

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
July 27, 2006

Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Judiciary Committee
On President Bush's Signing
Of the Reauthorization Of The Voting Rights Act
Executive Business Meeting
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Earlier today, we celebrated the reauthorization and revitalization of the Voting Rights Act when President Bush signed that bill into law. I know that many in his party are unhappy with him but I think he did the right thing. The Voting Rights Act is one of the most important laws Congress has ever passed. I am proud to say that our democracy and our nation have been better and richer for it.

The Voting Rights Act is the keystone in the foundation of civil rights laws and is one of the most important methods of protecting all Americans' foundational right to vote. Several generations have kept the chain of support for the Voting Rights Act unbroken, and now our generation has done its part to continue that legacy and revitalize the Act.

Keeping the Voting Rights Act intact is important, but enforcing it is equally important. Now that Congress has passed this bill -- and the President has signed it -- it is up to the President to ensure that this law and all of its provisions are enforced fully and faithfully. I was pleased today to hear the President commit to aggressive enforcement and to defend the Act from legal attacks. Article One of the Constitution says the Congress shall write the laws, and Article Two says the President shall enforce them. Congress has done its part, and now the President must do his. I commend him for saying that he will. That is the most important thing the President said today.

The President has not always been a supporter of this important civil rights law. While governor of Texas, President Bush, fought against some of the key anti-discrimination provisions Congress just reauthorized, as noted in a front page story in today's Washington Times. Today the President acted on behalf of all Americans and did the right thing despite the backbiting and criticism within his party. I commend him. Now his responsibility is to faithfully execute the law and aggressively enforce its provisions. I trust we will not see another after-the-fact presidential signing statement undercutting the commitment he made today in his public statement and by

signing the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006.

The enactment of this law is a triumph for all Americans, and a testament to efforts of its supporters in the House and Senate. On several occasions there were attempts by some to derail this bill. Those efforts continue. Fortunately, the findings in the Act itself and the record we have built should support this important measure. We know that effective enforcement of these provisions are vital in stamping out discrimination that, unfortunately, still exists in this nation today. As the President has acknowledged, the wound is not healed and there is more to do to protect the rights of all Americans to vote and have their votes count.

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