

over the years. He was elected as the Commonwealth attorney for the 35th Judicial Circuit and served in that post from 1964 to 1970. He was also the Republican candidate for Lieutenant Governor in 1967.

In addition to his work and positions in politics, Tom gave generously of his time to many worthy causes, including service as the director of the Pikeville Methodist Hospital and as a trustee of Pikeville College. He was the president of the Pikeville Rotary Club and volunteered his time with the Coal Operators Association and the Boy Scouts.

Tom was a Christian who attended Pikeville United Methodist Church. He also served on the church's administrative board. His hobbies included reading, traveling, boating, and being physically active. He loved to travel and had visited all the continents.

Tom is survived by his wife, Myrtle; the two were married on August 21, 1949. He is also survived by his daughters Susan G. Tillotson and Jan E. Sharpe; his sons Kevin N. Ratliff and Chris Ratliff; his grandchildren Elizabeth J. Spraggs, Juliet Kamper, Jonathan K. Wright, Thomas N. Ratliff, Daniel C. Ratliff, and Jordan B. Ratliff; his great-grandchild, Tiara Wright; his sister, Charlene R. Easton; and his brother, Roger E. J. Ratliff.

I want to extend my deepest condolences to Myrtle and to the family in this time of loss. The Commonwealth of Kentucky joins them in mourning this hero and public servant. Tom Ratliff bravely served his country in uniform during World War II, and served his fellow Kentuckians in public office. He was a hero and a patriot who I was proud to know and to call a friend. He will be greatly missed, not only by his family but by his many friends who knew and loved him.

RECOGNIZING THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF MIRACLE FLIGHTS FOR KIDS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, today I recognize the 30th anniversary of Miracle Flights for Kids.

Since its founding in southern Nevada in 1985, Miracle Flights for Kids has been providing airline tickets for sick children in low-income families. These flights are truly miracles that allow children to receive the specialized medical care they need and otherwise would not have access to due to distance and travel costs. In the beginning, Miracle Flights for Kids was a small organization that served a handful of local children, but today the organization coordinates hundreds of flights a month, including a record 976 flights in April 2015. To date, Miracle Flights for Kids has coordinated more than 92,000 flights resulting in 50 million miles of travel. These flights have helped to save and improve the quality of life for countless children.

Families from across the country and the world contact Miracle Flights for Kids for assistance, and the organiza-

tion works to ensure eligible children have access to the care they need, regardless of how far away the treatment center is located. They have flown children relatively short distances, such as flights from Nevada to California, and longer distances, including flights from Alaska to Colorado. They have even flown children from as far away as Turkey to Maryland. Miracle Flights for Kids also works to ensure that children can travel back to their treatment center as many times as their doctor deems necessary. For instance, they provided more than 40 flights from Ohio to Texas for one little girl so she could receive the medical attention she required.

Having a sick child is a devastating, trying experience for any parent. The services provided by Miracle Flights for Kids give families some peace-of-mind as they focus on getting their child healthy. I commend Miracle Flights for Kids for 30 years of exceptional service to children and families in Nevada and throughout the world. Their work is truly appreciated and admired, and I wish them continued success for years to come.

RECOGNIZING MARGARET A. FOCARINO AND JAMES D. SMITH

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I wish to take a moment to recognize two distinguished public servants who are leaving their positions at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, or USPTO,—Margaret “Peggy” Focarino, Commissioner for Patents, and James D. Smith, Chief Administrative Patent Judge. Both have played critical roles in bringing the USPTO into the 21st century by working tirelessly to implement the Leahy-Smith America Invents Act, the most comprehensive update of U.S. patent law since the 1950s. The patent system is one of the cornerstones of our economy. It drives innovation, growth, and job creation. This country has been fortunate to have dedicated leaders such as Ms. Focarino and Mr. Smith in key positions at this crucial Agency.

Peggy Focarino became Commissioner for Patents in 2012, where she has been instrumental in developing and implementing administrative changes made by the Leahy-Smith act. Working collaboratively with all stakeholders in the patent community while implementing this law is a hallmark of her tenure as Commissioner for Patents. As someone who worked for nearly 6 years to pass comprehensive patent reform legislation, I can attest to the fact that it is not easy to bring all of these stakeholders together and build consensus. The provisions she worked to implement include the transition to first-inventor-to-file and the USPTO's fee-setting authority, but her work encompassed a number of other aspects of the Leahy-Smith act as well.

Ms. Focarino's impressive tenure as Commissioner for Patents likely did not come as a surprise to anyone who

followed her rise within the USPTO. She started at the Agency in 1977 as a patent examiner. In 1997, she was promoted to the senior executive service. Throughout her almost 40 years at the USPTO, she distinguished herself as a leader within the Agency, receiving the Department of Commerce Silver Medal for Leadership in 2010. She also received American University's School of Public Affairs Roger W. Jones Award for Executive Leadership in 2010. While the USPTO will continue to do important work without her, there is little doubt that her leadership will be missed.

James Smith also played a key role in the implementation of the Leahy-Smith act. Mr. Smith became the Chief Administrative Patent Judge in 2011. During his tenure, Mr. Smith worked to implement the postgrant review proceedings the law established. Thanks to Mr. Smith's leadership at the Patent Trial and Appeal Board, these postgrant proceedings have been successful in providing low-cost alternatives to litigation for reviewing the patentability of issued patents. His strong and varied background in the private sector, including time spent working on intellectual property issues at large companies and law firms, served him well as he helped the USPTO implement these essential components of the Leahy-Smith act.

It is always difficult to see good public servants leave their roles. Ms. Focarino and Mr. Smith can look back proudly at their record of public service and point to meaningful accomplishments that have improved the U.S. patent system. I wish them both the best in their new endeavors.

VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT OF 2015

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I support the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015, an important step on the road to protecting the right to vote for all Americans. It responds to a recent Supreme Court ruling that rolled back critical voting protections that had proven effective for decades and that Congress had reauthorized several times.

This landmark legislation would reaffirm the importance of the vote as a pillar of our democracy and restore a powerful shield to combat voting discrimination. I thank Senator LEAHY for his leadership on this bill, and I am proud to be an original cosponsor of a bill that protects access to the ballot box for all American citizens.

Mr. President, 50 years ago, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965, legislation that he called “a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that has ever been won on any battlefield.” At the time he signed the bill into law, millions of Americans were denied the right to vote based on the color of their skin.

President Johnson called this “a clear and simple wrong” and acknowledged that the Voting Rights Act’s “only purpose is to right that wrong.” With the stroke of a pen, President Johnson enacted a bill that threw open the doors of democracy for all Americans and promised that the precious right to vote would be protected.

The United States has had a long and bumpy road to even achieving that promise. In the decades before the Voting Rights Act, Blacks had been denied their right to vote and participate in the political process. They were harassed and intimidated from going to the polls. Ordinary Americans who marched for themselves or their fellow citizens to exercise the right to vote were beaten, arrested, jailed, or even murdered.

On June 21, 1964, 51 years ago this week, three civil rights workers—two white young men from New York City and one black Mississippian—were killed in Mississippi by the Ku Klux Klan simply for trying to help register African Americans to vote. Their sacrifice inspired countless others to fight to make our union more perfect. Even in my home State, in Cherry Hill, NJ, stands a monument that pays tribute to these three civil rights workers who died in the struggle for equality.

Few things made African Americans feel less equal in America than being deprived of the basic right of citizenship—the right to vote. They even suffered the indignity of having to count beans in a barrel, take a literacy test, pay a poll tax, or recite from memory the preamble to the Constitution without a glitch just to cast a ballot. As a result of disenfranchising tactics, no Black southerner served in Congress from 1901 to 1973. For decades, the promises of liberty and justice for all embedded in our national charter were simply words on paper.

But the Voting Rights Act changed America. By the end of 1966, 1 year after it became law, only 4 out of the traditional 13 Southern States had less than 50 percent of African Americans registered to vote. In Mississippi alone, Black voter turnout increased from 6 percent in 1964 to 59 percent in 1969. Throughout the South, and indeed our entire country, Blacks and Latinos were elected into public office in significant numbers.

The Voting Rights Act has been the most powerful tool to defend minorities’ voting rights. The law established new ground to curb voter discrimination by requiring Federal “preclearance”—that is, Federal review—of voting law changes in areas with histories of discrimination. And therein lies its power. There is no remedy for citizens after an unfair election has occurred. Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act was the only Federal remedy that could prevent unfair elections before they took place.

The lesson of history is clear—section 5 of the Voting Rights Act has made America live up to its promises

of liberty and justice by ensuring that every citizen has an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy. That is why preserving the Voting Rights Act is so important. That is why Presidents Reagan, Ford, and Nixon had signed prior reauthorizations of the act. That is why in successive Congresses—both Republicans and Democrats—repeatedly reauthorized section 5.

In 2006, Congress reauthorized the Voting Rights Act by an overwhelming bipartisan margin. The law was reauthorized 98 to 0 in the Senate and 390 to 33 in the House and President George W. Bush signed the bill into law. It was a testament to the fact that men and women from across the aisle could come together to protect what is most important to our democracy, the right to vote. A right the Supreme Court has called fundamental because it is preservative of all other rights.

Congress developed an expansive record during its 2006 reauthorization that justified the need for section 5 as a necessary and effective tool to protect minority voters. The House and Senate Judiciary Committees found ample evidence that, even after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, States and localities continued to engage in overt and subtle tactics that discriminated against minority voters.

Two years ago, a narrowly split and deeply divided Supreme Court disregarded extensive findings of Congress and gutted the Voting Rights Act. In a case known as *Shelby County v. Holder*, five Justices on the Supreme Court put the Voting Rights Act on life support by striking down the formula by which Congress determines which States and localities are subject to preclearance.

That 2013 decision has nullified the ability of the Federal Government to use the preclearance requirement. Section 5 has protected constitutional guarantees against discrimination in voting even when civil rights laws tried for over 100 years to achieve the success of the Voting Rights Act. The Court reached its decision despite Congress finding an overwhelming record of contemporary voting discrimination. Even the Chief Justice wrote, “voting discrimination still exists: no one doubts that.”

Yet, the *Shelby County* decision rested on a flawed logic that the Voting Rights Act was a victim of its own success. Justice Ginsburg’s dissent noted a “catch-22” in the majority’s logic. She said:

If the statute was working, there would be less evidence of discrimination, so opponents might argue that Congress should not be allowed to renew the statute. In contrast, if the statute was not working, there would be plenty of evidence of discrimination, but scant reason to renew a failed regulatory regime.

I agree with Justice Ginsburg that the Court’s decision to strike down section 5 “when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory

changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you’re not getting wet.”

Even in the aftermath of *Shelby County*, States continued to enact laws that make it harder for American citizens to cast their ballot. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the Nation’s foremost civil rights coalition, released a report last year entitled “The Persistent Challenges of Voting Discrimination.” That report documented 148 voting rights violations in America since 2000. Because each voting rights violation often impacts thousands of voters, the report underscored that the impact of racial discrimination in voting is much more profound than the nearly 150 documented violations suggest.

New State laws erect barriers to voting, which restrict voter registration drives, eliminate same-day voter registration, reduce the early voting period, and require photo identification and proof of citizenship to vote. So far, 32 States have passed laws requiring voters to show some kind of identification at the polls, which often have a disparate impact on minority and low-income voters.

The Voting Rights Advancement Act would help prevent voting practices that are likely to be discriminatory before they cause harm. It would create a new nationwide coverage formula requiring States and localities to obtain preclearance for voting changes that have historically been found to be discriminatory. It would enhance the authority of courts to order a preclearance remedy, require greater transparency regarding voting changes, and clarify the Attorney General’s authority to send Federal observers to monitor elections across the country.

In his “I Have a Dream” speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.” The Voting Rights Act has been one of our most important tools to fulfill that promise and protect voters against discrimination. Congress now has a historic opportunity to ensure that the critical provisions in that law are restored and strengthened.

Now is the time to recommit ourselves to the cause of justice. Now is the time to safeguard our democratic values. Now is the time to protect the progress so many Americans worked so hard to establish. I urge all Senators to support this bill that would combat voter discrimination and breathe life back into the Voting Rights Act.

PASSENGER RAIL LEGISLATION

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, the tragic Amtrak derailment last month shined a light on the critical need to have a strong, safe passenger rail system for the millions of passengers traveling on our rails. My heart goes out to