

Electeds Blast SCOTUS Decision on Voting Rights Act *Updated*

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Today the Supreme Court struck down what a number of observers call the "heart" of the Voting Rights Act. The move has shocked and angered a number of New York politicians who say the Act is essential to fair elections.

Chris Bragg of Crain's Insider Blog [has a solid piece](#) cataloging just how New York City will be impacted by the decision. In the long run the decision will change how district lines are drawn for city council and state legislature. The city will also be able to use lever voting machines without federal approval.

Here are a few statements:

From Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Robert Jackson and Fernando Cabrera:

“We are disappointed in today’s Supreme Court decision striking down key components of the Voting Rights Act.

Fair elections are at the very core of a healthy democracy, and there is nothing more patriotic than exercising the right to vote as an American citizen. Congress must act immediately to re-enact provisions to protect the freedom to vote that pass constitutional muster.

We cannot, and we will not, go back to a time when millions of people were denied access to the polls because of arduous local laws designed to disenfranchise entire communities.”

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.:

“I am disappointed and shocked with the Supreme Court’s decision today to invalidate one of the core provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

“The decision to strike down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, which gives the federal government oversight of states and localities with a history of voter discrimination, is a huge setback for the progress America has made towards guaranteeing all Americans the right to participate in fair elections

“I believe today’s decision is a hard blow to the peace of mind of thousands of voters in the Bronx, which is a county covered by the Voting Rights Act, and minorities across the United States, especially those who live in places with a strong history of electoral discrimination. Certainly, we face continued challenges in the form of voter I.D. laws and other measures designed to disenfranchise minority voters and inhibit voter turnout, we therefore must remain ever vigilant in protecting the voting rights of all Americans.

“I join President Obama in his call for Congress to do the right thing and pass legislation to ensure a fair and equal voting process for Bronxites and all who vote, live and raise their families in this great nation. The time to act is now.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg:

“The Supreme Court today wisely did not invalidate Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, which was established in the 1960s to protect minority voters in areas of the country where voting suppression practices and laws had existed. Because of the effectiveness of Section 5, millions of voters are able to have access to the polls and elect the candidates of their choice. We filed an amicus brief supporting the constitutionality of Section 5, and we are relieved that the Court has preserved it. Unfortunately, by striking down the decades-old formulas in Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, which determines the areas of the country covered by Section 5’s Federal review, the Court has effectively placed Section 5 on ice, pending Congressional action. Since

the 1960s and 1970s, some areas of the country have made enormous progress protecting voting rights – including New York City – while other areas where voting rights have been more recently imperiled have been free of Section 5’s Federal review. Today’s decision by the Court puts the onus on Congress to bring Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act into the 21st century, and Congress needs to find a way to come together and do so immediately.”

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver

The right to vote is one of the most basic freedoms we have as American citizens, however today’s ruling by the United States Supreme Court undermines the landmark Voting Rights Act and jeopardizes fundamental protections in our electoral process.

From the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960’s, the Voting Rights Act has been a pillar in ensuring that all Americans – and all New Yorkers – are able to be a part of the electoral process. Just this past election cycle, the Voting Rights Act was essential in protecting voters from insidious attempts to enforce identification requirements and other methods to discourage certain voters.

It is baffling that the Supreme Court, while recognizing that voting discrimination still exists, voted to overturn the very protections afforded by the Voting Rights Act. In order to protect every person’s right to vote, Congress must expeditiously develop an update on the Voting Rights Act pre-clearance formula and work to uphold the tenets of democracy that Americans pride themselves on.

Former NYC Comptroller and mayoral candidate Bill Thompson:

"When the Voting Rights Act was enacted in 1965, it was a turning point in American history. It opened the doors of democracy so that all our people could play a part. Today's ruling has eliminated yet another protection for voters - especially those who have been historically silenced in our black and Latino communities - and opens the door even wider for potential disenfranchisement. As Mayor, protecting people's right to vote will always be my priority."

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