

Good Trouble Rally Speech Notes

- I am going to say something that should come as no surprise—our democracy is under attack. Our right to vote, our right to select leaders who will represent us, our communities, and our needs—this is fundamental to democracy. Our vote is our power, as the saying goes, and they have been trying to take our power for a long time.
- Our democracy has been under attack for over a decade now—with court cases and laws that weaken voting rights protections, that suppress the right to vote, and that dilute the power of Black and other communities of color so that the same kinds of people keep getting elected.
- It's clear that we don't have any allies on the federal level. The current Administration has gutted the federal agencies that protect our civil rights and right to vote. It is spreading misinformation about elections and voting so that people are too scared to vote. It is trying to change the way the Census works so that our noncitizen neighbors aren't counted!
- And the Supreme Court is no better. Since 2012, the Supreme Court has made it difficult for voters to claw any of that power back, and it's only going to get more difficult. At some point in the near future, it's very possible that the protections we have under the Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965—the legislation that was the result of Bloody Sunday in Selma, that John R. Lewis himself put his body on the line for—it is very possible that one day soon, the Federal VRA will be done away with completely.
- With the federal government so hostile to our communities and voting rights, where is the New Jersey Legislature?
- Why are we only relying on D.C.? It is New Jersey's job to protect New Jersey voters.
- It is New Jersey's job to look at the real obstacles New Jersey voters—especially Black and other voters of color—face when they try to participate in our democracy.
- Every election cycle, we see that Black and Brown New Jersey voters face more chronic challenges in their communities when voting. In general, Black and Brown voters face more:
 - long lines and late poll openings
 - voter roll purges with no ability to register the day of the election at the polling site
 - Instances of being incorrectly asked for voter identification
 - limited language assistance at the polls
 - Polling locations that are not accessible
 - Voter intimidation at the polls

- Redistricting maps that dilute voter power in Black and other communities of color
- These challenges can discourage voters from voting or even disenfranchise them. This is a form of voter suppression, and yes, it impacts thousands of voters *in New Jersey* every election!
- So what can we do about this? Or more specifically, what can the New Jersey Legislature do to make sure our right to vote is protected and that our democracy is inclusive and multiracial—a democracy representative of *all* of us?
- Today, at this event meant to honor the late Congressman John R. Lewis and his legacy of Good Trouble, I am going to urge you to push your legislators to pass the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey.
- This bill, sponsored by Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson and Senator Shirley Turner, is a New Jersey Voting Rights Act. We call it the NJVRA for short!
- This is the kind of legislation our legislators should be supporting to fight for us and our democracy. The NJVRA protects our right to the vote the way that the federal VRA once did.
- It is a bill that protects us from discrimination and intimidation at the polls. It is a bill that gives us legal tools to challenge laws that would suppress our right to vote, or that dilute the voting power of our communities! It is a bill that lets us have access to more information—about voting and elections—so that the process is less mysterious. It is a bill that expands language access so that non-English-speaking voters—who have the right to vote!—can understand the ballot in their own language, just as you and I do.
- The NJVRA is the single strongest piece of civil rights law that the New Jersey Legislature can pass to fight for us and protect us—if they're brave enough to do so.
- But we all know politics. We know that if we don't use our voices to pressure them, they're not going to do it.
- So today I ask you to call your state Assemblymembers and state Senators—email them, show up to the district offices and ask to meet with them—and demand that they fight for you. Demand that they fight for our democracy. Make that Good Trouble and demand that New Jersey pass A4083/S3009, the John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey before it's too late.