

people are looking for help, that fails to meet the needs of our farmers and our families. They passed a farm bill that would hurt our farmers by preempting State laws such as Prop 12 that create new markets for our farmers.

The Senate now has to do better. Democrats and Republicans in this Chamber must come together. We must put aside poison pills such as Prop 12 preemption and pesticide preemption and negotiate a bold farm bill that helps our farmers and families and meets this crisis that has been growing and growing and growing.

And at a time when we are seeing President Trump's policies causing food crisis to increase at an alarming rate, that bold farm bill must reverse the destructive Republican SNAP cuts that already left nearly 1 million of our children today going to bed hungry.

I hope that we rise to this occasion in the Senate. I hope that we are a nation that knows our fundamental health and well-being rely on American farmers. They protect our heritage. They are stewards of our land. They are the hope for a better, healthier future.

Let's stand together, join together, and be bold, be strong, and bring about a better deal—a new deal—for our farmers.

#### JUNETEENTH

Mr. President, this week, not many hours from now, we are going to celebrate Juneteenth.

We all know the story of Juneteenth, that there were slaves in Texas that had not gotten the word that they were free. A civil war that cost so much blood and treasure to this country—no other war has seen so many Americans dead—and yet, at the end of that war, many, many people had not heard the Emancipation Proclamation, did not know they were free.

It wasn't until that fateful day on Juneteenth that slaves—now free people—in Texas heard about their freedom. There was jubilation. There was celebration. And the tradition of Juneteenth started.

I am very familiar. It is hard for me to walk on this Senate floor, this sacred civic space—it is hard for me to walk here and not recognize the history.

Right after Reconstruction, we saw the first Black person ever to walk on this floor. We saw a Black Senator and a Black Senator elected to this body—not popularly elected—but back then we put our legislators in the Senate by votes of State legislatures.

We saw House Members come from Southern States, as well, being elected in free, fair elections in that Reconstruction period—because freedom in America is not just defined by not having chains. Freedom in America means being able to participate in this democracy. And in that brief period of the Reconstruction era, we saw free and open elections. African Americans rushed to the polls and voted at 70 and 80 percent and began to elect people in

fair elections. We saw multicultural legislators. We saw Blacks and Whites in States sharing power. It was extraordinary, this brief window of time.

But then the Reconstruction period ended, and a reign of terror fell throughout the South. We saw Black elected officials, Black judges, Black mayors being dragged out of their offices, beat, and some of them lynched. We saw laws being passed by State legislatures to bar Black people from voting, to put on poll taxes and other extraordinary hurdles to stop African-American participation and African-American voting. That very idea of being free was now undermined and undercut by a set of unfair laws.

And what happened to Blacks in the Senate? What happened to Blacks in the House of Representatives? Well, they disappeared.

I know the last speech—I have read it before—by George Henry White. The last Black person, in 1901, gave the final speech, and he predicted that one day African Americans would return to our Federal legislature, would return to the House of Representatives, would return to the States. It is called the "Phoenix Speech" because he predicted that one day Blacks would return to these bodies, one day elections would be free, one day we would reclaim our democracy of one person and one vote. It was 1901, and he was from North Carolina. And it wouldn't be until the 1990s that another Black person would come to be elected from North Carolina.

From those days in the 1870s and 1880s, with that reign of terror and the denial of vote, it wasn't until the 1960s that laws were secured, passed through the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House, that gave the right to vote a more fair and equal chance. It was called the Voting Rights Act of 1965, this extraordinary piece of legislation that secured the right to vote for African Americans.

And, finally, African Americans start returning to our legislature. We saw Edward Brooke get elected to the U.S. Senate. We saw Carol Moseley Braun be elected to the U.S. Senate. The third person was Barack Obama, elected to the U.S. Senate. And I was No. 4—the fourth Black person in history to be elected to this body.

After this history of horror and struggle and pain, after girls were killed in a bombing, the Edmund Pettus Bridge marchers beaten on Bloody Sunday, Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner being killed in Mississippi, the stories of horror of those folks who tried to stand up for the right to vote, tried to fight to advance the cause of equal voting—finally, in 1965, the Voting Rights Act was passed—equality at the polling place, justice returned. And this body and the Chamber across the Capitol began to see, as was predicted by George Henry White, Blacks come back to Congress—justice, fairness, equality secured by this Chamber, secured by Congress, signed by a President.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 held strong and allowed that fairness to be seen and allowed voters to have a fair say.

But here, as we get ready to celebrate Juneteenth and those ideals of freedom, I have to stand here on this Senate floor, recount this history, and say that we are at another crisis point in our democracy because the Supreme Court now has gutted the Voting Rights Act, eviscerated section 2.

And what has happened as a result? Before the ink was dry, we saw Southern States—those same States that, a century before, used the legislative power at the State level to eviscerate Black voting fairness, they raced really quickly to draw congressional lines on their maps with the express purpose of diluting African-American voting power, literally eliminating districts where African Americans had fair representation, in order to stop them from having a voice in Congress.

Here we are celebrating Juneteenth, but there is an irony—a painful, bitter-sweet truth—that is being told that, right now, we are seeing legislature after legislature in the very States that made up the former Confederacy moving with all deliberate speed to try to stop African Americans from having a fair say, a fair voice, equal rights in voting. And the consequence of that is already being seen.

Just like George Henry White, who knew he would not last one more election cycle, I see colleagues now who know that their districts have been diced up with intentionality in order to stop their voters from having a representative in Congress.

What did our ancestors struggle for? What did generations who swore an oath to this flag that this would be a nation of liberty and justice for all, what do those people who died in the movement, what do those folks who struggled and sacrificed, what do those folks who literally watched, finally, fairness and equality coming to maps in the South, what are they to say now?

I can't stand on this floor as one of the few and still only a handful of African Americans ever to serve in this body without knowing upon whose shoulders I stand, the debt that I owe, the price that they paid so that we should have a Federal Government that is truly of the people, for the people, and by the people.

We know our history is full of dirty tricks and unfair games that were played to stop some people from voting, so that even though those folks made up majorities in their communities, they would have no say in Congress. It is a bitter, ugly, wretched history that we have overcome. It speaks to the greatness of our Nation that we have overcome. It speaks to the mightiness of a rainbow coalition of Americans—Black folks and White folks, people from all backgrounds—who joined arms and sang songs and marched toward freedom that helped

this country to evolve and to grow into a more perfect Union.

And here we are, on the eve of Juneteenth, and we see not a stride forward but a stride back, but a step back, but our democracy being knocked down again by people who do not believe in the ideals of a democracy, of fair voting, fair maps, fair representation.

But I am here to tell you right now that progress is not always linear, that we are not in a nation that always, always marches forward. We have seen setbacks before. We have seen challenges, pains, and sorrows. What I am here to tell you is that this most recent dark chapter that is ongoing right now will come to an end. I am here to tell you that weeping may endure through the night, but joy cometh in the morning. I am here to tell you that we may have a setback and we may have a falling down, but this is not a failure. This is not final. We will fight.

I am not talking about a physical contest. I am talking about what makes democracies thrive, which is when we stand up and organize, we stand up and mobilize, we stand up and make sure that our voices are heard.

On this Juneteenth, we need to recommit ourselves, like our ancestors did, to the highest ideals of our democracy, which are freedom and liberty. And how are these rights secured upon our Nation? It is by people in this country standing up and securing those rights through action.

We are not a nation whose story is powerful people preying upon the powerless. We are a nation that has shown that the people hold the power and that the power of the people is greater than the people in power.

Six people in black robes, they were wrong in *Plessy v. Ferguson*; they were wrong in *Korematsu*. We overcame them then, and we can overcome them now.

The people united for the cause of freedom is the great story of America, and it is time that our generation—benefiting from the fruits of liberty, from the toiling hands of those in the past—it is time for our generation to earn the right of democracy by sweating for it and struggling for it now.

This Juneteenth, let us cry “freedom” again but not with our mouths. Let’s do it with our sleeves rolled up and ready to organize and mobilize in the days to come—because this next election is not right or left; it is right or wrong—so that we can elect people to this body and the other that will restore voting rights, that will restore voting freedom, that will restore the ideals of fairness. That is the end, that is the aim, and that is how we overcome again. That is how we, as a people, secure liberty and justice for all.

#### TRIBUTE TO SARAH ROJAS

Mr. President, I stand here with joy and sadness. I stand here with humble gratitude that I cannot express.

Today, I want to recognize one of the more extraordinary people I have worked with in my life and one of the

more extraordinary members of my staff, whose today is her last day. That person is my dear, dear friend Sarah Rojas.

It is very difficult to put into words the role that Sarah has played in my life and on my team. For 13 years—for my entire time as a U.S. Senator—she has done almost every job in a Senate office.

She is our utility player. She has been a special assistant to the director of special projects, acting communications director twice, to legislative director, to deputy chief of staff, to one of my most trusted counsels. She has played every position imaginable.

To her colleagues on my staff, she is that leader everyone looks up to and someone that everyone genuinely considers, like I do, that she is a friend, someone you can lean on.

To the people of the great State of New Jersey, gosh, I wish you all knew how incredible of a public servant she is and has been to New Jersey’s interests. She is one of those people who, for millions of people in my State—her labor, her work, her counsel have made things better for New Jersey.

To me, I don’t call her Sarah; I call her, usually, Rojas.

I am in public. I am in the light. I get jeers and applause. I get recognition and calls to do better. But I stand strong through it all because of the people around me, the people who encourage me, who keep my feet on the ground, the people who don’t let my positive press get to my head or my negative press get to my heart. Sarah has been one of those great ballasts in my life—keeping me balanced, keeping me grounded, keeping me inspired and encouraged.

She has superpowers, to be honest with you. One of them is her empathy. One of them is her capacity to care. One of them is her ability to make everybody around her feel her love.

I am devastated, actually, really sad that Sarah is leaving DC, although a consolation I get is that she is going to be in Jersey. I love the fact that she is going home.

Watching Sarah for 13 years of her life—I have seen her get better every day. Sarah has grown as a person, and she has grown as a leader. Thirteen years being witness to her blossoming is a privilege.

I want to thank not just her today on the floor, but I want to thank her incredible family. I want to thank her husband Nick—not just for rescuing her from those days when she was a single woman; I want to thank her husband Nick for being the rock in her life that has made her stronger for us all.

I want to celebrate her parents Joy—such an appropriate name—and Chris, whom I want to wish a very happy Father’s Day to.

Chris and Joy, thank you for raising such an extraordinary child.

I love what James Baldwin said. He said that children are never good at listening to their elders, but they never

fail to imitate them. Sarah is who she is because of her parents.

Her sister Emily, I am grateful for as well. I have a sibling—two siblings, actually, and they are also part of that circle of support. I want to thank her for that.

I thank them all, all of her family, for support, for encouragement, for the latitude when she has had to work late hours, for showing up when I have had to take her away from perhaps the center of her life, which is Sadie.

Sadie, I hope one day years from now, somebody will show you this video. I don’t know if you will understand it in the present moment, but I hope you are going to look back and hear what I say to you, Sadie.

Sadie, you should be proud of your mom. You should be in awe of her. Sadie, your mother is one of the more phenomenal people I know, and that makes me confident you are going to be phenomenal, too, Sadie. You have a rock star mom—maybe not known by millions, but to all who know her, she is a star that illuminates not just your life but all of our lives.

Four years ago, Sarah lost a very important person in her life, and I want to honor them as well: her grandmother Gloria Rojas. Again, these names like “Joy” and “Gloria” say so much about the people.

Gloria was this extraordinary trailblazer. It is another reason why I know how she got to be so great—how Sarah did. Gloria was the first Latina broadcast journalist in New York. She was a big deal. But she once said that the big news stories are not always the most satisfying; it is the little stories where you can really make a difference.

It is this idea that is such a human thing. It is this idea in life that is just so true, that the smallest things we do often matter the most. Every interaction, every conversation, every person you encounter, making them feel seen, making them feel valued, making them feel worthy, that is the legacy we can leave.

Indeed, to Gloria, her granddaughter Sarah, that is the legacy she is carrying forward, this understanding that in most days of our lives, the biggest thing we can do will most often be a small act of kindness, decency, and love. If you live every day of your life with that kindness, with that decency, with that love, you will make a change in this world that you cannot even fully appreciate or understand.

That is the last 13 years of Sarah Rojas—showing up every day, showing up fully herself, with unapologetic empathy, with courageous compassion, with remarkable consistency. Every day that I have known Sarah Rojas, as we tried our best to serve the State of New Jersey, every day, she illuminated our lives.

So I am excited, Sarah—I am excited, Rojas—to know that you will continue to serve, continue to make change, and continue to make a difference. But on this day, your last day serving in the