

This week, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered decisions with potentially wide-reaching implications. One such decision involved the striking down of section 4 of the Voting Rights Act (the VRA). Based on the history of racial discrimination in voting, the VRA required that any changes to election laws in a handful of states had to be approved by the Federal Government. This issue has been a recent point of contention in covered states like Texas or Mississippi, that have sought to impose strict voter id laws. This Supreme Court decision basically allows these states to now pass such laws without Federal Government approval. As this decision just recently came down, the implications of the opinion are unclear. However, it does show the need for state legislatures to take care in imposing changes to voting requirements.

As an Arkansas Democrat, I fully support ensuring the integrity of our elections. Preventing voter fraud is essential to our system of government. On the same side, election integrity also calls for ensuring that all who are eligible to vote have the chance to cast a ballot. Recently, our state legislature passed a “voter id” law that places too much of a burden on the working poor’s ability to vote. Pushed through by one particular political party, the authors of the law ignored commonsense alternatives and placed enormous burdens on the working poor’s ability to vote – while substantially increasing the scope and size of government.

I agree with Arkansas Democrats, such as Governor Beebe, that we must take a balanced approach to our voting laws. By placing such draconian barriers to voting, our GOP-controlled state legislature undermined the freedoms that so many in the Civil Rights Movement died to achieve. This simply cannot continue to happen, as our elections are the cornerstone of the freedoms we enjoy. As 2014 approaches, I am going to work hard for Democratic candidates – folks that embrace the importance of voting.

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