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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, we pause to thank You for providing us with strength for each day. As You continue to be our help in times of trouble, may our hearts be lifted to You in gratitude.

Lord, guide our lawmakers to show their gratitude for Your mercies by obeying Your precepts as You help them navigate through these challenging times. May their reverence for You provide them with a wisdom that will glorify Your Name. Keep our Senators from deviating from integrity so that their thoughts, words, and actions will please You.

We pray in Your Holy 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Alan Davidson, of Maryland, to be Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). The Senator from Vermont.

JOHN LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, last week I spoke on the floor, and I reflected on the unthinkable events of January 6, 2021. We all remember when a violent mob attempted to snuff out one of our democracy's most sacred traditions: the peaceful transition of power. That mob's attack on our Nation's Capitol was fueled by our former President's Big Lie, the utterly false alternate reality that Joe Biden stole the 2020 election through widespread fraud.

But the January 6 insurrection, as nightmarish as it was, was not the only thing that was spawned by the Big Lie. Inspired by the former President's baseless conspiracy theory, dozens of States have passed new laws suppressing voters and making it easier for partisan officials to overturn the will of their constituents. These have been billed as "election integrity" or "election security" laws. Even George Orwell would be impressed by these brazen euphemisms.

Disenfranchising tens of thousands of minority voters does nothing to improve the integrity of our elections, and empowering partisan actors to disqualify ballots and ignore the popular will actually makes our elections more insecure.

A record number of these voter suppression laws are being considered and enacted as we head toward a major midterm election that will shape the direction of our country. Many of these laws would not see the light of day if the Department of Justice still possessed its preclearance powers under

the 1965 Voting Rights Act. However, the Supreme Court unwisely decided to gut the Justice Department's preclearance powers in the Shelby County v. Holder decision in 2013. And then, adding insult to injury, the Supreme Court toppled another critical pillar of the Voting Rights Act in the 2021 Brnovich decision, even further limiting the Federal Government's tools to combat voter suppression.

So with a green light from our Nation's highest Court and constant prodding from a man who refuses to accept reality, partisan State actors have breathed new life into the Big Lie—not by breaking laws as the January 6 mob did but by making them.

Now, I happen to have a bipartisan bill to restore the Justice Department's powers to oversee and prevent States from enacting discriminatory voting laws: the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. I worked very hard to craft a compromise bill that has garnered Republican support here in the Senate, so it was truly a low point when Republicans recently refused to even allow debate on my bipartisan legislation—wouldn't even allow debate. Isn't that the whole point of being a Senator—to debate and vote on bills?

How can you justify telling your constituents that you refuse to even allow debate on a voting rights bill with a 56-year record of bipartisanship? Are we that afraid to simply do our jobs?

It bears repeating, but the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would simply restore and update provisions of the Voting Rights Act that have been overwhelmingly supported by both parties throughout the law's history. The Voting Rights Act has been reauthorized by large bipartisan majorities in Congress five times and proudly signed into law by Presidents Nixon, Reagan, and George W. Bush. That is not what you might call a liberal trio of Presidents.

The most recent Voting Rights Act reauthorization in 2006 was a 98-to-0

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



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S103

vote here in the Senate. In fact, a number of Senators still serving today, both Republican and Democrat, voted to support that legislation, as did I.

Now, the compromise bill I crafted with Senator MURKOWSKI follows the very same blueprint of these other bipartisan efforts to restore the Voting Rights Act. Probably I am old-fashioned, but it would be a tragedy if Senators have completely sacrificed our sense of common purpose at the altar of partisanship.

We used to believe that protecting our right to vote—the very right that gives democracy its name—is bigger than party or politics. We used to believe that a system of self-government—a government of, by, and for the people—is one that is worth preserving for generations to come.

And we used to believe, regardless of party, that government exists to serve the will of the people, not the other way around. I would sincerely hope we still believe these things. The only way to prove it, though, is through our actions.

I don't know what the next few weeks is going to have in store, but if we have an opportunity to consider the bipartisan John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, I hope that all of us—my Republican friends and Democrats—will at least have the courage of their convictions and allow a vote on it.

And if you oppose a bipartisan bill to restore a landmark voting rights law that has had nearly six decades of unwavering bipartisan support, then have the courage to stand up on the Senate floor and vote against it. I, for one, will proudly vote yes. All the tweeting and partisan posturing that seems to consume most of our energy these days will quickly be forgotten. What will be remembered for decades is what the Senate did in our democracy's hour of peril. I hope—indeed, I pray—that the answer is not nothing.

Too many hide behind parliamentary procedures not to have to vote on anything. What is wrong with us? We get 6-year terms. Don't be afraid to vote. Vote yes or vote no, but stand up and let the people know where you stand and vote. This “Well, we are going to block this coming to a vote” means, “I don't have the courage to stand up and vote.” That is all it means.

If you want to stop these things from coming to a vote, it means you don't have the courage to vote; you are not willing to go on record and vote or you are afraid somebody might look at your vote someday and say: Hmm, why did he or she vote that way?

I have voted more than 17,000 times on this floor. I have been proud to vote the way I have. I am sure I could look back over decades of voting and find a vote here and a vote there and say: You know, maybe I should have voted differently, but these issues always come back up again, and I will correct my vote—but not if we are not allowed to vote.

I had one Senator say that the reason we want this kind of open voting is so that we can elect just Democrats. That is balderdash. My State of Vermont has probably the most open voting, the most accessible voting, of any State in the Union. We also have one of the highest turnouts of any State in the Union. Anybody can request an absentee ballot. Anybody can vote right up to the last minute.

And is this for partisanship? I look at the last election a little over a year ago. We elect our Governor and our Lieutenant Governor separately. Voters all came to the polls in a record turnout. They elected a Republican as Governor and a Democrat as Lieutenant Governor. I think the Republican who was elected is proud of the way we vote, and I know the Lieutenant Governor who was elected, she is proud of the way we vote because it reflected that the voters actually vote for who they want, not in some partisan way.

And we hurt this country and we hurt this Senate that I love if we are afraid to vote. I am proud to be the dean of the Senate. I am proud to be the President pro tempore. But I am not proud when we don't vote. I am not proud when we hide behind mechanisms and we don't vote.

I am not proud to see partisan voting on nominees, something that has blocked—something where there has been far more votes against women in our Senate Judiciary Committee than I have seen in the decades I have served on that committee.

We can't do this. Stand up and vote. Let people know where you stand. If it is your automatic thing to vote against women for nominations, I disagree with that, but have the courage to stand up and vote and show people where you are. That is what we have to do.

If people are afraid to vote and have their votes heard, their votes recorded, then they don't belong in the U.S. Senate—not in a body that should be the conscience of the Nation.

I hope that we will come together and vote these voting rights bills up or down. In this country, we have seen too many times in the past where people were not allowed to vote or were blocked from voting—from whatever way it was done. And think of every time that happened. Our country suffered. Our country suffered.

What we are saying is, let everybody vote—whether Republicans, Democrats, or Independents—stand up and vote, have the ability to vote. Don't use artificial ways to block people from voting just because you think they may vote differently than you do, just as I have fought all my career to make sure that, in my own State of Vermont, everybody has a chance to vote.

Marcelle and I have even done ads on our television saying: We want everybody to vote, whether you are voting for a Republican or voting for a Democrat. Get out and vote.

Of course, I was hoping they would vote for me, and I am sure my Republican opponents hoped they would vote for them. But the point I was trying to make is, it is important that everybody votes, whether they are voting for me or against me. And that is why in Vermont we have one of the highest percentage of voters.

And if we want to keep having these “suppression of vote” bills, we all suffer. The country suffers. Our image around the world suffers. Don't be afraid to vote. We are not going to get perfect people every time, but we can have a perfect way of voting. In the long run, the country is better off.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam 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 majority leader is recognized.

TWIN PARKS NORTH WEST TOWER FIRE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today my thoughts, my prayers, and condolences are with everyone whose lives were ripped apart because of the awful fire in the apartments that ignited yesterday at the Twin Parks North West tower in the Bronx. Seventeen people lost their lives in yesterday's fire, including eight innocent children. Dozens of others were injured, many critically so. We pray for their recovery. Many are still in the ICU.

It was the deadliest fire in New York City in the last 30 years, an unspeakable tragedy made a thousand times worse because it happened within the confines of people's own homes—places that should be safe, should be secure, should be shielded from moments of terror like the ones we saw yesterday.

I grieve for all the families, friends, and neighbors whose lives were suddenly cut short in the fire. Many were from immigrant families, people who came to our city to start climbing up the ladders of prosperity and a decent life for themselves and their children in this beautiful country, and now they are lost.

I commend the brave firefighters who stepped up to beat back the fire, save lives, and keep the surrounding communities safe. They did not think about their own safety. They just answered the call and did their jobs. That is what firefighters do. We respect them. We love them. I am profoundly grateful for them and all the workers who are rebuilding from the damage, as well as the health workers tending to the injured.

Last night, I joined with the Governor, Mayor Adams, and with other members of the city and local government. It was a broad group because New York always pulls together in times of tragedy, and we had people