

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 695

Designating September 2020 as “National Voting Rights Month”.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

Mr. WYDEN (for himself, Mr. MERKLEY, Mr. KAINE, Mr. JONES, Mr. BENNET, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. CARPER, Mr. MARKEY, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. DURBIN, Ms. CANTWELL, Mr. BROWN, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. MENENDEZ, Ms. HIRONO, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. UDALL, Mr. REED, Mr. KING, and Ms. DUCKWORTH) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

RESOLUTION

Designating September 2020 as “National Voting Rights Month”.

Whereas voting is one of the single most important rights that can be exercised in a democracy;

Whereas, over the course of history, various voter suppression laws in the United States have hindered, and even prohibited, certain individuals and groups from exercising the right to vote;

Whereas, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Native Americans and people who were born to United States citizens abroad, people who spoke a language other than English, and people who were formerly subjected to slav-

ery were denied full citizenship and prevented from voting by English literacy tests;

Whereas, since the 1870s, minority groups such as African Americans in the South have suffered from the oppressive effects of Jim Crow laws that were designed to prevent political, economic, and social mobility;

Whereas African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and other underrepresented voters were subject to violence, poll taxes, literacy tests, all-White primaries, property ownership tests, and grandfather clauses that were designed to suppress the right of those individuals to vote;

Whereas members of the aforementioned groups and others are currently, in some cases, subject to intimidation, voter roll purges, bans on former prisoners from voting, and financial barriers that act effectively as modern-day poll taxes;

Whereas, in 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C. 10301 et seq.) to protect the right of African Americans and other traditionally disenfranchised groups to vote, among other reasons;

Whereas, in 2013, in the landmark case of *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013), the Supreme Court of the United States invalidated section 4 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, dismantling the preclearance formula provision in that Act that protected voters in States and localities that historically have suppressed the right of minorities to vote;

Whereas, since the invalidation of the preclearance formula provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, gerrymandered districts in many States have gone unchal-

lenged and have become less likely to be invalidated by the courts;

Whereas these gerrymandered districts have been found to have discriminatory impacts on traditionally disenfranchised minorities through tactics that include “cracking”, diluting the voting power of minorities across many districts, and “packing” or concentrating minority voters’ power in one district to reduce their voting power in other districts;

Whereas the courts have found the congressional and, in some cases, State legislative district maps, in Texas, North Carolina, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin to be gerrymandered districts that were created to favor some groups over others;

Whereas the decision of the Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013), calls on Congress to update the formula in the Voting Rights Act of 1965;

Whereas some form of a restrictive voting law has been instituted in at least 23 States since 2013;

Whereas these restrictive voting laws encompass cutbacks in early voting, voter roll purges, placement of faulty equipment in minority communities, requirement of photo identification, and the elimination of same-day registration;

Whereas these policies could outright disenfranchise or make voting much more difficult for more than 80,000,000 minority, elderly, poor, and disabled voters, among other groups;

Whereas, in 2016, discriminatory laws in North Carolina, Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Texas were ruled to violate voters’ rights and overturned by the courts;

Whereas the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (referred to in this preamble as “COVID–19”) public health emergency has only exacerbated the state of elections and the difficulties voters face in obtaining access to the ballot;

Whereas a lack of fair and safe election policies threatens minority communities, which have been disproportionately impacted and disenfranchised due to the COVID–19 pandemic, and their access to the ballot;

Whereas addressing the challenges of administering upcoming elections in 2020 and beyond requires increasing the accessibility of vote-by-mail and other limited-contact options to ensure the protection of voters’ health and safety amid a global pandemic;

Whereas, as voting by mail becomes a safer and more accessible option for voters to exercise their constitutional right to vote during the unprecedented times caused by the COVID–19 pandemic, the work of the United States Postal Service will be of paramount importance in successfully conducting elections;

Whereas Congress must work to combat any attempts to dismantle or underfund the United States Postal Service or obstruct the passage of the mail as blatant tactics of voter suppression and election interference;

Whereas there is much more work to be done to ensure all citizens of the United States have the right to vote through free, fair, and accessible elections;

Whereas National Voter Registration Day is September 22;
and

Whereas September 2020 would be an appropriate month to designate as “National Voting Rights Month” and to ensure that, through the registration of voters and aware-

ness of elections, the democracy of the United States includes all citizens of the United States: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) designates September 2020 as “National
3 Voting Rights Month”;

4 (2) encourages all people in the United States
5 to uphold the right of every citizen to exercise the
6 sacred and fundamental right to vote;

7 (3) commemorates—

8 (A) the 100th anniversary of Senate pas-
9 sage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitu-
10 tion of the United States, which guarantees
11 women the right to vote; and

12 (B) the legacy of generations of suffragists
13 who fought to protect women’s rights at the
14 ballot;

15 (4) encourages Congress to pass—

16 (A) the For the People Act of 2019 (S.
17 949 and H.R. 1 of the 116th Congress), to in-
18 crease voters’ access to the ballot, prohibit the
19 use of deceptive practices to intimidate voters,
20 end gerrymandering, create automatic voter
21 registration, limit the power of restrictive voter
22 identification laws, make critical investments in
23 election infrastructure and technology, and ad-

1 dress corruption in campaign finance and eth-
2 ics;

3 (B) the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Ad-
4 vancement Act of 2020 (H.R. 4 of the 116th
5 Congress) (introduced in the Senate as the Vot-
6 ing Rights Advancement Act of 2019 (S. 561 of
7 the 116th Congress)), to restore the protections
8 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C.
9 10301 et seq.) that prohibit discriminatory vot-
10 ing practices, remove barriers to voting, and
11 provide protections for minority voters in States
12 with a history of voting discrimination;

13 (C) the Natural Disaster and Emergency
14 Ballot Act of 2020 (S. 4033 of the 116th Con-
15 gress), to ensure that every eligible voter in the
16 United States is able to exercise the right to
17 vote safely and securely during a declared state
18 of emergency by, among other things—

19 (i) guaranteeing no-excuse absentee
20 voting;

21 (ii) expanding early voting;

22 (iii) providing self-sealing return enve-
23 lopes with prepaid postage for—

24 (I) voter registration applica-
25 tions;

1 (II) absentee-ballot applications;

2 and

3 (III) absentee ballots; and

4 (iv) providing accommodations for vot-
5 ers on Indian lands;

6 (D) the Delivering for America Act (S.
7 4527 and H.R. 8015 in the 116th Congress), to
8 prohibit the United States Postal Service from
9 making changes to operations or levels of serv-
10 ice that would reduce those operations or levels
11 of service relative to those that were in effect on
12 January 1, 2020, establish requirements for the
13 processing of election mail, and provide addi-
14 tional funding for the Postal Service Fund;

15 (E) the Securing America's Federal Elec-
16 tions Act, or the SAFE Act (S. 2238 of the
17 116th Congress), to provide funding for States
18 to improve the administration of elections, in-
19 cluding by enhancing technology and election
20 security, replacing antiquated voting systems,
21 and meeting new standards for administering
22 elections; and

23 (F) other voting rights legislation that
24 seeks to advance voting rights and protect elec-
25 tions in the United States;

1 (5) recommends that public schools and univer-
2 sities in the United States develop an academic cur-
3 riculum that educates students about—

4 (A) the importance of voting, how to reg-
5 ister to vote, where to vote, and the different
6 forms of voting;

7 (B) the history of voter suppression in the
8 United States before and after passage of the
9 Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

10 (C) current measures that have been taken
11 to restrict the vote;

12 (6) encourages the United States Postal Service
13 to issue a special John R. Lewis stamp during the
14 month of September—

15 (A) to honor the life and legacy of John R.
16 Lewis in supporting voting rights; and

17 (B) to remind people in the United States
18 that ordinary citizens risked their lives,
19 marched, and participated in the great democ-
20 racy of the United States so that all citizens
21 would have the fundamental right to vote; and

22 (7) invites Congress to allocate the requisite
23 funds for public service announcements on television,
24 radio, newspapers, magazines, social media, bill-
25 boards, buses, and other forms of media—

1 (A) to remind people in the United States
2 when elections are being held;

3 (B) to share important registration dead-
4 lines; and

5 (C) to urge people to get out and vote.

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