

Press Release

July 13, 2006

SCHAKOWSKY LAUDS PASSAGE OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT, CONDEMNS AMENDMENTS THAT THREATEN MINORITY EQUALITY

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky today delivered the following statement in support of the Voting Rights Reauthorization Act on the floor of the House of Representatives:

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 9, the Voting Rights Reauthorization Act. It was once said that "a majority has no right to vote away the rights of a minority; the political function of rights is precisely to protect minorities from oppression by majorities." The amendments offered today by the Majority seek to do precisely that; oppress the voting rights of minorities all over America to fairly and freely vote in elections.

While I am pleased to see this important, critical, and bipartisan bill brought to the floor, I am disheartened to see amendments offered that would weaken the core of H.R. 9, and would take a step backward in the fight for equality.

Since the birth of our nation, no other right has been more important than having the ability to vote. Unfortunately, as history has shown, the denial of this right to minorities is a scar on our system of democracy. The passage of the groundbreaking Voting Rights Act of 1965 broke down barriers that stood in the way of African Americans and minorities to vote, and we must pass H.R. 9, without the gutting amendments, to ensure that these barriers of discrimination, intimidation, and inequality will never be built again. Just as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 gave voice to millions of African American and minority men and women, H.R. 9 will ensure that voice for millions more in generations to come.

H.R. 9 would renew provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that protect minority voters in states and districts that have a documented history of voter suppression. It would extend the provisions of this bill for an additional 25 years, require the U.S. Attorney General to send federal observers to monitor elections to make sure that eligible African American and other minority voters are permitted to vote, it would extend bilingual requirements, and it would prohibit the use of any kind of test or devices to deny an individual the right to vote.

Each and every member of the House has the unique opportunity today to continue the

work of the great civil rights leaders of the past; Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hammer, and our own John Lewis, to overcome the ghosts of oppression and fight for a new day of equality and respect for every individual.

I urge my colleagues, Republican and Democrat, to vote for H.R. 9 and oppose all amendments.