



August 6, 2015

The Honorable Steve Scalise
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Scalise,

On the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), we write to express our profound disappointment that you have failed to act on our requests for your engagement on the crucial issue of voting rights. Your unwillingness to take action is extremely troubling, and appears to confirm the unfortunate fact that you have decided not to help protect the right of all Americans to access the ballot.

The VRA, together with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, remains the premier statute for the advancement of civil and human rights in the United States. And given the significant challenges that face this country, we are especially disappointed by your failure to respond to our requests.

We wrote to you on January 6, 2015, to lay out our candid concerns about your past behavior and to request a meeting to engage you in efforts to help repair the VRA. We met with you in a cordial and frank discussion on February 10, 2015. We sent a follow-up letter on March 24, 2015, thanking you for that meeting and reiterating our ask that you take a stand and help us move the Voting Rights Amendment Act, H.R. 885, a bi-partisan proposal to restore voting rights protections.

Your unwillingness to act is especially regrettable now. The anniversary of the VRA is not a time for a failure of leadership. It is a day where we commemorate a significant moment in our nation's history, but more importantly, it is a day to renew our call for action to protect voters. As we've seen across the country, despite the progress made by the VRA, the challenges that voters face today are real and ongoing:

- In North Carolina, the state chapter of the NAACP is challenging H.B. 589, a bill that shortens the early voting period by a full week, eliminates same-day registration, requires strict forms of voter ID, prevents out-of-precinct ballots from being counted, expands the ability to challenge voters at the polls, and ends a successful pre-registration program for 16- and 17-year olds. Each of these provisions has a disproportionate impact on North Carolina's African-American and Latino voters.
- In Virginia, the General Assembly faces a court-mandated deadline of September 1 to redraw Congressional district lines, after they were found to have illegally packed African Americans into a single district, thus diluting their influence.

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- Texas enacted one of the strictest photo ID laws in the nation, requiring voters to present photo identification from a very limited list before being allowed to vote. The law allowed Texans to vote with a Texas concealed handgun license, but not with an ID from a public university or a tribal identification card. On August 5, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals recognized that this ID law was discriminatory. The court's decision demonstrates why it's critical for Congress to take action now. The decision came only after a long, expensive and monumental legal effort, and came too late for voters who went to the polls last fall to choose a new governor, other state and local officials, and members of their Congressional delegation. Those who were discriminated against were denied a vote in that election, and with it, the ability to decide who should represent their interests in Washington, Texas and their local communities.
- In the last two years, Ohio has imposed a number of barriers to voting that disproportionately burden African Americans, Latinos, and young people. These include limits on the numbers of voting locations and voting machines as well as restrictions that make absentee voting more difficult. Obstacles like these threaten to return voters in Ohio's minority and college neighborhoods to the lengthy waiting lines that discouraged so many of them in 2004. Litigation has been filed to eliminate these barriers to the ballot box, but lawsuits take time.

With this backdrop, we are distressed that you failed to honor our requests: to secure a hearing by working with House Judiciary Chairman Bob Goodlatte and to engage the House Leadership on the Voting Rights Amendment Act, H.R. 885, and the Voting Rights Advancement Act, H.R. 2867. Given the maelstrom of recent events in this country, where too many Americans do not have a meaningful voice in the processes that affect their lives, the need for congressional leadership is crucial to help our nation rebuild and our communities engage. Your past actions have cast you as part of the problem. We invited you to join our efforts to become part of the solution.

Voters around the country are fed up and angry that efforts to modernize the Voting Rights Act following the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* two years ago have been stalled. On June 25th, the second anniversary of the *Shelby* decision, we joined with local civil rights groups to hold a rally in Representative Goodlatte's district, attended by approximately 400 individuals. The rally garnered a great deal of public and media attention, and examples of relevant press coverage can be found [here](#) and [here](#). There were also several television pieces, including [this one](#). As chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Representative Goodlatte holds the keys to a fair airing of the issue. He so far has refused to agree to hold a hearing. As a member of House Leadership, you can influence whether or not a hearing takes place. Your failure to engage on this is disturbing.

We took you at your word when you defended your decision to speak at the David Duke-affiliated EURO conference in 1991. We laid out a clear plan to aid in efforts to heal the wounds you caused by delivering that speech. We explained the need for action, and you offered to help.



That offer has rung hollow. As part of House Leadership, you have a responsibility to serve not only the constituents in your district, but also the broader national constituency. Your failure to do this has been a disappointing abdication of your responsibility to the Congress and to the nation.

Please feel free to contact either of us, or Lisa Bornstein, Legal Director at The Leadership Conference, at bornstein@civilrights.org or (202) 263-2856, regarding this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wade Henderson'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Wade Henderson
President & CEO
The Leadership Conference

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marc H. Morial'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Marc H. Morial
President & CEO
National Urban League