

Shelby Week 2019

Restore the VRA Action Toolkit

June 24-30



The Leadership
Conference

SHELBY WEEK: Restore the VRA Action Toolkit

Why a Week of Action?

In the aftermath of the June 25, 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* Supreme Court decision – which gutted key protections of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) – states and localities across the country jumped to enact restrictive voting laws, disenfranchising millions of American voters. For six years, civil rights organizations and their allies have been fighting back against these discriminatory laws. But we need Congress to restore the VRA to its full strength to ensure that all eligible voters have equal access to the ballot and that every vote counts.

The Leadership Conference coalition and our allies around the country will mark June 24-30 as a week of action to push Congress to act to restore the VRA. But it doesn't end with Shelby Week. We will continue to engage partners, the public, media, and elected officials until we ensure voting rights and protections for all.

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MESSAGE FRAMEWORK: VRAA – Democracy Reform and Racial Discrimination in Voting

Communications Goal

The Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA) is a key piece of legislation that will restore the Voting Rights Act. Our primary goal is to **make it clear that restoring the VRA is central to any effort to build a representative democracy in which people of color can be full, participating members.**

Message Frames

- **Our democracy works best when everyone can fully participate, no matter who they are or what their race or color.** When five justices on the Supreme Court gutted the VRA in the *Shelby County v. Holder* case, they made it easier for states and localities to revert back to discriminatory practices that restrict the voting rights of Black, Brown, Native, and Asian American people. It's time we fix this injustice, so we have the tools to effectively combat current racial discrimination in voting. Congress **must** pass the Voting Rights Advancement Act and restore our ability to prevent racial discrimination in voting so that we can build the truly representative 21st century democracy we deserve.
 - In 2016 alone, 14 states imposed new restrictive voting laws for the first time in advance of a presidential election. By 2018, six states had new restrictive laws in place.¹
 - Federal courts have determined intentional discrimination in at least 10 voting rights decisions since *Shelby* in 2013.² [Fill in a specific case(s) to make this point if you would like.]
- **When our democracy is in peril, so too are our civil rights.** We must have a working democracy in order to make progress on important racial justice issues like educational equity, justice system reform, and immigrants' rights. [Fill in or swap in any issue]. Congress must restore the protections against racial discrimination that the Supreme Court has destroyed. Building a government that is representative of all its people is critical to our ability to solve some of our country's most pressing challenges to improve conditions for us all.
 - [Add any data, stories, facts about your issue of choice.]
- **Americans want a system that works for every voter.** Millions of people have made it clear that they want to build a representative and functioning democracy where everyone, regardless of race or color, can participate. In 2018, voters turned out in record numbers to support laws and policies aimed at making voting more accessible and eliminating unnecessary, racist barriers to the ballot box. Congress must deliver at the national level by passing the Voting Rights Advancement Act to ensure that we have the tools we need to address current racial discrimination in voting.

¹ <https://www.brennancenter.org/new-voting-restrictions-america>.

² NAACP Legal Defense Fund, [Letter Request for Hearing on the Voting Rights Act of 1965](#), September 7, 2017.

MESSAGE FRAMEWORK: VRAA – Democracy Reform and Racial Discrimination in Voting

- [Use any example of voters casting ballots for democracy reform and voting rights from 2018. Examples below:]
- Florida voters restored voting rights to 1.4 million voters with felony convictions, a disproportionate number of whom are Black and Brown.
- Nevada voters cast their ballot for automatic voter registration.
- Michigan voters cast a ballot for a suite of reforms including same-day and automatic voter registration.

Message Pivots

Not every line of argument or angle is worthy of a direct response. Often times our opponents lure us into talking about issues on their terms, not ours. **We have to resist this temptation.**

The following pivots are designed to help you navigate tricky questions or conversations that are usually designed to knock you out of your lane and get off-message. Avoid the trap and stay consistent and on-message.

If you get questions that suggest high rates of turnout in communities of color is proof that there is no voter suppression, here's a suggested pivot:

“Our democracy has to work for all of us – regardless of who we are or what color we may be. That means that we should make voting as accessible as possible. We should not have a system where Black and Latino voters have to wait in long lines for hours in order to vote. The fact that more people are turning out despite the barriers that some policymakers have erected says more about voters’ commitment to our democracy, not how well the system is run.”

If you get questions that try to raise concerns about state sovereignty or federalism, here's a suggested pivot:

“States do not have the right to discriminate. Everyone should be able to cast a ballot free from intimidation, discrimination, or coercion. It is a federal right. Our elected officials are responsible for ensuring that our collective voice is heard by investigating every instance when this right is violated and responding with laws that will protect them and keep infringements from happening again. Our democracy can only work when everyone – no matter who they are or what their race or color – can fully participate. This is precisely why we need to restore the Voting Rights Act and prevent further plots to silence our most vulnerable communities.”

SOCIAL MEDIA: Six years after *Shelby County v Holder*

*Graphics will be available at this link: <https://bit.ly/315zmum>

Sample messages

Our democracy works best when everyone can fully participate, no matter who they are or what their race or color. That's why we're calling on Congress to restore the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by passing #HR4 – the Voting Rights Advancement Act. #RestoreTheVOTE

It's been six years since #SCOTUS gutted the Voting Rights Act. Congress must fix this injustice so that we have the tools to effectively combat current racial discrimination in voting. It's time for lawmakers to pass the Voting Rights Advancement Act to #RestoreTheVOTE!

Six years after *Shelby County v. Holder*, Congress MUST pass the Voting Rights Advancement Act to restore our ability to prevent racial discrimination in voting – and to build the truly representative 21st century democracy our nation deserves. #RestoreTheVOTE

Restoring the Voting Rights Act is about more than elections every couple years: When our democracy is in peril, so too are our civil rights. We must have a working democracy in order to make progress on the important racial justice issues we care so much about. #RestoreTheVOTE

Congress must restore the protections against racial discrimination in voting that #SCOTUS destroyed in 2013. Building a government that is representative of ALL its people is critical to our ability to solve some of our country's most pressing challenges. #RestoreTheVOTE

Voters turned out in record numbers in 2018 to support laws & policies aimed at making voting more accessible and eliminating unnecessary, racist barriers to the ballot box. Congress must deliver at the national level by passing the Voting Rights Advancement Act. #RestoreTheVOTE

Without a functional democracy in which everyone is included, heard, and represented, we cannot make real progress on other important civil and human rights issues. That's why Congress MUST pass the Voting Rights Advancement Act to #RestoreTheVOTE.

Since #SCOTUS gutted the Voting Rights Act in its 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, multiple federal courts have found intentional racial discrimination in violation of the VRA. Six years later, we need lawmakers to work together and finally #RestoreTheVOTE.

Since #SCOTUS gutted the Voting Rights Act six years ago in its *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, Selma's legacy has been unraveled by discrimination. Congress must honor Bloody Sunday's foot soldiers and work to finally #RestoreTheVOTE.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is one of the most successful civil rights statutes ever enacted. It's past time for Congress to repair it. #RestoreTheVOTE

HOSTING EVENTS: Importance, Planning, Tips

Why We Organize

Campaigns have no power unless our communities are organized. Successful organizing requires building knowledge of a need or issue, developing a shared understanding of who has the power to make the desired change, and motivating people to take the actions necessary to influence those in power. Crucial to any successful organizing effort are messages that resonate with the people you want to engage, trusted messengers, and opportunities that make it easy for organizations and individuals to participate.

Shelby Week is an opportunity to raise public and political awareness of critical voting rights issues across the country in the wake of the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision (June 25, 2013). This is a prime opportunity to organize your community to understand the issue and to call on members of congress to #RestoreTheVOTE.

Event Planning Checklist

High Level Planning: **start your planning as early as possible.*

- Establish Event Goals: Depending on your organizational perspective, communities engaged, etc., the event could be anything from educating the public on an issue, lobbying members of congress, rallying your community to demand the passage of a VRAA, and much more.
- Select Date: Shelby Week is Monday, June 24 – Sunday, June 30, 2019. Select a date that works for your community and organizing purposes.
- Identify Partners: Consider reaching out to organizations that share your position on the issue and can co-sponsor the event to help share the burden of staff time, resources, contacts, funds, etc.
- Identify Venue: If you are hosting an in-person event, think of the best location to get turnout from supporters, notice from reporters, and attention from your target audience.
- Get Cost Estimates: *e.g. room rental, permits, equipment, speaker fees, travel, etc.*
- Build Event Committee: Identify team leads for event manager, volunteer coordinator, speaker organizer, communications/media point, turnout organizer, etc.
- Create Publicity Plan: Brand the event and identify your target audience to begin outreach.
- Identify Speakers: Consider who the best messengers are for this issue and who can get you media and public attention. (*e.g. elected officials, impacted individuals, etc.*)

HOSTING EVENTS: Importance, Planning, Tips

2-3 weeks ahead of event

- Speaker/presenter/entertainer liaison: e.g.:
 - Finalize speaker topics
 - Have contracts signed if appropriate, etc.
- Venue/logistics planning, e.g.:
 - Investigate need for any special permits, licenses, insurance, etc.
 - Determine and arrange all details re: A/V equipment, registration set-up, signage, etc.
 - Review security needs/plan for the event as relevant
- Publicity: Follow publicity plan, e.g.,
 - Develop draft program and script
 - Develop publicity pieces -- *e.g., newsletter articles and/or ads, radio spots, print blog posts articles for submission to other publications and/or ads, etc.*

1 week ahead

- Send event reminder to all registered attendees
- Publicity:
 - Release press announcements about keynote speakers, celebrities, VIPs attending, etc.
 - Post your event information on your website and circulate to partners
- Finalize event script
- Brief any/all hosts, greeters, and volunteers about their event duties and timelines
- Determine interview opportunities with speakers, VIPs, etc. and confirm details with media

1 day ahead

- Confirm media attending
- Ensure all signage is in place
- Ensure registration and media tables are prepared and stocked with necessary items as necessary

Event day

- Ensure you have copies of all instructions, permits, directions, phone numbers, etc.
- Check-in with each Committee Chair to ensure their team is on track

HOSTING EVENTS: Importance, Planning, Tips

Sample Event Agenda:

11:30 am: (30 minutes)

- Set up tables, chairs, signage, etc. Make sure AV equipment is set up and working, water is available for speakers, etc.

12:00 pm: (5 minutes)

- As participants arrive, direct them to allocated location
- Direct speakers to their allocated location

12:05 pm: (5 minutes)

- Emcee introduces event and key organizations involved.
- Emcee gives a brief background on why the coalition organized event.
- Emcee introduces speakers.

12:10 pm: (20 minutes)

- Speaker A speaks for 5 minutes.
- Speaker B speaks for 5 minutes.
- Speaker C speaks for 5 minutes.
- Speaker D speaks for 5 minutes.

12:30 pm: (5 minutes)

- Emcee wraps up with key messages, a call to action, and thanks all for participating.

12:35 pm:

- Conclusion of event.
- Clean up.

Tips for Increasing Turnout

- Attend community meetings and ask permission to make announcements about your event.
- Get coalition partners to publicize your event in their newsletters and other communications with members or constituents.
- Submit listings to newspapers and radio stations with community calendars and columnists.
- Create a Facebook page for the event and ask members of participating organizations to invite their friends.
- Ask coalition groups and allies to make specific commitments to turn out a certain number of people and follow up with them to make sure they are planning to do it.
- Call your own members, constituents, and supporters and ask for commitments to attend. Try to get people to commit to bringing one or more friends with them.

MEDIA ADVISORY: Event Notice

FOR PLANNING PURPOSES / LINK

June XX, 2019

Contact: NAME, ORGANIZATION, EMAIL, PHONE

ADVISORY: State and Community Leaders Call on Senator **XXX / Rep. **XXX** to Restore the Voting Rights Act on *Shelby* Anniversary**

WASHINGTON – on **DAY**, 2019 at **TIME**, state African-American, women’s, civic, and faith leaders will hold a **[PRESS CONFERENCE, RALLY, ETC.]** to call on **[SENATORS/REPS]** to address the urgent need to restore the Voting Rights Act (VRA) to ensure that every eligible voter can make their voice heard free from discrimination.

When five justices on the Supreme Court gutted the VRA in the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* case, they made it easier for states and localities to revert back to discriminatory practices that restrict the voting rights of Black, Brown, Native American, and Asian American people. It is time we fix this injustice so that we have the tools to effectively combat current racial discrimination in voting. Congress must pass the Voting Rights Advancement Act and restore our ability to prevent racial discrimination in voting so that we can build the truly representative 21st century democracy we deserve.

WHAT: **PRESSER/RALLY** of state civil rights leaders calling on Congress to pass the VRAA

WHO: **TBD**

WHEN: **DAY**, June **XX**, 2019
TIME p.m. – **TIME** p.m.

WHERE: **TBD**

###

ACTION ALERT: Take Action for *Shelby* Week

Take Action: Join the National Week of Action (June 24-30) to restore the Voting Rights Act! Call members of Congress (202-224-3121) on Monday, June 24 and tell them that our democracy needs a fully restored Voting Rights Act today.

Tuesday, June 25, marks six years since the U.S. Supreme Court's *Shelby County v. Holder* decision gutted the Voting Rights Act.

Together, during the week of June 24-30, allies around the country will come together to show how this decision unleashed a torrent of voter discrimination and electoral chaos nationwide. We will also demand that Congress take immediate action to restore the VRA.

Over the past six years since *Shelby County v. Holder*, states and localities have used every tool available to make voting harder. **[Insert specific example relevant to your organization or state]**

Introducing bills is only one step. Now Congress should act.

The Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4 / S. 561) was introduced to address the voting discrimination unleashed in the wake of the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision. Now let's get to it and move forward on consideration of the bill.

Demand action from your members of Congress today!

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