

the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

On July 15, 2006, in Chicago, IL, a gay man was attacked by Marquell Shepard after leaving a local bar. Shepard approached the man, berating him with sexually derogatory slurs. Shepard then physically assaulted him and fled the scene. He was soon picked up by police and charged with a felony hate crime.

I believe that the Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

SPACE SHUTTLE "DISCOVERY" STS-121 MISSION

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, yesterday, July 17, 2006, marked the successful conclusion of the STS-121 space shuttle *Discovery* mission with its safe landing at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. This 13-day mission was the 115th shuttle mission and the 18th to visit the International Space Station. STS-121 satisfied its "return to flight" objectives by flight testing improvements to the shuttle and testing on-orbit shuttle repair procedures. This flight provided more than 28,000 pounds of equipment and supplies to the space station and enabled its number of occupants to grow to three. STS-121 included three important spacewalks and laid the groundwork for the continued assembly, and ultimately doubling in size, of the space station.

I applaud the bravery, expertise, and accomplishments of the STS-121 crew—Commander Steven Lindsey, Pilot Mark Kelly, and Mission Specialists Michael Fossum, Lisa Nowak, Thomas Reiter, Piers Sellers, and Stephanie Wilson. This successful mission is a testament to the thousands of people who work on the space shuttle and space station programs.

Mr. President, we must continue with our plans to fly the space shuttle in order to complete the construction of the International Space Station. Equally important, we must work together to preserve the workforce that will soon become the backbone of the new crew exploration vehicle and the next human space project.

VOTING RIGHTS ACT REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, more than 2 months ago I joined the Chairmen of both the Senate and House Judiciary Committees, the ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee, the Democratic and Republican leaders of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and Members of Congress from both parties to introduce a

bill to reauthorize and reinvigorate the temporary provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The bicameral, bipartisan introduction of this bill reflects not only its historic importance as a guarantor of the right to vote for all Americans, but also the broad consensus that the expiring provisions must be extended this year without delay. Unfortunately, we in the Senate have been delayed in getting this bill to the Senate floor by repeated cancellations and postponements of committee hearings and markups. The bill was also delayed in the House of Representatives for a month by a small group of opponents. Fortunately, the House was able to pass this legislation last week with 390 Members voting in favor. Now it is time for the Senate to do its part and pass this bill.

At my request, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee has agreed to hold a special executive business session of the committee so that after a month of delay we can report out the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006. I hope that this vital civil rights legislation will be ready for full Senate consideration without further delay and that we can proceed with deliberate speed to pass the House-passed bill so that it may become law before Congress takes its summer vacation.

The U.S. Constitution specifically provides that Congress has the power to remedy discrimination under both the fourteenth and the fifteenth amendments. Over the course of nine Judiciary Committee hearings we received testimony from a range of constitutional scholars, voting rights advocates, and Supreme Court practitioners. There was agreement among these witnesses that Congress is at the height of its powers when giving enforceable meaning to these amendments by enacting laws that address racial discrimination in connection with voting. The fourteenth and fifteenth amendments have not changed. As long as these amendments are in our Constitution, Congress has the authority to enforce them, especially on matters of racial discrimination in connection with the right to vote. These are matters of fundamental importance.

The Senate Judiciary Committee held several hearings this year on the continuing need for the provision of the Voting Rights Act that requires covered jurisdictions to "pre-clear" all voting changes before they go into effect. This provision has been a tremendous source of protection for the voting rights of those long discriminated against and also a great deterrent against discriminatory efforts cropping up anew. Some academic witnesses suggested in their committee testimony that section 5 should be a victim of its success. In my view, abandoning a successful deterrent just because it works defies logic and common sense. Why risk losing the gains we have made?

When this Congress finds an effective and constitutional way to prevent violations of the fundamental right to vote, we should preserve it. Now is no time for backsliding.

Since section 5 of the Voting Rights Act was first enacted in 1965 and last reauthorized in 1982, the country has made tremendous progress in combating racial discrimination. Certain jurisdictions disregarded the fifteenth amendment for almost 100 years and had a history of pervasive discriminatory practices that resisted attempts at redress from the passage of the fifteenth amendment in 1870 to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Section 5 is intended to be a remedy for violations of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, in place for as long as necessary to enforce those amendments and eliminate practices denying or abridging the rights of minorities to participate in the political process. In fact, due in large measure to the remedies provided in the VRA, many voters in jurisdictions covered for the purposes of section 5 have gained the effective exercise of their right to vote.

However, based on the record established in hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights, and Property Rights, which builds on the extensive record established in the House of Representatives, there remains a compelling need for section 5. The Judiciary Committee received three categories of evidence supporting the continuation of this remedy. First, there is evidence that even with section 5 in place, covered jurisdictions have continued to engage in discriminatory tactics. Often, this recurring discrimination takes on more subtle forms than in 1965 or 1982, such as vote dilution, which relies on racially polarized voting to deny the effectiveness of the votes cast by members of a particular race. Second, there is evidence of the effectiveness of section 5 as a deterrent against bad practices in covered jurisdictions. Finally, there is evidence of the prophylactic effect of section 5, preserving the gains that have been achieved against the risk of backsliding.

Today, I would like to provide some of the evidence received in the Judiciary Committee about the persistence of discriminatory practices in covered jurisdictions that supports reauthorization of this crucial provision.

The robust record compiled in the Senate Judiciary Committee includes voluminous evidence of recurring discrimination in section 5 covered jurisdictions. Often, this recurring discrimination takes on more subtle forms than in 1965 or 1982, such as vote dilution and redistricting to deny the effectiveness of the votes cast by members of a particular race. Notably, many jurisdictions are repeat offenders, continuing a pattern of persistent resistance dating back to the enactment of the VRA. Debo P. Adegbile, Associate