

Statement of

# **The Honorable Russ Feingold**

United States Senator  
Wisconsin  
July 19, 2006

Senator Russell D. Feingold  
Statement on Voting Rights Act Reauthorization  
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Mr. Chairman, I was managing an amendment on the floor this afternoon, so I was not able to attend today's special session to mark up the Voting Rights Act reauthorization bill. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record, and I thank you for moving the bill out of committee today.

I also want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the thorough manner in which this Committee has proceeded on this important bill. We have held ten hearings in four months. We have heard from some outstanding witnesses and built a comprehensive record of which we should all be proud.

Today, it was time for us to act - to bring up S. 2703 for a vote in this Committee so that it can continue on to the full Senate. I am pleased that the bill received a unanimous vote in this Committee and I hope that augers well for quick and successful consideration on the floor.

The Voting Rights Act may very well be the most important piece of federal legislation ever passed. For without a meaningful chance to vote, there can be no equality before the law, no equal access to justice, no equal opportunity in the workplace or to share in the benefits and burdens of citizenship.

As we heard from numerous witnesses, the enactment of the Voting Rights Act was a landmark event in our history - a moment where we recognized that our nation was failing to fulfill one of its most fundamental promises: representation for all. Since its enactment, millions of African-Americans were able to vote for the first time and a record number of minority legislators have been elected to public service.

But we have also heard much testimony that the work of the Voting Rights Act is far from complete. Even in recent election cycles, Americans continue to be disenfranchised by discriminatory redistricting plans, voter intimidation tactics, long lines at polling places, inadequate numbers of voting machines, and lifetime restrictions on voting rights for ex-felons. Even the Supreme Court recognized recently that discriminatory re-districting plans are not a vestige of the past - finding a purposeful effort to dilute the voting power of over one hundred thousand Latino-Americans.

In 1970, '75, and '82, Congress came together and reauthorized the Voting Rights Act, recognizing each time that the march to freedom is still incomplete. The provisions of the Voting Rights Act set to expire -- dealing with federal observers, language assistance, and federal pre-clearance - are its backbone and we need them to stay in effect and continue to play a vital role in protecting the constitutional rights of our citizens.

So let's not falter now. Let's not stop or turn back the clock but build on the extraordinary success of this legislation, and re-affirm the promise that all citizens, no matter what the color of their skin, can participate fully and equally in the electoral process.

We have little time for delay. More than two months ago, the House Judiciary Committee, overwhelmingly voted Voting Rights Act reauthorization out of Committee. Last week, the House overwhelmingly passed the bill and defeated all attempts to amend it. This Committee has now done its job and reported the bill to the Senate floor. I hope it will be quickly adopted, and I stand ready to do whatever I can to help. Thank you.