

Though it has been subject to legal challenges previously, the Voting Rights Act has always emerged intact and on sound legal ground until . . . yesterday.

For almost 50 years, the Voting Rights Act has always received overwhelming, bipartisan support in the Halls of Congress and in the Executive Branch.

Each of the four times that the Voting Rights Act has been reauthorized in 1970, 1975, 1982, and most recently in 2006—Congress has done so with the broad bipartisan super majorities that are all too rare these days.

That is because protecting the right to vote should not be a partisan prerogative. It is not a Democratic or Republican issue. It is a fundamental right for every eligible voter and it is a core value of our American democracy.

In 2006, the House of Representatives voted 390 to 33 in favor of reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act. The Senate voted unanimously, 98 to 0, to reauthorize the law. And the final bill was signed into law by President George W. Bush.

There was good reason for this bipartisan support for reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act. Congress developed an extensive record, holding 21 hearings, reviewing more than 15,000 pages in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, and hearing from more than 90 witnesses about the need to reauthorize the law.

On Tuesday, five activist Justices on the Supreme Court decided to completely ignore the extensive record of current and ongoing discrimination that Congress meticulously assembled just 7 years ago.

And you don't have to take my word for it.

Rep. JIM SENSENBRENNER, a Wisconsin Republican who was Chair of the House Judiciary Committee in 2006 and helped secure reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act, had this to say:

[t]he legislative record accompanying consideration of the Voting Rights Act is among the most extensive in congressional history.

I am disappointed that the Supreme Court ignored the Congressional findings in issuing this decision.

We all acknowledge the progress that our great country has made on civil rights and voting rights issues. Over time, our Nation has indeed grown to be more perfect—and more inclusive in some ways—than just a few generations ago.

But we are not yet a perfect union. And the jurisdictions covered by the Voting Rights Act have both a demonstrated history and a contemporary record of implementing discriminatory restrictions on voting.

The Supreme Court's decision acknowledges the progress our country has made in expanding the franchise. The Court also acknowledges that discrimination remains in our society today.

Nevertheless, five Justices on the Court have taken the extreme position of gutting the very law that has en-

abled that progress on voting rights and stands guard to ensure that that progress isn't rolled back.

As my Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights found during a series of hearings I chaired last Congress, the Voting Rights Act remains a critical tool in protecting the right to vote.

All one needs to do is look to the last election cycle to understand the ongoing need for the Voting Rights Act.

After a careful analysis of new voter ID laws in Texas and South Carolina, the Department of Justice used its authority under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act to object to the implementation of new photo identification requirements.

In Texas, according to the State's own data, more than 790,000 registered voters did not have the ID required to vote under the new Texas law.

That law would have had a disproportionate impact on Latino voters because 38.2 percent of registered Hispanic voters did not have the type of ID required by the law.

In South Carolina, the State's own data indicated that almost 240,000 registered voters did not have the identification required to vote under the State's new law.

That included 10 percent of all registered minorities in South Carolina who would not be able to vote under the new law.

That is more than 1 million registered voters who would have been turned away from the polls in Texas and South Carolina last year, if the Department of Justice did not have the authority under the Voting Rights Act to object to those photo identification laws.

Why did the Court neuter the Voting Rights Act?

Chief Justice Robert's opinion claims that the formula used to determine which States should be covered by the Voting Rights Act is not justified by "current conditions" of discrimination at the ballot box.

Had they not completely disregarded the 15,000 page CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, perhaps the Chief Justice and his four colleagues would understand the unfortunate fact that literacy tests and poll taxes may have died in the 1960s, but current, more sophisticated means of diluting minority voting strength are alive and well.

In 2001, for example, the city of Kilmichael, MS canceled an election because "an unprecedented number" of African American candidates decided to run for office. After the Department of Justice used the Voting Rights Act to require that the election move forward, the town elected its first black mayor and its first majority black City Council.

In 2004, officials in Walker County, TX threatened to prosecute two black students after they announced their candidacies for county office. When that threat didn't keep the students off the ballot, county officials tried to

limit black turnout by reducing early voting only at polling places near a historically black college.

Not to be outdone, the State of Mississippi, in 1995, tried to reenact a dual voter registration system "which was initially enacted in 1892 to disenfranchise black voters."

As Justice Ginsburg noted in her dissent, "[t]hese examples, and scores like them, fill the pages of the legislative record."

Unfortunately, a majority of the Supreme Court chose to ignore both the extensive legislative record of ongoing discrimination in voting and the critical role of the Voting Rights Act in protecting the right to vote.

If there is any question about the major impact of this decision, just look at the statement released by the Texas Attorney General just hours after the Court's decision. He wasted no time announcing that the State would immediately implement its restrictive voter identification law.

Now that the Supreme Court has gutted the most effective Civil Rights law in our Nation's history, hundreds of thousands of voters in Texas may not be able to cast a ballot in the next election.

After the Court's decision, these 790,000 minority, low income, young, rural and other voters in Texas can no longer depend on the Voting Rights Act to protect their access to the ballot.

The Voting Rights Act has never been about who wins an election.

It has never been about political advantage.

It has about ensuring every eligible American can vote and have their vote counted.

The Voting Rights Act has done the important work of protecting the right to vote for almost 50 years. Tuesday's Supreme Court decision is a disappointing one that threatens to undermine our democracy.

There is ample evidence today that some people are still being denied the right to vote, so Congress has a moral and Constitutional obligation to remedy that problem.

Congress must act to restore the key provisions of the Voting Rights Act that protect the right to vote for all Americans—regardless of the color of their skin, their net worth, the language they speak, or the community in which they live.

As Chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights & Human Rights, I will hold hearings to address this troubling decision, so that we can promptly begin the process of correcting the mistake the Supreme Court made.

OBSERVING PTSD AWARENESS DAY

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, on this important day, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder—PTSD—Awareness Day, we must pause to reflect on the

contributions of our Nation's veterans and recommit ourselves to a sacred promise that should never be forgotten: that they served this country, and this country will always care for them no matter the challenge.

This year, for the first time, based on a resolution that I cosponsored, the Senate has recognized June as PTSD awareness month. This is a good step in our effort to raise awareness of the invisible wounds our returning servicemembers far too often face. But today in particular, we must recognize that there is so much more to be done to fully heal those wounds, support families, and truly save lives.

I recently had a meeting, one I will never forget, with a number of immensely brave West Virginia veterans and their families who were willing to publicly share the struggles they face every day as a result of PTSD.

The Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense were there for our discussion in West Virginia, and I am glad they were.

We heard from wives who stand firmly by their husbands' sides as the horrors of war manifest at home in frightening ways. We heard from a father who hurts every day knowing the inner turmoil his son faces. And we heard from veterans who served their country without question, through multiple tours of duty, but have encountered nothing but stress and resistance when seeking the care they unquestionably earned.

They have faced stigma and a lack of understanding about their private struggles. And they have faced untenable—and, truthfully, life-threatening—delays in getting the strong mental health care they need.

This has been the case for two of the veterans who courageously joined our discussion—both of whom had been fighting for the benefits we owe them. I vowed to do everything I could for them, and I celebrate today knowing that with our help their benefits have been approved, and they now have some measure of peace.

But I do not rest—because there are thousands more veterans out there fighting and waiting for that good news.

Without the right care at the right time, things can start to spiral out of control for veterans with PTSD—financial hardship, marital stress, feelings of hopelessness. It is our job to deliver that care.

With the end of the Iraq war, and with tens of thousands of veterans coming home from Afghanistan, the VA and the DOD know the complexities of caring for returning servicemembers with conditions like PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury—TBI. But as the demand for mental health care increases, we must be prepared to swiftly and strongly answer the call for our newest veterans and those from every generation.

The VA recently announced that it has filled 1,600 mental health positions

and the vacancies of more than 2,000 mental health clinical providers. This is an important step, and something I pushed for. But I believe we must do more to deliver the timely, consistent, individualized care our veterans need, including providing highly-skilled doctors and therapists and making sure that care is always available.

We must end the months-long delay that places veterans in limbo when transitioning their paperwork from active duty status at the DOD to the VA. And we can no longer expect veterans tormented by mental health issues to twist and turn through multiple levels of bureaucracy to get the care we owe them.

This is a difficult issue. But we can not let the complexity be an excuse for not delivering care for our veterans. No one is more deserving.

We know the system can work for our veterans when the VA, DOD, vet centers, counselors and support networks get it right. And we know the right kind of care when it is most needed can keep families together. It can also transform and save lives.

Near the end of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln made a solemn commitment to, "bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle . . ." We should be relentless in our efforts to uphold that pledge for each and every veteran and their loved ones—today and every day.

NUCLEAR ARSENAL

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a copy of the following op-ed from POLITICO.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From POLITICO, June 26, 2013]

MODERNIZE, DON'T ABANDON OUR NUCLEAR ARSENAL

(By: Senator Deb Fischer)

The Brandenburg Gate served as an iconic backdrop for the 20th-century struggle between freedom and oppression. Standing before the gate in the long shadow of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, President Barack Obama made a remarkable—and indeed a historic—announcement last week that could drastically alter the course of the 21st century for the United States and our allies.

Before thousands of German citizens, the president announced our nation was effectively abandoning the long-standing policy of "peace through strength." Instead, Obama pledged to pursue a policy of "peace with justice." "Peace with justice means pursuing the security of a world without nuclear weapons, no matter how distant that dream might be," Obama explained. Reducing our nuclear arsenal by one-third, he argued, brought us closer to this lofty goal.

Following the president's speech, the Pentagon quickly released a report on the new nuclear strategy, which succeeded in making one thing clear: The world is increasingly unstable. It states, "the risk of nuclear attack has increased"; it cites nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation as key threats; and it expresses concern with Russian and Chinese nuclear modernization and the "growth of China's nuclear arsenal."

In an age of persistent nuclear proliferation, it is puzzling as to why the commander in chief would endorse shedding a third of our deterrent power. Responsible national security policy requires a realistic recognition of the world as it is, not as we hope it to be.

It is naive to believe terrorists and rogue nations will be swayed by the philosophical righteousness some may attach to the president's new policy. And count me among the skeptics in believing that China or Russia will abandon its own nuclear modernization plans.

Moreover, deep reductions in strategic weapons could actually undermine the stability that characterizes current force levels. Russia is estimated to maintain several thousand tactical nuclear weapons, which are exempted from current arms reduction agreements, compared with a few hundred such devices in U.S. inventories.

The Department of Defense report notes, "large disparities in nuclear capabilities could raise concerns . . . and may not be conducive to maintaining a stable, long-term strategic relationship, especially as nuclear forces are significantly reduced." In short, as the number of strategic weapons diminishes, other nuclear weapons become more important. When potential adversaries hold greater numbers of these weapons, the U.S. and our allies are less secure.

Perhaps the president is motivated by cost reductions—a pitch to fiscal conservatives like me—reasoning that fewer weapons could save us tax dollars. This, too, is unconvincing. Testifying earlier this year before the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Energy and Water, Don Cook, the deputy administrator for Defense Programs at the National Nuclear Security Administration, stated that "not much savings will be achieved" by nuclear reductions. I received similar assessments from the directors of our national weapons labs.

Some argue deep cuts are necessary because nuclear weapons pose a threat to humanity. Lesser is better, they insist. The president suggested a similar view in his Berlin speech: "So long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe." I disagree.

Our freedom, security and prosperity are all contingent upon the United States maintaining a position of unquestioned strength. Since World War II, nuclear weapons have provided the bulwark of American national security. Nuclear deterrence is not academic; it is real. For example, the administration's recent decision to order a nuclear-capable aircraft to the Korean region earlier this year clearly reaffirmed the power and relevance of our nuclear deterrent.

The president also failed to acknowledge his previous commitments to nuclear modernization. When the Senate ratified New START in 2010, the president pledged to provide critical funding to modernize our aging nuclear forces (some still have 1960s vacuum tubes) and supporting laboratories. The reasoning was clear: As we retain fewer weapons, we must exponentially increase our confidence in their ability to fully function—deterrence depends on it. This promised funding has not materialized.

The Senate should not consider additional arms reductions when we have not achieved the modernization guaranteed in exchange for the last round of cuts to the arsenal.

Despite the president's pledge to pursue the "dream" of a world without nuclear weapons, the truth is that dreams don't always match reality. The frigid reception from Kremlin officials to Obama's call for further Russian nuclear reductions was telling. Moreover, history has proved the current Russian president isn't exactly a good-faith negotiator.