

**Remarks for 60th Anniversary of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
U.S. Representative F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Washington, DC – November 11, 2017**

Congressman Sensenbrenner was unable to speak at the Commission's event due to unforeseen circumstances. The below remarks are those he prepared in advance for delivery.

I want to thank the Commission for the invitation to speak today and for putting together this important and timely forum. This is an occasion for us to celebrate the 60 years of work the Commission has done to promote civil rights and equal opportunities for all, and for us to continue to seek new opportunities to work together to achieve these goals.

Since the creation of the Commission in 1957, the agency has served as both watchdog and advisor on a number of issues relating to civil rights. The enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 largely depended on work done by the Commission. In 1990, Congress relied heavily on a commission report to enact the Americans with Disabilities Act. And more recently, the Commission has weighed in on matters relating to civil asset forfeiture and human trafficking.

The independent, bipartisan nature of the Committee is sorely needed. Too often issues of civil rights have been viewed through a partisan lens. This shouldn't be the case.

One such issue is the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was amended or reauthorized multiple times, and each time, it was done on a strong, bipartisan basis. I am proud to have had a leading hand in preserving and strengthening that essential tradition when the Act was last reauthorized in 2006.

The Voting Rights Act is important, not only because of the discrimination it stops, but because of the faith it gives to voters that their votes will be counted and their elections will be fair.

However, in 2013, in *Shelby vs. Holder*, the Supreme Court held that, while preclearance is a constitutional response to voter discrimination; it is unconstitutional to apply it to states based on a 1965 formula — which was what the 1982 and 2006 reauthorizations were modeled after. The result is that pre-clearance remains, but almost no jurisdictions are subject to it.

In response to this ruling, I introduced the Voting Rights Amendment Act. Among other things, the bill modernizes the original 1965 law — which applied preclearance to the same nine states for 48 years — so that the pre-clearance rules apply equally to every state in the country. It also provides greater transparency in elections so that voters are made aware of any changes to polling times, dates, locations, and protocols. The additional sunlight will deter discrimination from occurring and protect voters from discrimination.

Additionally, I want to commend the Commission for its work on civil asset forfeiture reform. In recent years, we have learned of a growing number of instances across the United States where the government has confiscated property from citizens and small businesses without any criminal conviction, or even criminal charges. The current civil forfeiture system is ripe for abuse, and has undermined the constitutional rights of far too many Americans. I applaud the Commission for bringing these abuses to light.

Our nation was founded on the principles of due process and property rights, and Congress must vigorously defend these values. I am the proud author of the DUE Process Act. My bill builds upon changes made in the 2000 Civil Action Forfeiture Reform Act by increasing transparency in the civil asset forfeiture process, adding protections for innocent property owners, and implementing additional protections to ensure property owners have the opportunity to contest seizures. The legislation also improves the notice that the government must give property owners and makes it easier for them to be heard by a judge.

Our federal civil rights laws have made tremendous progress in addressing discrimination based on race, sex, and ethnicity; and yet we know that they will continuously face setbacks. Today is a time for us to renew our commitment to protect and advance our nation's civil rights. Again, I thank the Commission and look forward to working with you to shape federal civil rights laws.

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