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Senate

The Senate met at 9:50 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Spirit of God, from generation to generation, people of faith speak of Your greatness. Thank You for the strength You give to all who love You and for the blessings You bestow upon our Nation.

Today, give our lawmakers the contentment that comes from knowing and serving You. Clear their hearts with Your peace as You bring them into a closer relationship with You.

Shield this land we love against all enemies foreign and domestic as You teach us to dwell in Your peace. Lord, make us to know a constancy of Your presence, to be aware of the certainty of Your judgment, and to give primacy to prayer in these challenging times.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HELLER). The Democratic leader is recognized.

VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in less than 18 months, Americans all over the country will cast their ballots in the 2016 elections. This exercise fulfills one of the most basic promises of our con-

stitutional democracy: that all citizens have the right to vote, regardless of race, gender, or social status.

This right to vote and the guarantee that each vote counts equally is the foundation of our form of government. It ensures that as this country changes, the elected officials who represent its citizens will also reflect those changes. The electorate should be able to elect those who represent them, their thoughts, and their ideals. Yet, there is an ongoing effort all over America to obstruct the work of perfecting our Union by hindering progress where it is needed the most.

We see this reflected in the debate about whether the Confederate flag—a symbol of bigotry and racism—still has a place on public lands. There should be no debate. The answer to this question is no. And that matter should have been settled long ago. It was not. It took the deaths of nine innocent people, perhaps, to move this issue forward.

We see this reflected in the debate about whether gay people have the right to marry. After all that has gone on, there should be no debate in this regard. The answer to this question is yes. The matter should have been settled long ago.

We see this reflected in the insidious fight to keep certain citizens from exercising their constitutional right to vote by instituting voter ID laws. There should be no debate. The answer to this question is no poll tax or any sort of maneuver designed to prevent voting should exist anyplace at any time. That matter was settled long ago—or at least we thought it was.

The fight is not new. It is deeply rooted in our Nation's history. I finished many years ago now a book, "Freedom Summer," about these courageous, brilliant young men and women who went to Mississippi and spent one summer. It pointed out how the people of Mississippi at that time would do anything they could to keep

an African American from voting. That is wrong. The Constitution now grants women and citizens of all races the right to vote. There have long been efforts to undermine that right. We also see it playing out in State capitols across the country. Districts are being gerrymandered to ensure that minority votes have the least possible impact on election outcomes. We have seen it playing out in courtrooms, where the Voting Rights Act has been under attack.

Congress passed the Voting Rights Act 50 years ago—hard to believe but 50 years ago. Historically, it is one of the country's most important laws—or was an important law. It aimed to clear the path to the ballot box for all citizens who choose to vote. But 2 years ago, the Supreme Court, in one of their questionable decisions, struck down a crucial section of the Voting Rights Act, in a 5-to-4 decision in the case of *Shelby County v. Holder*. As a result of the Court's decision, it is now easier for States to enact laws making it harder for citizens to vote, and they have taken that way past where they should have. Voter ID, shortening the time for early voting—they are doing so many different things to prevent people from voting. It is hard to believe there would be efforts made to stop people from voting.

In the States where we have same-day registration, I am not aware of a single case—not a single case of any type of fraud. The voter turnout where we have same-day registration is tremendous.

In the Presiding Officer's State and my State, there have been efforts made over the years to make sure that 30 days before an election, either a primary or general, no more registrations. How ridiculous. I personally have tried to get that changed for decades, but no luck. The county clerks from 15 rural counties have enough juice in the State legislature to prevent that from happening. It is too bad. Why in the world

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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