

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

The President's Weekly Address

August 8, 2015

Hi, everybody. The right to vote is one of the most fundamental rights of any democracy. Yet for too long, too many of our fellow citizens were denied that right, simply because of the color of their skin.

Fifty years ago this week, President Lyndon Johnson signed a law to change that. The Voting Rights Act broke down legal barriers that stood between millions of African Americans and their constitutional right to cast a ballot. It was and still is one of the greatest victories in our country's struggle for civil rights.

But it didn't happen overnight. Countless men and women marched and organized, sat in and stood up, for our most basic rights. For this they were called agitators and un-American; they were jailed, and they were beaten. Some were even killed. But in the end, they reaffirmed the idea at the very heart of America: that people who love this country can change it.

Our country is a better place because of all those heroes did for us. But as one of those heroes, Congressman John Lewis, reminded us in Selma this past March, "There is still work to be done." Fifty years after the Voting Rights Act, there are still too many barriers to vote and too many people trying to erect new ones. We've seen laws that roll back early voting, force people to jump through hoops to cast a ballot, or lead to legitimate voters being improperly purged from the rolls. Over the years, we've seen provisions specifically designed to make it harder for some of our fellow citizens to vote. In a democracy like ours, with a history like ours, that's a disgrace.

That's why, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, I'm calling on Congress to pass new legislation to make sure every American has equal access to the polls. It's why I support the organizers getting folks registered in their communities. And it's why, no matter what party you support, my message to every American is simple: Get out there and vote, not just every 4 years, but every chance you get. Because your elected officials will only heed your voice if you make your voice heard.

The promise that all of us are created equal is written into our founding documents, but it's up to us to make that promise real. Together, let's do what Americans have always done: Let's keep marching forward, keep perfecting our Union, and keep building a better country for our kids.

Thanks, everybody. Have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 11:05 a.m. on August 7 in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House for broadcast on August 8. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 7, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on August 8.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Weekly addresses.

Locations: Washington, DC.

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