



October 28, 2020

Let's Vote and Make History!

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed." The system that was established in our United States is a representative democracy, where voting is the method by which the electorate appoints its representatives to government, and by which the elected representatives make decisions. At first, white men with property were the only Americans routinely permitted to vote. President Andrew Jackson, champion of frontiersmen, helped advance the political rights of those who did not own property. By about 1860, most white men without property were enfranchised. But African Americans, women, Native Americans, non-English speakers, and citizens between the ages of 18 and 21 had to fight for the right to vote in this country.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1868) granted African Americans the rights of citizenship. However, this did not always translate into the ability to vote. Black voters were systematically turned away from state polling places. To combat this problem, Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. It says:

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Yet states still found ways to circumvent the Constitution and prevent Blacks from voting. Poll taxes, literacy tests, fraud and intimidation all turned African Americans away from the polls.

In 1963 and 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. brought hundreds of Black people to the courthouse in Selma, Alabama to register. When they were turned away, Dr. King organized and led protests that finally turned the tide of American political opinion. In 1964 the Twenty-fourth Amendment prohibited the use of poll taxes. In 1965, the Voting Rights Act directed the Attorney General to enforce the right to vote for African Americans.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act created a significant change in the status of African Americans throughout the South. The Voting Rights Act prohibited the states from using literacy tests and other methods of excluding African Americans from voting. Prior to this, only an estimated twenty-three percent of voting-age Blacks were registered nationally, but by 1969 the number had jumped to sixty-one percent (source for this material: The Library of Congress). I introduced and passed House Resolution HR 0909 (95th General Assembly) which urges Congress to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to make all its provisions permanent. I also Introduced and passed House Joint Resolution 0076 (99th General Assembly) which supports amending the United States Constitution to explicitly guarantee an individual's right to vote

The history of voting rights is not yet over. Even today, debate continues. One of the most heated debates is whether or not convicted felons who have served their time be allowed to vote. Today, a

handful of states bar convicted felons from voting unless they successfully petition to have their voting rights restored. I have fought for voting rights for people with a history of a felony who have completed their sentence (see my legislation HJRCA0033). Recently, I filed legislation (HJRCA0048) that repeals language denying a person convicted of a felony, or otherwise under sentence in a correctional institution or jail, the right to vote until completion of his or her sentence.

Above all, the Electoral College arouses controversy, with critics arguing that our country's indirect system of electing a president overrepresents small states, distorts political campaigning, and thwarts the will of a majority of voters. I introduced legislation that became law stating the State of Illinois ratifies the agreement among the states to elect the President by National Popular Vote, to ensure that the candidate with the most votes is elected President of the United States (Public Act 095-0714).


History reminds us that even issues that seem settled sometimes reopen as subjects for debate. In short, the debate about what it means to be a truly democratic society remains an ongoing, unfinished, story. (source for this material: The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History)

So, we have the opportunity to create our own history by voting. Many people have sacrificed and died to create our opportunity today. Have your voice heard and VOTE, either in early voting or on Election Day on November 3. Even if you haven't registered, you can register at the polling place using two forms of ID, one of which shows the voter's current address. At this late time in the process, most experts are now advising to drop your Vote By Mail ballot in secure drop boxes at Early Voting Locations rather than mailing them.

West Side Early Voting locations where you can vote early or submit your Vote By Mail Ballot to a secure drop Box include: Herzl Elementary School, 3711 W. Douglas Blvd; Suder Elementary School, 2022 W. Washington Blvd; Westside Learning Center, 4624 W. Madison St.; Burbank Elementary School, 2035 N. Mobile Ave.; Hanson Park Elementary School, 5411 W. Fullerton Ave.; and McNair Elementary School, 4820 W. Walton St. Hours are Monday-Friday: 8:30 a.m. – 7 p.m. and Saturday-Sunday: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Election day hours on November 3, 2020 are 6 a.m. – 7 p.m.

The census count is over, but now you must be counted at the polls!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'La Shawn K. Ford', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District