

WASHINGTON, DC – House Democratic Whip Steny H. Hoyer (MD) released the following statement today in recognition of the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), which was signed into law on August 6, 1965:

“There is a high probability the 109th Congress will not enact any legislation that is saluted 40 years from now. I say that not to cast aspersions on the current Congress, but to make a point that all of us who serve here know is true: history only rarely summons Congress to enact landmark legislation that improves the lives of every American.

“The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is one such piece of legislation. VRA gave – and continues to give – force to the 15th Amendment requiring that ‘the right of citizens to vote shall not be denied ... on account of race or color.’ By outlawing discriminatory election processes, VRA has enriched every American’s vote and strengthened our democracy.

“Both sides of the aisle can take pride in this legislation – 217 Democrats and 111 Republicans supported the VRA on August 3, 1965.

“While the 89th Congress and President Johnson did the right thing 40 years ago, they did so only after men and women of rare conscience, courage and conviction – people like Representative John Lewis – revealed for all to see that the Constitution is as much a moral exhortation as it is the supreme law of the land.

“The simple and powerful lesson these giants embody is that when the Constitution is not applied equally to all Americans, and we fail to correct it through legislation like the Voting Rights Act, we as a nation break not only the law of this world but offend a much higher moral code.

“But our democratic system remains imperfect. The specter of discrimination still haunts our election system. To keep faith with the promise and requirements of our constitution, we must reauthorize the Voting Rights Act.”

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