Trump administration has Voting Rights Act on life support

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Rep. John Lewis on crossing Edmund Pettus Bridge 01:11
As we celebrate the 53rd anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, which vastly improved voter turnout, this country is at a crucial juncture in the centuries-long struggle to create, maintain, preserve, and ensure true equality of voting rights for members of minority populations. That we are still concerned about this well into the 21st century is incredible. That we, especially those of us who work to make voting readily accessible to all, are even more concerned than we were five years ago -- when the Supreme Court gutted a key provision of the Voting Rights Act in Shelby v. Holder -- is frightening.

On August 6, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which took critical action against literacy tests and poll taxes and provided for federal oversight of voter registration in places where less than 50% of the nonwhite population had not registered to vote. Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders were present for the enactment of this legislation that gave African-American voters the legal means to challenge voting restrictions.

Only 12 years ago, in 2006, a unanimous Senate and a nearly unanimous House of Representatives re-authorized Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, the crucial provision that prevented jurisdictions with a history of discriminatory voting practices from implementing any changes in voting without federal preclearance.

Nevertheless, a scant seven years later, a deeply divided Supreme Court handed down a decision that, in the words of Congressman John Lewis, "put a dagger in the heart of the Voting Rights Act of 1965."
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v. Holder overturned Section 5. This left Section 2 as the Voting Rights Act's sole remaining prohibition of racial discrimination in voting. But since January 20, 2017, the DOJ has not filed a single suit under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

Of equal concern, today we have an administration partnering with those who have used the myth of voter fraud to further the passage of laws aimed at suppressing the votes of minority voters. Just recently, the President exhorted a Florida rally that “the time has come for voter identification,” ignoring that 34 states—including Florida—require some form of voter identification.