

Voting Rights Advancement Act. It is a commonsense proposal to reinstate the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act which were wrongfully struck down by a conservative Supreme Court and which have a long history of bipartisan support in the Senate.

I want to thank my colleague Senator LEAHY, who spoke earlier today, and Chairman DURBIN and all of my other Democratic colleagues who had a hand in drafting this proposal, and a special thanks to our colleague, the Senator from Alaska, who announced yesterday that she will vote in favor of opening debate on the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. I know it was not a decision she made lightly—she called me from Alaska and let me know—but my Democratic colleagues worked hard with her to compromise on a proposal that she could support while still maintaining the basic thrust of their legislation.

Now, just as Democrats in the Senate worked with Senator MURKOWSKI on legislation to strengthen our democracy, we will work with other Republicans in good faith to improve this legislation, but they must come to the table first. I want to emphasize once again what today's vote is about. We are not asking any Republican to support specific legislation. Today is about whether or not we will vote to begin debate here in this Chamber.

Again, the preclearance provisions that are being updated in today's bill have long been supported by both sides of the aisle repeatedly. The Voting Rights Act, which originally instituted them, has been updated five times in the last half century, under both Republican and Democratic Presidents, and with votes from both sides. This has always been a bipartisan issue in the past; it should be no different today.

I commit to my Republican colleagues that we will have a full-fledged debate process here on the floor, where our colleagues can offer germane amendments and voice what concerns they may have.

Now, I hope more Members on the other side of the aisle will follow Senator MURKOWSKI's example. Senate Republicans shouldn't be afraid of merely starting debate on an issue we have long debated and long supported in the past. Merely crossing arms and squelching any opportunity for progress is unacceptable. If Republicans have different ideas on how to achieve a stronger democracy, they owe it to the American people to come forward and debate their ideas. I hope they do the right thing and vote for cloture to move forward on this discussion later today.

NOMINATION OF DILAWAR SYED

Mr. President, finally, Mr. Syed. For every executive branch nominee who grabs headlines, there are many, many more who escape the spotlight while still playing an essential role in our government. Almost always, these

nominees proceed through this Chamber with bipartisan support, but, today, a handful of extreme Republican Senators are needlessly and callously stonewalling many of President Biden's uncontroversial nominees. The case of Dilawar Syed—nominated to be second in charge at the SBA—stands out as being particularly, particularly egregious.

He is an American success story. He came to this country from Pakistan decades ago and became a successful entrepreneur, small business owner, and coalition builder. His nomination is backed by more than 200 civic, government, higher education, and business groups and leaders, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce—hardly a mouthpiece for the Biden administration. Upon his confirmation, Mr. Syed would be the highest ranking Muslim in government, the highest ranking Muslim for Senate confirmation.

But, for reasons that confound common sense, a handful of Republicans on the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee are not just blocking Mr. Syed's vote; they are refusing to meet in order to allow his nomination to proceed. They are just not even meeting, and that holds his nomination up. I haven't heard of that happening in a very long time.

To date, what is so confounding is that these Republicans who are holding Mr. Syed up have failed to offer a clear reason why they oppose him. Each time they try to come up with an explanation, whether it is cheap ad hominem attacks or partisan tie-ins to the culture wars, their arguments fall flat and are easily refuted.

Why are these handful of Republicans opposing this nomination?

Although Republicans have boycotted his markup several times, they will have a chance to give this man his vote tomorrow. Chairman CARDIN has worked with Republicans to try to get them to show up to tomorrow's markup. I commend Chairman CARDIN's effort.

Today, I ask: Will any Republicans have the decency to show up tomorrow to his markup and give Mr. Syed a vote?

If they want to oppose him, they are free to go on record and explain why, but boycotting his markup, resorting to cheap and offensive attacks, and needlessly blocking a qualified public servant is a shameful, shameful course to take.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative 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 MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING JEAN ROUNDS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, we learned of the tragic passing

of a much loved member of the Senate family.

Jean Rounds was an impressive and active public servant who served the people of South Dakota in many ways, including as their first lady; who served a large and tight-knit family as mother and grandmother; and who, for our colleague, Senator MIKE ROUNDS, was, quite simply, the center of his world.

The life MIKE and Jean built together was a partnership founded on faith, service, and love. By all accounts, Jean's bravery, MIKE's devotion, and the loving care of their family in the face of a terrible illness made their inspiring example shine even brighter.

So the Senate is united in our grief. We will continue to hold our friend MIKE and the entire Rounds family close in our thoughts and prayers in the difficult days that lie ahead.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, on a totally different matter, last night was a difficult evening for Democrats. The Democratic Party has wildly misread their mandate and let the radical left run the country. Local Democrats let teachers unions keep schools shut months longer than necessary and told parents they didn't get a say in what their kids were learning. Washington Democrats have supercharged inflation, recreated welfare without work requirements, and made America significantly less energy independent.

President Biden was only given a 50-50 Senate and a tiny majority in the House, but he decided to let the radical left run the country. Citizens wanted a return to normalcy but have gotten a never-ending series of government-created crises.

So, look, the American people will not stand for this. That is what voters told Democrats last night all across the country. The results from different parts of our country demonstrate that this was, in large part, a referendum on national issues. But it is not too late. Democrats should listen to the voters, drop this reckless taxing-and-spending spree, and stop trying to ram through a socialist transformation that the American people never asked for.

The radical transformation that Democrats are writing behind closed doors would compound every mistake their party has made. Look at virtually any part of American families' lives, and Democrats' reckless taxing-and-spending spree would seize control of it and yank it way to the left.

The same Democrats who don't want parents involved in schools want to take over daycare and pre-K, crowd out faith-based and family providers, and put this vast new system under the control of the culture warrior HHS Secretary, who sued the Little Sisters of the Poor.

The same Democrats who pretend to defend working families are dead set on a massive tax cut that would overwhelmingly benefit rich people in blue States. One of the biggest pieces of

their signature bill is now a huge tax cut for rich people.

The same Democrats who say they support science and medicine want to slap arbitrary price controls on Americans' prescription drugs, reducing future innovation and, according to experts, literally costing Americans their lives who would have lived if not for this policy.

The same Democrats who pretend they care about Social Security and Medicare want to stretch seniors' existing Medicare Program even thinner. Even though the trust fund is already just a few years away from running dry, they would do this in order to fund new giveaways.

The same Democrats who talk a big game about competing with China want to raise taxes so high that our own American industries would face a higher tax rate than businesses have to pay in communist China.

The same Democrats who are still trying to sneak forms of amnesty into this bill also want to make illegal immigrants eligible for new welfare.

The same Democrats who pretend they are forward-thinking on energy issues want to hammer the U.S. economy with painful regulations while bigger emitters, like China, just keep on emitting—maximum pain for American families and no measurable gain for emissions or the climate.

The bill our colleagues are writing behind closed doors is terrible from top to bottom—more debt, more taxes, more inflation, and fewer options for American families.

This reckless taxing-and-spending spree would hurt families and help China. This radical social takeover is the last thing Americans need and the last thing Americans want. The voters of America just yesterday gave our colleagues a preview of that fact last night. It is not too late. They could still pull back from the brink while they can.

VOTING LAWS

Mr. President, now on one final matter, practically every single week, Senate Democrats make another attempt at grabbing new power over America's elections.

Remember, a giant partisan power grab over voting procedures in every county and State was Democrats' ceremonial first priority of this whole Congress. They revealed their mission from the very start. That first proposal would have sent Federal funds to political campaigns; overridden common-sense State rules, like voter ID; and even changed the Federal Election Commission itself from a neutral referee into a partisan body.

It was so bad—so bad—that even the New York Times called it a flawed bill that was “designed to fail.” That is, of course, exactly what happened here in the Senate, but the Democrats tipped their hand right from the start. They gave away the entire game.

So every time that Washington Democrats make a few changes around

the margins and come back for more bites at the same apple, we know exactly what they are trying to do.

Many of the go-nowhere bills that the Democratic leader has used for political theater had Congress essentially appointing itself—itsself—the Board of Elections on steroids for every county and State in America. Congress was going to micromanage elections to a degree with no precedent.

This new version, today's episode in this ongoing series, is only slightly different. Rather than congressional Democrats trying to grab all the power for themselves, they are instead trying to pull off the power grab on behalf of the Democratic Attorney General. Instead of Washington Democrats and the legislative branch seizing power over elections in the country, it will be Washington Democrats and the executive branch doing the same thing—a slightly different twist on the same concept, but for the same partisan reasons, with the same basic problems.

In order to let Attorney General Garland dictate voting procedures, Democrats want to overturn Supreme Court precedent. Our colleagues' flimsy arguments keep losing in court, so they are now trying to overturn the courts. When States cracked down on the absurd practice of ballot harvesting, Democrats ran to the courts, claiming discrimination, and lost.

When liberals wanted to kill voter ID laws—which are popular with majorities of Black Americans and Hispanic Americans, by the way—they ran to the courts.

What happened?

They lost.

When the Supreme Court ruled in 2013 that one part—just one part—of the 40-year-old Voting Rights Act needed updating, the radical left said the sky was falling and voter turnout would collapse.

Well, of course, the opposite happened. Turnout in 2020 was the highest since 1900. In one recent poll—listen to this—94 percent of voters say voting is easy. Ninety-four percent of voters say voting is easy, and, of course, it is.

Moreover, the Voting Rights Act is still in effect. The courts haven't struck down that law. It is simply false to suggest otherwise. The Supreme Court simply ruled that there was no evidence—no evidence—supporting the continuation of 40-year-old practices that were designed in the mid-1960s to address the specific challenges back then.

There is nothing—nothing—to suggest a sprawling Federal takeover is necessary. Nationalizing our elections is just a multidecade Democratic Party goal in constant search of a justification. Their rationales change constantly, but the end goal never does.

Americans don't need Attorney General Garland ruling over their States' and their counties' elections any more than they need congressional Democrats doing it themselves. So the Senate will reject this go-nowhere bill

today, like we have rejected every other piece of fruit from the same poisonous tree.

This body has real business we should be tackling. The Defense authorization bill is months behind schedule. The majority has been derelict in allowing bipartisan progress on appropriations. These are things we need to be doing.

Every designed-to-fail political showboat comes at the expense of the things that we ought to be working on.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJAN). The Republican whip.

REMEMBERING JEAN ROUNDS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, let me begin this morning by saying how sorry we are to hear the news about the loss of the former First Lady Jean Rounds of the State of South Dakota.

MIKE and Jean have been friends of ours for many, many years. I was involved in Senator ROUNDS' first campaign for office when he ran for State Senate back in 1990. I have known Jean since I worked in the administration of late Governor George Mickelson along with her at the Department of Transportation, and I just can't tell you what a loss it is for the State of South Dakota.

She was an individual who carried herself with incredible grace, always kind, had a humility about her that I think people just found infectious. She was very down-to-earth. She never lost that. As a First Lady, she conducted herself in a way that represented a great model for the State of South Dakota, both in her character and her conduct. The style, the way in which she has served as First Lady, is something that I think made every South Dakotan proud.

So, today, along with all South Dakotans, Kimberley and I mourn her loss. We lift up the Rounds family in our prayers, and I hope and pray that through this time they will feel God's grace and comfort in new and profound ways. But just a tremendous loss, and I know for my colleague MIKE ROUNDS, who has been a great partner of mine—we have been involved in politics together now, in South Dakota, for over 30 years—that he, too, is going to need our support and our prayers in the days ahead.

This is a tough job under ordinary circumstances, but with the burden that he has been and will be carrying now into the future, it is going to be really important that we do everything we can to support him and stand with him, and today especially with him and his family.

ELECTIONS

Mr. President, there is a lot of interpretation about what happened in these off-year elections last night. Obviously, the results in two traditionally Democrat-leaning States are causing people to speculate about what it all means.

And I listened to some of the analysis, and there are lots of armchair quarterbacks who are doing the analysis about what these—what we all