



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 161

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2015

No. 62

House of Representatives

The House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. WALKER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
April 28, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable MARK WALKER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2015, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 1:50 p.m.

VOTING RIGHTS AMENDMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, when the Supreme Court ruled in 2013 to invalidate the preclearance formula in the original Voting Rights Act, it issued a challenge to Congress to pass an updated one. That is a challenge Congress must accept. Until Congress acts, millions will continue to face barriers at the ballot box.

On April 18, The New York Times editorial board highlighted the disturbing and flawed argument that preclearance

is no longer necessary. Obviously, the Congress of the United States found otherwise.

The editorial stated: "This process . . . stopped hundreds of discriminatory new laws from taking effect, and deterred lawmakers from introducing countless more."

The process to which they were referring was the preclearance process that the Supreme Court threw out. The editors cited a new study that analyzed more than 4,000 rights cases.

They write again: "The study provides the most wide-ranging empirical evidence yet that Congress was amply justified in finding that voting discrimination remains concentrated in the covered States and regions."

When we reauthorized the Voting Rights Act in 2006, Mr. Speaker, we did so with an overwhelming vote of 390-33 in the House. In the Senate, Mr. Speaker, it was 98-0. There was no confusion, there was no doubt in the minds of the Congress of the United States, and that bill was signed by President George Bush. It was an overwhelmingly bipartisan conclusion that preclearance was still necessary some 45 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

This has traditionally been an issue that brings Democrats and Republicans together, and I am proud to have co-sponsored a bipartisan compromise bill sponsored by Republican former chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary, JIM SENSENBRENNER, who was the sponsor and chairman of the committee when the reauthorization was effected in 2006.

The bill that we have introduced, called the Voting Rights Amendments Act, with Republican former chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary, JIM SENSENBRENNER, and Ranking Member JOHN CONYERS, as well as JOHN LEWIS—great hero of the civil rights movement—that would answer the Supreme Court with an updated preclearance formula, as they suggested. In fact, in

the past 2 years since the Court's ruling, we have seen a resurgence of efforts to limit when and where minorities can vote.

The editorial goes on to say, Mr. Speaker: "Voting discrimination no longer takes the form of literacy tests and poll taxes. Instead, it is embodied in voter-ID laws, the closing of polling places in minority neighborhoods, the elimination of early-voting days and hours, and much more."

Mr. Speaker, I hope the House will take up a bill to restore the Voting Rights Act without delay and crack down on these discriminatory practices that only serve to weaken our democracy by excluding millions of voices that deserve to be heard.

2015 is the 50-year anniversary of the passing and signing of the Voting Rights Act. That act was achieved only after some died, many bled, and a large number participated in the march from Selma to Montgomery.

That galvanized American public opinion and led the Congress to pass one of the most significant civil rights and democratic rights bills of its history. Congress has the responsibility to act and act now.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Members of the Congress that I discussed this with the majority leader. The majority leader indicated that we would have discussions about bringing Voting Rights Act to the floor, as did I and Mr. Cantor, his predecessor as majority leader.

I look forward to those discussions to facilitate and to speed the bringing to the floor of the bipartisan restoration of the protections in the Voting Rights Act amendments.

Mr. Speaker, I will insert into the RECORD the editorial reference.

[From the New York Times, Apr. 18, 2015]

VOTING RIGHTS, BY THE NUMBERS

When the Supreme Court struck down the heart of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, its main argument was that the law was outdated.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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Discrimination against minority voters may have been pervasive in the 1960s when the law was passed, Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. wrote, but “nearly 50 years later, things have changed dramatically.” In this simplistic account, the law was still punishing states and local governments for sins they supposedly stopped committing years ago.

The chief justice’s destructive cure for this was to throw out the formula Congress devised in 1965 that required all or parts of 16 states with long histories of overt racial discrimination in voting, most in the South, to get approval from the federal government for any proposed change to their voting laws. This process, known as preclearance, stopped hundreds of discriminatory new laws from taking effect, and deterred lawmakers from introducing countless more.

But Chief Justice Roberts, writing for a 5–4 majority, invalidated the formula because “today’s statistics tell an entirely different story.”

Well, do they? A comprehensive new study by a historian of the Voting Rights Act provides a fresh trove of empirical evidence to refute that assertion. The study by J. Morgan Kousser, a professor of history and social science at the California Institute of Technology, examines more than 4,100 voting-rights cases, Justice Department inquiries, settlements and changes to laws in response to the threat of lawsuits around the country where the final result favored minority voters.

It found that from 1957 until 2013, more than 90 percent of these legal “events” occurred in jurisdictions that were required to preclear their voting changes. The study also provides evidence that the number of successful voting-rights suits has gone down in recent years, not because there is less discrimination, but because several Supreme Court decisions have made them harder to win.

Mr. Kousser acknowledges that the law’s formula, created without the benefit of years of data, was a “blunt tool” that focused on voter turnout and clearly discriminatory practices like literacy tests. Still, he says, the statistics show that for almost a half century it “succeeded in accurately homing in on the counties where the vast majority of violations would take place.”

Members of Congress had seen some of this data in 2006 when, by a near-unanimous vote, they reauthorized the Voting Rights Act for 25 years. In fact, the legislative record contained more than 15,000 pages of evidence documenting the continuation of ever-evolving racially discriminatory voting practices, particularly in the areas covered by the preclearance requirement.

But the Roberts opinion showed no interest in actual data. Nor did it seem to matter that the law was already adapting to current conditions: Every one of the more than 200 jurisdictions that asked to be removed from the preclearance list was successful, because each showed it was not discriminating.

Instead, the court said the coverage formula had to be struck down because it failed to target precisely all areas with voting rights violations in the country.

Mr. Kousser’s study does not solve this problem, in part because there is no easy way to compare discrimination in places that are under a federal microscope with those that are not. But the study provides the most wide-ranging empirical evidence yet that Congress was amply justified in finding that voting discrimination remains concentrated in the covered states and regions. In other words, the tactics may have changed, but the story remains largely the same. Voting discrimination no longer takes the form of literacy tests and poll taxes. In-

stead, it is embodied in voter-ID laws, the closing of polling places in minority neighborhoods, the elimination of early-voting days and hours, and much more.

The Supreme Court suggested that Congress could fix the law by updating the coverage formula to more closely reflect where violations are occurring today—and a bipartisan bill introduced in 2014 and reintroduced this year has done just that. So far it has gone nowhere because most Republicans oppose it. Even if it were to pass, there is no guarantee it would survive before a Supreme Court that is highly skeptical of any race-conscious efforts to reduce discrimination.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department and private groups are doing what they can to combat the flood of new discriminatory laws with the surviving provisions of the Voting Rights Act. But without preclearance requirements for places with the worst records on racial discrimination, they will always be a few steps behind.

AMERICAN ANGELS OF MERCY IN SYRIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, last year, a National Geographic photographer captured 5,000 desperate people navigating their way through a sandstorm, then eventually breaking through a barbed wire for safety through the border into Turkey. They were among the roughly 11 million Syrians who have now been displaced from their homes over the past 4 years.

The rich, the poor, the elderly, and the children, Christians, Muslims, they all share a new identity: a war refugee. Though they may be alive, many of them have little hope for a better life.

A Syrian mother and a refugee under World Vision’s refugee program said she and her family lived in a small apartment and they were happy before the war; they were never envious of anyone, but after living in a tent with some 25 other families in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, she now envies even the dead in Syria.

Unable to work because it is illegal, the more than 3.8 million refugees in neighboring countries wonder every day if they will be given aid to feed their kids. Safe places where children can go to learn, laugh, and play don’t exist. Parents worry that their children might also join the ranks of ISIS, become victims of child labor or forced marriage.

A 14-year-old girl who participated in Save the Children’s programs in Jordan had been married off by her father, not because he loved her less, but because it was one less mouth to feed in the family. Young girls like this one are torn within their identity. They wonder whether they should be playing with fellow children or must be a wife.

For the 7 million people internally displaced in Syria—7 million, that is bigger than New York City—those people face a double-edged sword every day because they may be killed by Assad’s monsters or by the rebels. In June 2012, government forces executed

entire families in front of one another and their neighbors.

Ten-year-old Fatima stood bravely before the soldiers with \$2 in her hand, asking to spare the life of her 11-month-old baby brother, Mattessem. They still shot. The bullet went through Mattessem and killed their mother. Out of a family of 25, only Mattessem, Fatima, the father, and the grandfather survived those executions.

Assad kills his people indiscriminately with barrel bombs that are embedded with chlorine and with shrapnel. These attacks bring scores of victims into the already overworked makeshift hospitals in Syria; 175 of these hospitals have been hit by barrel bombs by Assad.

Dr. Sahloul, a Chicago doctor and head of the Syrian American Medical Society, has become one of the dozens of American doctors who have helped the wounded in this war. He has risked being arrested, tortured, and even killed for aiding the opposition. He has treated victims of these barrel bomb attacks and has shared with my committee a young boy’s vivid account of the attack.

Instead of drawing a sun and animals, this child drew people with their legs severed—severed from their bodies—bloody, and tears in the eyes of the victim. These children have had the first years shrouded in war. They have been deprived of a childhood stolen by war.

We are all made the same way, no matter what we look like or where we live, and deep down in our soul, all of us, even these Syrian refugees, just want to be free.

For every day the reign of terror continues, the colossal number of 12.2 million Syrians who are in dire need of humanitarian assistance continues to grow. U.S. Government-funded programming is working to meet this need. U.S.-based nongovernment organizations, both religious and secular, are doing great work inside Syria and the surrounding region to address the many needs of the displaced.

American funding has provided life-saving food and essential items for several hundred thousand people inside the constantly bombarded city of Aleppo. Dozens of medical facilities throughout Syria are providing trauma and primary health care, as well as much-needed psychological and social support. Child-friendly spaces are set up in a safe place for children to receive support, to learn, and to play.

Mr. Speaker, war is hell, and the non-combatant citizens are the ones who suffer from this hellish violence. Until the war in Syria is over, the lifesaving humanitarian care done by these American angels of mercy give hope to millions of refugees.

We thank these selfless people that help those affected by this war in Syria.

And that is just the way it is.