

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
July 13, 2006

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY,
RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
EXECUTIVE BUSINESS MEETING
JULY 13, 2006

I have come today to help us fulfill our commitment to report out the Voting Rights Act reauthorization bill. It has been carried over a number of times already and we need to act. I expect that the Chairman will want to allow anyone with amendments an opportunity to discuss their amendments so that we can consider them, vote on them and proceed to report the bill. That is what I am here to do and it is with that in mind that I will work with the Chairman to encourage members to be here to work through this important matter.

I hope that we can report it out today. I understand that after some delay the House is finally prepared to take up the companion, bipartisan House bill. I look forward to favorable action by the House.

I have been urging that this reauthorization bill be made a priority of this Committee. I hope that we will not be bogged down in controversial nominations or other matters and will recognize its priority by beginning with consideration of our bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act, S.2703, which is cosponsored by 12 of the 18 Members of this Committee.

If we cannot successfully complete action on it today, I urge the Chairman to clear the Committee's agenda for next Wednesday and proceed with a special markup of this matter then to ensure that we will complete our action on the bill and favorably report it by the deadline he most recently set of July 20. In the same way that I worked with the Chairman to make asbestos compensation reform and comprehensive immigration reform top priorities, I will work with him to ensure that this top priority is considered fairly and that we act expeditiously.

This Committee has held extensive hearings on this important subject over the past three months. Two weeks ago, the Chairman agreed to yet another hearing on voting rights in light of the recent Supreme Court decision in the LULAC v. Perry case. In that case the Supreme Court recognized the continued vitality of the Voting Rights Act and in accordance with the Voting Rights Act found that 100,000 Latino Americans had suffered illegal disenfranchised by the Tom Delay-led redistricting scheme in Texas. I understand that hearing is scheduled for later today.

We have only a few dozen legislative days left in this session. We are behind schedule and should report this bill out of Committee for full Senate consideration without further delay.

Working together, we can report our bipartisan voting rights bill and allow for Senate consideration and passage this year. Congress has reauthorized and revitalized the Act four times, each time with overwhelmingly bipartisan support pursuant to its constitutional powers. The time

is now to do so again.

Another important legislative matter on which we have been working is a child safety bill. Of course with the leadership of the Chairman, Senator Biden, Senator Kennedy and others the Senate passed S.1086 months ago. I understand that the Chairman is putting the finishing touches on a revised version of the bill based on weeks of bipartisan discussions with the House. While it is not the bill I would have written, I intend to support its passage without delay so that we can enact sex offender registration legislation by July 27 as the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate have discussed on the Senate Floor.

Mr. Chairman, I know our staffs have been working hard on other matters in a bipartisan way, including an important bill that follows up on the hearing we held last month regarding telecommunications. Chairman Stevens announced during the Commerce Committee markup of telecommunications legislation that he expected the Judiciary Committee to take action on issues that are properly within this Committee's jurisdiction. I agree. I hope we can jointly introduce a good, bipartisan bill in the next week that addresses the important competition and intellectual property matters.

There are a number of other matters on which I could comment, including matters on which we held hearings this week, but in the interest of getting to a discussion of amendments to the Voting Rights Act I will withhold for now.

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