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Opinion

On Anniversary of the VRA, the Fight Continues

Fifty-one years ago, on March 24, 1966, the United States Supreme Court struck down the last poll taxes in this country. It was a victory for the American people and for the case's lead plaintiff, Annie A. Harper, an elderly African-American woman who could not afford to pay Virginia's poll tax to cast her ballot.

That spring, it looked like the United States was on its way towards a democracy where all voting-age Americans would have access to the polls. The Supreme Court's 1966 decision to strike down the Virginia poll tax knocked down one of the last pillars of the Jim Crow era. And just the year before, in August of 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act (VRA), our nation's most powerful tool for protecting the vote.

Now, in 2017, more than 50 years later, the same racial and economic discrimination continues to haunt our elections. Old battles have become new again. As minority voters and low-income Americans face new barriers to participating in our democracy, the anniversary of Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections is less of a celebration and more of a reminder that our fight for voting rights is far from over.

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SewellCongress-
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Since the Supreme Court gutted the VRA in its 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision, states across the country have enacted a new set of discriminatory voting restrictions: voter ID laws. After decades of progress, it is open season for erecting new barriers to

reach.

The price of today's barriers to voting is just as debilitating and restricting as Annie Harper's poll tax.

Consider the cost of today's voter ID laws. In my home state of Alabama, some rural voters have to drive over an hour to acquire a state-issued photo ID, which can often mean taking time off of work. There are also rural voters who don't have birth certificates or the verifying documents necessary for getting proper identification, and those documents cost money

integrity of our democracy.

In addition to fostering a more responsive, more diverse democracy, the right to vote and engage in our elections is a right that runs to the core of who we are as a country. It is a right embedded in our Constitution. For me, the right to vote is a fundamental principle of our democracy, and one we have a sacred obligation to protect.

That's why I was outraged when the Trump Administration announced recently that it would drop its support for a challenge to discriminatory voter ID laws in Texas. For six years, the federal government stood side by side with plaintiffs against Texas' voter ID law because it targets African-American and Latino voters. Federal courts have consistently ruled that the law is unconstitutional and petitioned Texas to fix it, a decision which the Justice Department's new position now puts in jeopardy.

For those of us watching the attack on voting rights unfold, we have a responsibility to speak up and speak out. We stand on the shoulders of giants in the voting rights movement and we will never be able to repay the debt.

Read the rest of this commentary at
TheSkanner.com

“More than 50 years after Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, racial and economic discrimination continues to haunt our elections

voting. Voter protections in states with a history of discrimination have been erased, and as states implement voter ID laws limiting access to the polls, the impact of these policy changes is eerily familiar.

When Annie Harper brought her case to the Supreme Court in 1966, her lawsuit asked the Court to rule on a \$1.50 poll tax charged by the Virginia Board of Elections. For a low-income senior like Harper living on a fixed income, that fee was out of

to acquire. For many voters, the hidden costs of obtaining a voter ID create modern barriers to voting.

No democracy should ask voters to make these sacrifices in order to be heard. The impact is to deprive certain Americans, often voters from minority communities and disabled voters, of a voice in our democracy. The strength of our democracy lies in the ability of all its citizens to vote. If one person's vote is denied, it goes to the very in-

Mr. President, What If It Was Your Mama?

During the summer before the election, then-presidential nominee Donald Trump, added this message to his speeches: “You're living in poverty; your schools are no good; you have no jobs; 58 percent of your youth is unemployed. What the hell do you have to lose?”

It was an attempt to appeal to Black voters.

Needless to say, this was an unusual way of trying to expand his political base among a constituency that had not shown much support for the GOP in recent years.

President Trump is perhaps the first political candidate to knowingly insult the very ones to whom he was appealing for votes. What also made these appeals to African-Americans outside of the norm, and even bizarre, is that they were often made before predominantly, White audiences.

After reviewing the president's first budget proposal, titled “America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again,” his question of “What the hell do you have to lose?” can now be more broadly posed beyond African-Americans. Based on his fiscal priorities, many Americans, including a significant

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number of those who voted for him, stand to lose a great deal.

Unfortunately for some, Hell might seem like a better alternative than trying to sur-

“Based on President Trump's fiscal priorities, many Americans, including a significant number of those who voted for him, stand to lose a great deal

vive under some of the president's proposed cuts.

Take, for example, the “Meals on Wheels” Program. The president's budget identified steep cuts in numerous domestic programs.

It calls for the elimination of a key program that Meals on Wheels groups depend on: a \$3 billion program—community development block grants (CDBG)—that began under the Ford administration to combat poverty by giving states and cities greater flexibility in how to combat

poverty.

Therefore, pain and hardship will be felt if Congress enacts the cuts.

Meals on Wheels delivers food to individuals at home who are unable to purchase or prepare their own meals.

The name is often used generically to refer to home-delivered meal programs, not all of which are actually named “Meals on Wheels.”

Research has shown that home-delivered meal pro-

grams significantly improve diet quality, increase nutrient intakes and improve the quality of life among recipients. The program also reduces government expenditures by reducing the need of recipients to use hospitals, nursing homes or other expensive community-based services.

Mick Mulvaney, the new director of the Office of Management and Budget recently stated, “We can't spend money on programs just because they sound good...to take the federal money and give it to

the states and say, ‘Look we want to give you money for programs that don't work.’”

Try telling someone, who is no longer experiencing hunger pains due to Meals on Wheels, that the program does not work.

President Trump is blessed to have never gone hungry a day in his life. However, I wish that he would visit with 56-year-old Linda Preast in Macon, Georgia.

During a recent interview on “CBS Evening News,” Ms. Preast was asked if she was surprised by the spending cuts to Meals on Wheels being proposed by the president. She replied, “Yeah, because I was told—I was under the [impression] that he was going to help us.”

The reporter then asked, “What would you tell him to convince him not to cut the program?” Ms. Preast responded, “What if it was your mama?”

Ms. Preast, who is White, poor and confined to a wheelchair due to a stroke, signed up for Meals on Wheels two years ago.

Read the rest of this commentary at
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