

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

from all parts of this city and all different backgrounds coming together to support those families impacted by the fire. At the Federal level, we will do whatever we can—housing assistance, disaster assistance, and help for all immigrant families.

Many of those affected by the fire came from Gambia and other West African countries on a program called Diversity Visa, which I was proud to author. I say to these immigrant families: Do not hesitate to reach out to local and Federal authorities. You will find nothing but a helping hand.

When tragedy strikes our city, New Yorkers come together. We embrace one another. We help however we can. And we always find ways to come back stronger than before. That has been true throughout our city's history, and it shall remain true as we get through this latest, awful tragedy.

#### DEMOCRACY

Madam President, now on defending democracy, last week, the Nation observed the 1-year anniversary of the greatest violent assault against our democracy since the time of the American Civil War. Though the Capitol attack of January 6, 2021, was confined to a single day, the attacks on our democracy have not ceased. The Big Lie—the terrible fantasy that our elections are rife with voter fraud and that Donald Trump won the 2020 election—lives on to this day and is spreading throughout our country, used to undermine our democracy.

Donald Trump has such an infantile ego that he cannot accept that he lost. So he spreads the Big Lie. But just as bad—or almost as bad—are all those in politics, in the media, and elsewhere who know it is a lie but continue to spread it, to the grave detriment of the fundamental roots of this country, its democracy.

Tomorrow, President Biden will travel to Georgia and make the moral case to the Nation that the time has come to act to defend democracy and protect voting rights, even if it means changing Senate rules to restore the Senate.

Every single lover of democracy across America, especially those of us in this Chamber, should take heart of the President's message and ask ourselves: What can we do to protect free and fair elections in this country?

The Senate, I believe, stands ready to follow through on the President's call. Later this week, we will hold a vote yet again on legislation to protect our democracy and protect the sacred right to vote. Everyone in this Chamber will have a chance to go on record. Will Republicans join Democrats in a bipartisan manner to move forward on defending democracy or will they once again mount a filibuster and offer their implicit endorsement of the Big Lie?

I hope they join us, but to date, unfortunately, I have seen precious little suggesting they will do so.

On the contrary, our Republican colleagues have gone to great lengths recently to distract from the dangers of

Donald Trump's Big Lie. Senate Republicans are so stung by our arguments about voter fraud and the Big Lie that the Republican leader has actually tried to argue that it is actually Democrats pushing a big lie when we warn about voter suppression.

The threats of voter suppression are not false; they are dangerous. The Republican leader's line of argument is gas-lighting, pure and simple. The Republican leader has pointed repeatedly to the experience of the 2020 election as proof, somehow, that there exists no effort to suppress the vote. But he ignores that the problem today is not just about what happened during the 2020 election. It is about what happened after, and it is happening today.

If Leader McCONNELL doesn't want to get into specifics about the laws passed by Republican legislators across this country to limit the right to vote, then we Democrats will. Despite the fact that the 2020 election was free, fair, and accurate, in the year that followed at least 19 States suddenly decided to rewrite the rules that govern the way people voted in their respective States. At least 33—33—new laws have passed across the country that will make it harder to vote, harder to register to vote, and, worst of all, potentially empower partisans to arbitrate outcomes of future elections instead of non-partisan election workers. And that may be just the beginning because legislatures in various States are preparing new laws as they enter the 2022 sessions of their legislatures.

I ask my Republican colleagues: Take a look at what has happened in many of the Republican-led State legislatures. When Republicans in States like Texas reduce polling hours and polling locations, how does that not make it harder for people to vote? When Republicans in States like Florida, Kansas, Iowa, and Texas make it harder for people to even register to vote—even to register to vote—how is that not suppressing their fundamental right to vote at all? What does that have to do with election security?

When Republicans in States like Georgia, Indiana, and Florida cut back on the number and availability of locations where people can drop off their absentee ballots, how can Republicans say that voting hasn't been made harder? And when Republicans in States like Georgia make it a crime to give food and water to people waiting in line at the polls, how is that not making it harder for them to cast a ballot?

Some of the examples are especially egregious. According to one recent report, Lincoln County in Georgia is looking to eliminate all but one polling location in the entire county before the next election—one location in a whole big county. That is disgusting.

Some voters who live in the county would have to drive 23 miles just to drop off a ballot. This in no way makes voting more convenient. It makes it an enormous burden.

Let's be abundantly clear. These new anti-voter laws are on the books today

because their authors cited the Big Lie, cited the fictitious bugaboo of voter fraud, and are trying to succeed where the insurrection failed. It is a slow-motion insurrection but a very, very pernicious one.

We have yet to hear, on substance, any serious attempt from Senate Republicans defending these terrible new laws. They don't mention them. The truth is our Republican colleagues cannot defend them because the goal of these laws is very clear: They are deliberately targeting all the ways that younger, poorer, and non-White Americans typically access the ballot.

And by blocking this Chamber from taking any action, Senate Republicans are implicitly offering their own endorsement of the Big Lie.

Senate Democrats have been clear of our intentions from the start: The Senate must pass legislation that will safeguard our democracy and protect people's right to vote. It is why we have pushed the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act numerous times here on the floor, only for Republicans to filibuster them and prevent the Chamber from having so much as a debate.

By hijacking the rules of the Senate and preventing any movement, Republicans are saying they oppose policies that guarantee same-day voter registration, policies that safeguard against election subversion, policies that protect poll workers, and policies that prevent faulty and dangerous voter roll purges.

By blocking action in the Senate, Republicans are saying they oppose efforts to fight the power of dark money and efforts to end partisan gerrymandering. Senate Republicans are saying they are perfectly fine with laws that limit voter registration, limit early voting, and limit the number of polling places and drop boxes. They are even fine with policies that criminalize giving food and drink to voters at the polls.

These laws are anathema to the very spirit of our democracy. They are Jim Crow 2, and it is the Republican Party, by and large in this Senate, supporting the reenactment of those Jim Crow laws.

If Republicans refuse to join us in a bipartisan spirit, if they continue to hijack the rules of the Senate to turn this Chamber into a deep freezer, we are going to consider the appropriate steps necessary to restore the Senate so we can pass these proposals and send them to the President's desk.

On this month—the same month we mark the 1-year anniversary of an armed insurrection at the U.S. Capitol—the question before the Senate is a simple one: How will we find a path forward on protecting our freedoms in the 21st century?

Members of this body must now face a choice: They can follow in the footsteps of our patriotic predecessors in this Chamber or they can sit by as the fabric of our democracy unravels before their very eyes.