My judgment is clouded by the people I have worked with here who would never consider anything like this.

Mr. DURBIN. I will ask the Senator from Nevada a further question. Didn't we also have a similar precedent when Senator MCCAIN and Senator Kerry were leaders in an effort to finally establish diplomatic recognition of Vietnam and normalize relations? This was a bipartisan effort to try to move us beyond a painful chapter in our history which cost so many American lives. That, too, was bipartisan, as I recall.

Mr. REID. And if anyone should have some ill feelings about Vietnam, JOHN MCCAIN, who came to the House of Representatives with the Senator and me, was in a prison camp for 5 years and 4 of those years were in solitary confinement. John Kerry was shot, was wounded—highly decorated, but he had a little beef with the Vietnamese. And they worked together because they thought it would be good for our country to reestablish relations with that country.

So my mind is—I repeat—clouded with the experience I have in this body with leaders such as Mark Hatfield, a Republican, who would never ever consider anything like this.

I am dumbfounded that 47 of my colleagues would sign a letter. Last week they were over here, as I said, jumping up and down and cheering the Prime Minister of Israel because he was denigrating what was going on in Iran—you can't negotiate with these people—and now they are sending a letter to the same people whom they were cheering against just a week ago?

Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 5 p.m., with the time equally divided in the usual form, and with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The assistant Democratic leader.

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF BLOODY SUNDAY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last Saturday marked the 50th anniversary of what has come to be known as Bloody Sunday. In March of 1965, Congressman JOHN LEWIS, then a young man fresh out of college, and Rev. Hosea Williams led 600 brave civil rights activists across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL.

These courageous men and women, and children marching with them, were marching in pursuit of the most fundamental right—the right preservative of all others—the right to vote. What they received that day, however, were brutal beatings from police batons as State troopers turned them back and chased them down.

A few days later, President Lyndon B. Johnson addressed the Nation and called on Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act. Within months, the legislation was signed into law—guaranteeing that the fundamental right to vote would not be restricted through clever State and local schemes, such as poll taxes and literacy tests.

I was proud to join Congressman LEWIS on a trip to Selma about 10 years ago for a ceremonial walk across the bridge to mark the 40th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. As we marched on a Sunday morning in the footsteps of the civil rights giants, we celebrated a bill that has often been called the most significant civil rights law ever passed by Congress. Little did we know that 8 years later, in 2013, the Supreme Court would strike down a major provision of that law.

In Shelby County v. Holder, by a 5-to-4 vote, a divided Supreme Court struck down the provision of the Voting Rights Act that required certain jurisdictions to preclear changes to their voting laws with the Department of Justice. The decision effectively gutted the Voting Rights Act.

In the aftermath of the Shelby County decision, several State legislatures pushed through discriminatory and onerous restrictions on voting that previously would have required Department of Justice clearance.

We have heard disturbing stories of a 93-year-old veteran and a nearly 70-year-old doctor who were turned away from the polls in Texas because their IDs did not meet the specifications of an onerous new State law. We heard about Florida's faulty voter verification efforts that disproportionately flag Hispanic citizens for removal from the voter rolls. And we have heard how the elimination of out-of-precinct voting and cuts to early voting impacted minority voters in North Carolina.

It is hard to believe that 50 years after Selma, we are watching State legislatures pass legislation restricting opportunities to vote in America. None of us want to subscribe or endorse voter fraud—not a person on either side of the aisle—but this goes far beyond it.

As chairman of the Judiciary subcommittee on the Constitution, I held hearings in Florida and Ohio, where they were enacting restrictive laws to limit opportunities to vote—limiting the time you can vote, requiring IDs.

In each of those States, I called as my first witnesses elected officials of both political parties. I asked, in both States, the same question to the first panel of witnesses: What has happened in your State by way of voter fraud that has led you to restrict the opportunity to vote in your States of Ohio and Florida? The answer was: Nothing—nothing.

Then we discussed how many people have actually been prosecuted for voter fraud that led to this tightening of the laws and limiting the opportunity to vote. In Ohio, the answer was: We think in the last 10 years, a few people might have been prosecuted. This clearly was not a problem in need of a solution. This was clearly an effort made in these State legislatures to restrict the opportunity to vote for certain Americans. Why? If you believe in this country, if you believe in democracy, if you believe in the right to vote, why do so many State legislatures—under the guidance of a group called ALEC—why are they changing their laws to restrict the right to vote? Clearly it is because they want certain people to find it more difficult to vote.

When I chaired this subcommittee and I had this series of hearings, we heard over and over again that these laws have a disproportionate negative impact on lower income individuals, minorities, youth, elderly, and other vulnerable populations.

I wish that 50 years after Bloody Sunday, our society had reached a point where the protections of the Voting Rights Act were no longer necessary. But we have seen in State after State that we still need the protections of the law, or people—good American citizens—will be denied their opportunity to cast a vote in an election.

So in order to truly honor the foot soldiers of Bloody Sunday, we have to do more than vote for congressional medals. We have to work together to pass the Voting Rights Amendment Act to ensure the Federal Government is once again able to fully protect the fundamental right to vote for all American citizens.

The Voting Rights Amendment Act, which Senator LEAHY, Senator COONS, and I plan to reintroduce soon, will undo the damage of the Shelby County decision. Our bill will restore the Voting Rights Act by updating the formula that determines which jurisdictions must preclear changes to their voting practices with the Justice Department.

In 2006, Congress reauthorized the Voting Rights Act with an overwhelming bipartisan vote. The spirit of Bloody Sunday—the spirit of Selma, AL—was alive and well 9 years ago, when both political parties stood up and said: We are both going to endorse it. It is the right thing to do.

Mr. President, 390 Members in the House out of 435 voted for it, and 98 Senators—from both political parties—voted to reauthorize it, 9 years ago. Congress, after all the hearings—21 of them—with more than 90 witnesses testifying, produced a record that exceeded 15,000 pages, and the bill was solid in the law.

We recognized then that despite the progress we have made in the years since that famous march, there still was unlawful and unfair discrimination against Americans who wanted to exercise their right to vote.