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Senate

The Senate met at 9:50 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Spirit of God, from generation to generation, people of faith speak of Your greatness. Thank You for the strength You give to all who love You and for the blessings You bestow upon our Nation.

Today, give our lawmakers the contentment that comes from knowing and serving You. Clear their hearts with Your peace as You bring them into a closer relationship with You.

Shield this land we love against all enemies foreign and domestic as You teach us to dwell in Your peace. Lord, make us to know a constancy of Your presence, to be aware of the certainty of Your judgment, and to give primacy to prayer in these challenging times.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HELLER). The Democratic leader is recognized.

VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in less than 18 months, Americans all over the country will cast their ballots in the 2016 elections. This exercise fulfills one of the most basic promises of our con-

stitutional democracy: that all citizens have the right to vote, regardless of race, gender, or social status.

This right to vote and the guarantee that each vote counts equally is the foundation of our form of government. It ensures that as this country changes, the elected officials who represent its citizens will also reflect those changes. The electorate should be able to elect those who represent them, their thoughts, and their ideals. Yet, there is an ongoing effort all over America to obstruct the work of perfecting our Union by hindering progress where it is needed the most.

We see this reflected in the debate about whether the Confederate flag—a symbol of bigotry and racism—still has a place on public lands. There should be no debate. The answer to this question is no. And that matter should have been settled long ago. It was not. It took the deaths of nine innocent people, perhaps, to move this issue forward.

We see this reflected in the debate about whether gay people have the right to marry. After all that has gone on, there should be no debate in this regard. The answer to this question is yes. The matter should have been settled long ago.

We see this reflected in the insidious fight to keep certain citizens from exercising their constitutional right to vote by instituting voter ID laws. There should be no debate. The answer to this question is no poll tax or any sort of maneuver designed to prevent voting should exist anywhere at any time. That matter was settled long ago—or at least we thought it was.

The fight is not new. It is deeply rooted in our Nation's history. I finished many years ago now a book, "Freedom Summer," about these courageous, brilliant young men and women who went to Mississippi and spent one summer. It pointed out how the people of Mississippi at that time would do anything they could to keep

an African American from voting. That is wrong. The Constitution now grants women and citizens of all races the right to vote. There have long been efforts to undermine that right. We also see it playing out in State capitols across the country. Districts are being gerrymandered to ensure that minority votes have the least possible impact on election outcomes. We have seen it playing out in courtrooms, where the Voting Rights Act has been under attack.

Congress passed the Voting Rights Act 50 years ago—hard to believe but 50 years ago. Historically, it is one of the country's most important laws—or was an important law. It aimed to clear the path to the ballot box for all citizens who choose to vote. But 2 years ago, the Supreme Court, in one of their questionable decisions, struck down a crucial section of the Voting Rights Act, in a 5-to-4 decision in the case of *Shelby County v. Holder*. As a result of the Court's decision, it is now easier for States to enact laws making it harder for citizens to vote, and they have taken that way past where they should have. Voter ID, shortening the time for early voting—they are doing so many different things to prevent people from voting. It is hard to believe there would be efforts made to stop people from voting.

In the States where we have same-day registration, I am not aware of a single case—not a single case of any type of fraud. The voter turnout where we have same-day registration is tremendous.

In the Presiding Officer's State and my State, there have been efforts made over the years to make sure that 30 days before an election, either a primary or general, no more registrations. How ridiculous. I personally have tried to get that changed for decades, but no luck. The county clerks from 15 rural counties have enough juice in the State legislature to prevent that from happening. It is too bad. Why in the world

- This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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should we stop registration a month before an election? Election day is when people are so excited about voting. So I am really very disappointed in what is happening in my own State regarding keeping people from voting.

The Voting Rights Act was very important, but now it is harder and harder for people to vote. There is little question that Republican-controlled State legislatures have taken advantage of this decision. I repeat: In States all across this country, Republican-controlled State legislatures have passed burdensome voter ID laws that target minority voters especially, college students especially, and many other groups, to prevent them from voting.

In Ohio—a State that experienced the longest voting lines in the Nation, even longer than the questionable Florida election—the Republican legislature scaled back early-voting hours in an effort to keep people from voting. The legislature in North Carolina eliminated same-day registration when it worked so well and the turnout—it helped significantly. How can we work to form a more perfect union when some States actively work to prevent our fellow citizens from voting?

We have a moral obligation to protect the right to vote for every American citizen. Our country is stronger when every eligible voter participates. The Dean of the Senate, Senator LEAHY, has introduced robust legislation to repair the damage from the Supreme Court's Shelby County decision. I am happy to support the efforts made by the senior Senator from Vermont. His bill will restore the heart of the Voting Rights Act. It will create a new nationwide coverage formula that applies to any State with repeated voting rights violations in the last 25 years. It will also establish a targeted process for reviewing voting changes and also any changes these jurisdictions make all around the country that have a record of discrimination against voters. This bill requires reasonable public notice for voting changes and also allows the Attorney General to request Federal observers to be present in places where a serious threat of racial discrimination may occur.

We must do everything we can to restore and reestablish and defend the Voting Rights Act. Congress must act to protect one of the most important legislative accomplishments of the civil rights era. We should ensure that every American has equal access to the ballot. It is the right thing to do. As Dr. King said many years ago, "There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right." To push forward, under the words of Dr. King, is so important.

Let's do everything we can to have people vote. Let's stand together on increasing, not diminishing, one's ability to vote. Why? Because it is the right thing to do.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

TRADE PROMOTION AUTHORITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the road to yesterday's win for the middle class on TPA was never going to be an easy one. It was hardly a quick one.

We always knew that was going to be the case, but I thought we owed it to the working men and women of our country to push ahead anyway. So we did. Through every bump and twist along the way, Republicans and Democrats held together.

In achieving something that can open more opportunities for working families, we proved the growing power of good ideas in the new Republican Congress. In passing legislation that can facilitate the lowering of barriers and the lifting up of our workers in the 21st century, we proved that this is a new Congress that is back to work on behalf of the American people.

Passing trade wasn't the first bipartisan achievement of this new Congress, and it won't be the last, but it is significant. It opens the door for more wins for the middle class as trade negotiators move forward under this President and, importantly, under the next President as well.

I thank everyone who worked with us to get here on both sides of the aisle. It is thanks to continued cooperation and no end of determination that we were able to achieve another important accomplishment for our country.

WARRIOR GAMES 2015

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting with some of our Nation's heroes. These men and women are taking part in Warrior Games 2015, an annual DOD-organized sporting event for both veterans and wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers from every corner of the country. This year's games featured approximately 250 athletes from the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force, and Marine Corps. All of these wounded warriors gave it their all in heated competition. Their bravery and their perseverance through adversity serve as a source of inspiration to the rest of us. Their determination serves as a continuing reminder that heroism endures long after events on the battlefield.

It was a great honor to meet some of these courageous athletes and their families yesterday afternoon. They were here in the Capitol. I shared the thanks of a grateful nation with many men and women who wear our Nation's uniform or who recently have. I shared my personal gratitude as well, because their heroism and their sacrifice represent an enduring source of freedom for every other American.

I hope they never forget it. I hope they are reminded when looking out to cheering crowds on the field, because America won't forget what the men and women who stood in our defense have given all of us for our freedom.

So let us hope that our Nation will always find brave warriors like them.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AWARENESS DAY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final matter, Saturday, June 27, is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day.

Sadly, post-traumatic stress disorder is an affliction that touches too many of our veterans. Raising awareness of PTSD and combatting the myths and misinformation that surround it are incredibly important. There are effective treatments for PTSD, and all of us can do a few simple things in honor of PTSD Awareness Day.

First, we can learn more about PTSD by getting the facts on the condition and its treatment. We can also reach out to somebody who might have PTSD or be at risk, particularly among the veterans community. And, finally, we can pass along what we learned to others to continue to raise awareness.

So I hope Americans will take action on this PTSD Awareness Day to shed some light on an often misunderstood condition and hopefully to reach out to someone in need.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Arizona.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, before I make a unanimous consent request, I wish to say, for the information of my colleagues, that, as happens on occasion, the legislation of the National Defense Authorization Act was in violation of the Ways and Means jurisdiction in the House, which then led to an automatic blue slip, which means that basically, for all intents and purposes, the entire bill comes to a standstill.

In order to repair that, it requires unanimous consent in the Senate in