

Chairman Bob Goodlatte

ID: LFG-2017-0010

House Committee on the Judiciary

2138 Rayburn House office Building

Washington, D.C, 20515

Sent via: Mail

August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Re: Support of the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017 (VRAA) and Support of the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017 (VRAA)

Chairman Bob Goodlatte,

I am sending you this letter in support as to the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017, H.R 3239 and in support as to the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017, H.R 2978 and I am hoping that you will support those two pieces of legislation and that you will also made sure that members of the majority will also support the proposed Acts. As you may already know by now, the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017, H.R 3239 was introduced to Congress by Representative John Conyers<sup>1</sup> and by Representative Jim Sensenbrenner<sup>2</sup> and the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017, H.R 2978 was introduced to Congress by Representative Teri Sewell.<sup>3</sup> Both legislation is designed as to being in compliance not only with the recent Shelby County v. Holder United States Supreme Court case but also to ensure that citizens of the United States are given a fair and an equal opportunity as to exercising their right to vote in a democratic system.

As you may already know, the United States of America is a constitutional republic in which citizens of our country have a right to vote for their government representatives. Even though citizens of the United States of America have this right, some individuals in an authority position and some states of the United States of America have in the past and have been currently attacking the rights of citizens being able to vote in elections. Back in the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law as to addressing issues that involved voter disenfranchisement. Section 5 the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was extremely important because it froze changes in election practices or procedures in covered jurisdictions<sup>4</sup> until the new procedures have been determined, either after administrative review by the United States Attorney General, or after a lawsuit before the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, to have neither discriminatory purpose or effect.

In a recent case known as Shelby County v. Holder, 570 U.S. 2 (2013), the United States Supreme Court was asked whether two provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was constitutional, in which included Section 5 and Section 4(b). Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 required certain states and local governments within the boundary of the United States of America to obtain federal preclearance before implementing any changes as to their voting laws or practices; and Section 4(b) of

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<sup>1</sup> Representative John Conyers Jr. is the United States Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district.

<sup>2</sup> Representative Jim Sensenbrenner is the United States Representative for Wisconsin's 5th congressional district.

<sup>3</sup> Representative Teri Sewell is the United States Representative for Alabama's 7<sup>th</sup> congressional district.

<sup>4</sup> Covered jurisdictions under the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were local governments and even states of the United States that had a procedural history as to discriminating against voters.

the Act contained a coverage formula that determined which jurisdiction would be subjected to preclearance based on their procedural history as to discriminating against voters. The United States Supreme Court did rule in the Shelby County v. Holder case that Section 4(b) of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 was unconstitutional. This was because an old formula was still presently being used through Section 4(b) of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 as to determining which jurisdictions would be currently subjected to preclearance based on their old and not recent procedural history. This ruling thus made Section 5 of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 non-enforceable since Section 4(b) of the Act cannot be enforced, although the United States Supreme Court did not declare Section 5 of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 to be unconstitutional.

Representative John Conyers and Representative Jim Sensenbrenner of Congress have acted as to proposing a new coverage formula based on recent voting violations that is not based on decade old voting violations. The Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017 (VRAA) is aimed as to fully restoring and modernizing the original Voting Rights Act of 1965 to reflect on today's societal needs and challenges of today. The Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017 (VRAA) will:

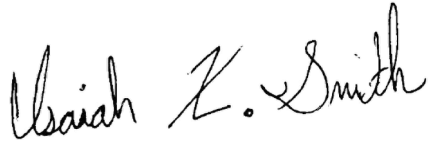
1. Apply equally to every state in the country and will only apply if a state has a documented history of discrimination;
2. Make sure that states would only be subject to preclearance if they have committed five voting violations in the last 15 years;
3. Provide greater transparency in elections so that voters are made aware of any changes to polling times, dates, locations, and protocols. The additional sunlight will deter discrimination from occurring and protect voters from discrimination.
4. Allow for preliminary relief to be obtained more readily, given that voting rights cannot often be vindicated after an election is already over.

While somewhat different as from the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017 (VRAA), The Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017 (VRAA) would:

1. Modernize the Voting Rights Act's preclearance formula to cover states and localities with a pattern of discrimination;
2. Ensuring that last-minute voting changes do not adversely affect voters by requiring jurisdictions to publicly disclose all voting changes that occur 180 days before an election;
3. Expanding the Attorney General's authority to send federal observers to any jurisdiction where it is believed there is a substantial risk of discrimination at the polls on election day or during an early voting period; and
4. Improving the voting rights for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives.

Both the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017 (VRAA), H.R 3239 and the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017 (VRAA), H.R 2978 should be supported by you and members that are in the majority. As a country, we cannot tolerate attacks against citizens of the United States being able to vote because that jeopardizes the democratic system in which this country has. These pieces of legislation will help fix the problem in the original Voting Rights Act of 1965 by using a new current formula as to helping determine which states and local governments are subjected to pre-clearance. This proposed formula is specifically designed as to being in compliance with the ruling of the United States Supreme Court in Shelby County v. Holder decision, and it will take into account the United States Supreme Court's concerns as to the scope and the applicability of the pre-clearance formula.

The United States of America needs both those pieces of legislation to become a law because voter disenfranchisement needs to be prevented. As a country, we need to make sure that all citizens are able to engage in the democratic process by them being able to use their right to vote. I urge you and the majority members in the United States House Committee on the Judiciary to support and help vote in favor as to passing both the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017, H.R 3239 and the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017, H.R 2978 because this will help ensure that a fundamental value of the United States, a government of the people and by the people, will be ensured and further that the people will always have an opportunity as to determining who will represent them in the government.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Isaiah X. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "I" and "S".

Respectfully,

Isaiah X. Smith

Isaiah Smith Campaign

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