

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

the families and individuals impacted by the tragedy and I hope we never see anything like it again.

Last week I joined my colleague, Senator WICKER in introducing the Railroad Reform, Enhancement, and Efficiency Act, comprehensive passenger rail legislation that boosts our infrastructure and implements needed reforms. Most importantly, it improves safety on our Nation's railways. This 4-year authorization is a step forward in providing the stability Amtrak needs to be successful and serve the consumers who rely on it.

Across every mode of transportation, America needs critical investment. Nowhere is the investment crisis more pronounced than in New Jersey. The century-old tunnels that run under the Hudson River between New Jersey and New York are reaching a breaking point. We must act with urgency to find State and local partners to replace this critical infrastructure. New Jersey is also home to the Portal Bridge, which is in need of replacement in order to prevent delays and closures that slow our economy. It has been estimated that the loss of the Northeast Corridor could cost the country \$100 million per day; a devastating impact that we cannot afford. The costs for these projects are significant, which is why we must find new ways to help advance them.

Our legislation is a game changer for large-scale rail projects. The bill helps unlock and leverage innovative financing opportunities by improving the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program, or RRIF. Our legislation will establish new creditworthiness criteria focused on the merits of the project, increase repayment flexibility, help leverage private financing opportunities, and speed up the process of applying for and receiving a loan—all of which can help advance projects like the Gateway Project along the Northeast Corridor. As China and other countries invest tens of billions for rail infrastructure, we must do more than maintain the status quo. Our bill's financing provisions enable us to take every possible advantage to improve our rail capacity and infrastructure.

Our legislation also includes strong safety provisions to protect passengers and workers. Positive train control, or PTC, was cited as a technology that could have prevented the tragic derailment last month and our legislation will advance deployment of PTC by authorizing grants and prioritizing loan applications to support implementation. Additionally, the legislation will improve safety by requiring action on priorities like grade crossings and enforcing speed limits, as well as worker protections, among various other provisions.

It is important to note that a strong authorization of funding for passenger rail is only the start. Investing in the future of America's rail network will also require dedicated and multi-year

streams of revenue to support the funding authorized in this bill. I am committed to working with my colleagues on the Finance Committee to make that a reality.

The Railroad Reform, Enhancement, and Efficiency Act is important for our global competitiveness and a forward step in promoting investment in our infrastructure. I thank the committee leadership and Senator WICKER for their support and work on this important legislation that will improve the lives of New Jerseyans and individuals across the country I urge my colleagues to support it.

3RD ANNIVERSARY OF DACA PROGRAM

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I would like to commemorate the third-year anniversary of the creation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, DACA, program. On June 15, 2015, we celebrated this successful, although not comprehensive, policy that has provided deportation relief to more than 660,000 child immigrants nationally, including 14,900 in Colorado.

This life-changing program has allowed young people who were brought to the United States as children—DREAMers—to fully engage in their communities by continuing their education and having the opportunity to work. They have been able to open bank accounts, obtain credit cards, and receive driver's licenses. Deferred action is giving these young people relief and some degree of certainty to pursue opportunities that would not have been available to them otherwise.

DACA has given DREAMers hope for their future. They include DREAMers like Alex Alvarado-Renteria who has lived in Carbondale, CO for the last 18 years and has known no other home outside of the United States. Alex's parents migrated from Mexico and worked as farmworkers in order to give their children an opportunity for a better life. Alex was granted DACA and has since graduated from the Metropolitan State University of Denver with a bachelor of arts in history and Chicana/o studies. He now plans to become the first in his family to earn an advanced degree by attending law school and opening up his own immigration law practice one day.

We also have DREAMers like Lourdes Bustos from Denver, CO who has lived in the United States for the last 26 years and who was able to stay with her children upon receiving DACA. It was years before Lourdes realized she was not documented and would not be able to work legally or get a driver's license. Granting her deferred action meant that she would not be separated from her family. Lourdes has graduated from high school and has opened her own painting business.

DACA has played a transformative role in increasing social and economic integration for youth who have been raised and educated in our country. It

has given DREAMers an opportunity to invest in their futures. It has empowered DREAMers with a sense of community and belonging.

This program has helped many of our young people, but only offers a temporary solution to the unfair consequences of our broken immigration system. This anniversary should also serve as a stark reminder that every day that Congress fails to enact immigration reform, it jeopardizes our economy, our safety, and our communities. It is time to put politics aside and work to enact comprehensive immigration reform.

TRIBUTE TO ADMIRAL SAMUEL LOCKLEAR

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, after a lifetime of service to our Nation, ADM Samuel J. Locklear III recently stepped down as Commander of United States Pacific Command and retired from the U.S. Navy. On this occasion, I wish to honor Admiral Locklear's 43 years of distinguished uniformed service to our Nation.

Admiral Locklear graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1977. He has led at every level from command-at-sea to theater command. Prior to assuming command of the United States Pacific Command, he commanded U.S. Naval Forces Europe and concurrently, U.S. Naval Forces Africa and NATO's Commander of the Allied Joint Force Command, where his leadership was instrumental in galvanizing an effective coalition of 18 NATO nations to support the complex Libya air campaign.

At Pacific Command, Admiral Locklear provided the strategic vision required to lead in a region vital to America's future peace and prosperity. He has presided over the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific with an even-keeled leadership approach that has focused our Nation in a time of difficult security challenges and austere budgets. Pacific Command is the oldest and largest of our geographic commands encompassing roughly half of the Earth's surface, extending from pole to pole and across the vastness of two great oceans. Admiral Locklear skillfully navigated the complexities and competing interests of this expansive theater. He has worked to strengthen alliances, reinvigorate old ones, cultivate new partnerships, and maintain a robust forward presence to assure and defend our allies and partners.

Admiral Locklear's legacy of service will be as a driving force behind a renewed commitment to protecting America's enduring interests in the Asia-Pacific region. When the Nation needed its very best in military experience, leadership, and advice to confront the challenges and threats we face globally, Admiral Locklear answered the call.

I join many past and present members of the Senate Armed Services Committee in my gratitude to ADM Samuel Locklear for his outstanding