

109TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. RES. 232

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and reaffirming the commitment of the Senate to ensuring the continued effectiveness of the Act in protecting the voting rights of all citizens of the United States.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 29, 2005

Mr. KENNEDY (for himself, Mr. REID, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. FEINGOLD, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. KOHL, Mr. JEFFORDS, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. BIDEN, Mr. LEVIN, Ms. MIKULSKI, Ms. LANDRIEU, Mr. OBAMA, Mr. SCHUMER, Mr. KERRY, and Mr. SPECTER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

RESOLUTION

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and reaffirming the commitment of the Senate to ensuring the continued effectiveness of the Act in protecting the voting rights of all citizens of the United States.

Whereas brave people in the United States, known and unknown, of different races, ethnicities, and religions, risked their lives to stand for political equality and against racial discrimination in a quest culminating in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965;

Whereas numerous individuals paid the ultimate price in pursuit of political equality, while demanding that the

United States enforce the guarantees enshrined in the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution;

Whereas, on March 7, 1965, a day that would come to be known as “Bloody Sunday”, the historic struggle for equal voting rights led nonviolent civil rights marchers to gather on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama where the bravery of such individuals was tested by a brutal response from State and local authorities, which in turn sent a clarion call to the people of the United States that the fulfillment of democratic ideals could no longer be denied;

Whereas 8 days after Bloody Sunday, President Lyndon B. Johnson called for a comprehensive and effective voting rights bill as a necessary response by Congress and the President to the interference and violence, in violation of the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution, encountered by African-American citizens when attempting to protect and exercise the right to vote;

Whereas a bipartisan Congress approved the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and, on August 6, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed this landmark legislation into law;

Whereas the Voting Rights Act of 1965 stands as a tribute to the heroism of countless individuals and enactment of the Act was one of the most important civil rights victories in the history of the United States, enabling political empowerment and voter enfranchisement for all citizens of the United States;

Whereas the Voting Rights Act of 1965 effectuates the permanent guarantee of the 15th amendment that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State

on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude”;

Whereas the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was amended in 1975 to facilitate equal political opportunity for language-minority citizens and was amended in 1982 to protect the rights of voters with disabilities;

Whereas the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has helped advance the true spirit of democracy in the United States by encouraging political participation by all citizens and ensuring for voters the ability to elect representatives in Federal, State, and local governments;

Whereas the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has increased voter registration among racial, ethnic, and language minorities, as well as enhanced the ability of citizens in those minority groups to participate in the political process and to elect minority representatives to public office, resulting in 81 African-American, Latino, Asian, and Native American Members of Congress and thousands of minority State and local officials across the United States;

Whereas despite the noteworthy progress from 40 years of enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, voter inequities, disparities, and obstacles still remain for far too many minority voters and serve to demonstrate the ongoing importance of the Voting Rights Act of 1965;

Whereas the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provides extensive voter protections, such as equipping voters with the means to challenge election laws that result in a denial or abridgement of voting rights on account of race, color, or language minority status (in section 2 of such Act), eliminating literacy tests nationwide (in section 201 of such Act), requiring Federal approval before jurisdictions

with a history of practices that restrict minority voting rights may implement changes in voting practices and procedures (in section 5 of such Act), providing the Department of Justice with the authority to appoint Federal election monitors and observers to ensure that elections are conducted free from discrimination and intimidation (in sections 6 through 9 of such Act), and mandating language assistance and translated voting materials in jurisdictions with substantial concentrations of language minorities (in section 203 of such Act);

Whereas several of these provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 will expire in August 2007 unless Congress acts to preserve and reauthorize them;

Whereas it is vital to democracy in the United States, and to the efforts of the United States to promote democracy abroad, that the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are fully effective to prevent discrimination and dilution of the equal rights of minority voters;

Whereas, in 2005, the year marking the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, people in the United States must applaud the substantial progress that has been made in protecting the right to vote, but also continue efforts to ensure fairness and equal access to the political process in order to protect the rights of every citizen of the United States; and

Whereas the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been widely hailed as the single most important civil rights law passed in the history of the United States: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

1 (1) observes and celebrates the 40th anniversary of the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of
2
3 1965;

4 (2) reaffirms its commitment to advancing the
5 legacy of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to ensure
6 the continued effectiveness of the Act in protecting
7 the voting rights of all citizens of the United States;
8 and