

Voting Rights - 2013

The right to vote is at the very foundation of democracy. Casting a vote is not only lifting your voice; it is also a claim to a stake in the social and political life of the nation. Today, we recognize that voting is a right to which all Americans have access. It is not a privilege.

This was not always the case: Since America's founding, the right to vote has expanded from white, male property owners in the original 13 states to all white men, to all men, to all women, to Native Americans and others. There are many more watershed moments in the history of voting rights, but it is important to take a moment and reflect on the fact that for the first seven years of its existence, the women of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods could not vote. They could be powerful advocates on a broad range of social justice topics, but they themselves could not fully participate in our political process.

This history is just one of the reasons why WRJ is presenting a resolution on voting rights at this year's Assembly. Recently, voting rights have been challenged by a [Supreme Court decision \(*Shelby County v. Holder*\)](#) and [state and local voter identification laws](#).

Earlier this year, the Supreme Court heard *Shelby County v. Holder*, a case that challenged the constitutionality of Section 4(b) the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965. This section deals with the concept of "preclearance," which requires that the Department of Justice review any changes to voting rights laws in jurisdictions that have a history of voting rights problem. This crucial piece of the VRA was held to be unconstitutional and out of date by the Supreme Court. The Court held that the formula used to determine which jurisdictions would be required to be precleared was unconstitutional. Following this decision in June 2013, many states previously covered by Section 4(b) are testing the extent to which they can legally limit citizens' access to the ballot box.

The other main reason why the time is now to rededicate ourselves to voting rights is the slate of voter identification laws that have cropped up over the course of the last few elections. These laws make stringent requirements for the kind of ID you must have in order to vote; reasoning for instituting these laws highlights concerns regarding voter fraud. [According to the Department of Justice, of the 197 million votes cast for federal office between 2002 and 2005, only 40 voters were brought to trial for voter fraud. Of these cases, 26 led to guilty pleas or convictions. Or 0.0000013% of votes cast!!](#) The approved forms of ID under these laws disproportionately affect elderly, disabled, and low-income Americans, as well as students. Although the laws are not written discriminatorily, the affect is limiting the voting rights of a large portion of society.

We understand how important voting rights are to participation and representation, the central pillars of a democratic society. The proposed resolution for the [WRJ 49th Assembly](#) calls on us all to take action at the federal, state, and local levels to preserve the right to vote for all Americans. It does not matter how you vote, but that you do.