

John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021

A BILL TO PROTECT EVERY AMERICAN'S INHERENT RIGHT TO VOTE BY MODERNIZING THE BIPARTISAN VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

OUR POSITION

Our democracy is not a given; it has been contested since our nation's founding and must be fought for, defended, and constantly expanded. The right to vote represents the lifeblood of our democracy; it is what gives democracy its legitimacy and power. Morally, suppressing the right to vote is a direct assault on both our civic equality and our Christian conviction that all people are made in the image of God.

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LEADING SPONSORS:

Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL-07)
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CURRENT SPONSORS:*

House: 223
Senate: 48

*as of 01.12.22

WHAT THE BILL WOULD DO

The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (John Lewis VRAA) of 2021 promotes and protects voter rights by addressing the Supreme Court's concerns regarding pre-clearance in Section V of the original, bipartisan Voting Rights Act of 1965 as decided in *Shelby v Holder*. If passed, this bill would restore the full protections of the original law by:

- Modernizing the Voting Rights Act's "pre-clearance" formula determining which states and localities have a pattern of discrimination;
- Ensures and mandates that last-minute voting changes do not adversely affect every voter by requiring officials to publicly announce all voting changes at least 180 days before an election;
- Updating the law's "bail-out" framework so that jurisdictions would no longer be required to obtain federal review and approval before making any changes to their voting laws or policies. They would be eligible once they demonstrate a record of not discriminating against voters of color; and,
- Pausing discriminatory voting changes during judicial review.

WHY CONGRESS SHOULD ENACT THIS LEGISLATION

- No matter where we live or what our background, Americans want fair elections, where we all have the freedom to vote and make our voices heard on important issues such as providing affordable health care, creating good jobs, and ensuring quality education.
- Unfortunately, the very foundation of our democracy—free and fair elections—is in danger. At least 19 states passed 34 laws restricting access to voting. More than 440 bills with provisions that restrict voting access have been introduced in 49 states in the 2021 legislative sessions.
- Any law that restricts the sacred right to vote is unjust because it denies citizens their agency and voice. Put in theological terms, unjust laws assault the *imago Dei*, the core belief that every person is made in God's divine image. What is true for unjust laws, is also true for unjust rules—particularly the current filibuster.
- The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been extended three times since it was introduced, with bipartisan support and under Republican presidents like Nixon and both Bushes. In fact, Senator McConnell and fifteen other current Republican Senators voted to extend the VRA by a margin of 98-0 in 2006;
- Even Strom Thurmond, staunch opponent of Civil Rights legislation in the 50s and 60s, who used the filibuster to cudgel efforts to bring equality to all, eventually supported Voting Rights legislation. What is the current excuse for inaction and chaos today?

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