

**ADDRESS OF SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY
ON THE LEGACY OF JOHN LEWIS
AND THE URGENT NEED TO PASS THE JOHN LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT
SENATE FLOOR
JULY 22, 2020**

I stand here on the Senate Floor with an incredibly heavy heart. On Friday night, my dear friend and hero, John Lewis passed away. America has lost a genuine hero – an unwavering lodestar who, over decades of selfless activism and public service, drew us closer to our ideals. But John was not just a great man. He was a fundamentally good man, equally generous and kind to the powerless and the powerful. I was humbled and honored he called me his brother when we were together, including during an unforgettable visit he had with us in Vermont just last year.

Words don't suffice in paying tribute to a man whose life was defined by the relentless, fearless pursuit of equality. John bled and his bones were broken for the cause of civil rights. He came to Congress bearing those scars – a living, breathing reminder that our society's progress on racial equality came through the sacrifices of heroes like him. In Congress, John stood with equal moral clarity, serving as its conscience and reminding us that our work to build a genuinely equal and just society remains unfinished.

The fact that he passed away during another national reckoning on racial injustices in some ways is fitting, however painful. An embodiment of the civil rights movement has passed the baton to a younger generation of Americans. His thundering words just months ago echo even more loudly today: "When you see something that is not right . . . you have a moral obligation to say something. To do something. Our children and their children will ask us, 'What did you do?'"

There is one thing I am doing today that I want to share with my fellow senators and Americans. Today, I am reintroducing the Voting Rights Advancement Act. And we are re-naming it the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. This bipartisan legislation with 47 Senate cosponsors would safeguard what John fought over a lifetime to achieve: equality at the voting booth. The bill would restore the Voting Rights Act and help end the scourge of minority voter suppression. John called voting "the most powerful nonviolent tool we have to create a more perfect union." He was right. And that's why we cannot stand idly by while states engage in flagrant suppression schemes to take this tool away from marginalized communities.

The House already passed the companion to the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act in December. Now we must do our part. We cannot claim to honor the *life* of John Lewis if we refuse to carry on his *life's work*. Or worse, if we stand in the way of that work.

The hand of history is poised to write the next chapter of our nation's story. Let us rise to the moment. I urge my fellow Senators to join me in calling on Senator McConnell to allow a vote on the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. Let's do it for John. But let's do it *not simply because* it's named after him, *but because it is precisely* what John would do: take action to forge a more perfect union, to protect our democracy, and, above all, to do what is right.

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