

A Fitting Celebration: Adoption of the Voting Rights Act Amendment

"Nobody's free until everybody's free." – **Fannie Lou Hamer**

"I would like to be known as a person who is concerned about freedom and equality and justice and prosperity for all people." – **Rosa Parks**

"Women, if the soul of the nation is to be saved...you must become its soul." – **Coretta Scott King**

These three remarkable women speak to the most basic aspirations of our nation. In their unparalleled grace and majesty, they embodied the struggle for justice and equality of all people.

Congress appropriately titled the legislation extending key sections of the Voting Rights Act *The Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006*. This gesture was more than symbolic. Not only does the measure pay tribute to these three heroines of our nation's struggle for racial justice, it acknowledges the countless unsung heroines of the march to freedom.

The struggle to win the right to vote, like all major campaigns for equal justice, has been paid with sacrifice, toil, and sometimes blood. Many of the foot soldiers have been women. Women historically have been the life-force of all social justice movements—whether the abolition movement of the 19th Century, the suffrage movement of the early 20th Century, or the current struggle for racial and equal justice being waged today on many fronts by a multi-racial, multi-ethnic force of women who collectively represent the soul and essence of our nation's highest ideals.

Those who join us to demand immediate passage of the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King legislation know that equal ballot access and the right to elect representatives of one's choice are inextricably tied to the unfinished promise of equal justice. The Voting Rights Act made the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote a reality for women of color. The VRA has been critical in the increased numbers of Latina, Asian American, Native American, and African American women elected officials. In 1970, five years after the passage of the Act, there were 160 Black women elected officials; in 2001, that number was 3,200—a vast majority of them in Southern states. Giving a voice to the voiceless has always benefited women.

We are calling upon Congress to *act now*. Adoption of the expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act will exalt substance over symbolism and be the most fitting celebration of the courageous women for which this legislation is titled.

Signatures attached

Signed,

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