew of voting restrictions passed at the state level across the country in its wake. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has vowed the chamber will vote on whether to change the Senate's legislative filibuster rules by Martin Luther King Jr. Day, January 17, if Republicans block Democrats' latest effort to advance voting rights legislation.

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Citing obstacles to voting access throughout history, Obama wrote that in 2022, Americans must continue to fight for their rights.

"Generations of Americans have persevered through poll taxes, literacy tests, and laws designed to strip away their power — and they've done it by organizing, by protesting, and most importantly, by overcoming the barriers in front of them in order to vote. And now, we've got to do the same," Obama wrote.

Obama added: "We must give Congress no choice but to act decisively to protect the right to vote and make the ballot box more accessible for everyone."

While When We All Vote has previously focused on voter registration and mobilization, the organization has recently added an emphasis on education and advocacy.

Last year, Obama and celebrities including Tom Hanks, Tracee Ellis Ross and Kerry Washington, called on Americans to encourage their senators to support the For the People Act, a sweeping voting rights package later blocked by Senate Republicans.

"We spent all 2021 really fighting for federal voting rights legislation. Over 20,000 people took (advocacy) action with us (last year), and we knew going throughout this year, and seeing that Congress was not acting, and that the filibuster was getting in the way, we realized that we really had to take matters into our own hands," Stephanie Young, executive director of When We All Vote, told CNN.

"We know at the end of the day, we're not going to be able to out-organize when it comes to fixing our voting system and modernizing it, and replacing the federal legislation, and that's why it's twofold," Young said.

The coalition of groups signing on to Obama's pledge was formed to bring together some of the largest voting rights organizations.

For its part, Fair Fight Action -- the organization founded by voting rights advocate and Democratic candidate for Georgia governor Stacey Abrams -- has worked to protect the right to vote in Georgia and across the country.

"Fair Fight Action's work with dedicated voting rights activists throughout Georgia has led to enormous gains in voter registrations in our state -- particularly among voters of color, who have helped spearhead advocacy for critical federal voting rights legislation to protect our democracy while also blocking Republicans' most dangerous anti-voter proposals in state legislatures," Hillary Holley, Fair Fight Action's organizing director, told CNN.

"Now, with the GOP's voter suppression campaign ramping up in state houses across the country, Fair Fight Action is proud to join with Michelle Obama and When We All Vote alongside other civil and voting rights organizations to fight back against Republicans' anti-voter agenda. We're ready to work with our allies to recruit new volunteers and keep organizing Americans to push for the Senate to pass new federal protections for voting rights at a time when we need them more than ever," Holley said.

For her part, Young said this type of coalition is a first-of-its-kind initiative for When We All Vote.

"While these groups have worked closely together for years," Young said of the coalition, "We haven't seen them come together with concrete shared goals in this way before."