

MOTION

The right to vote has long been held as one of the most important rights granted by the U.S. Constitution. Despite that reverence, however, voting in America has a long and fraught history marked by injustice. Originally reserved for white male citizens over the age of 21, the franchise was first extended to African Americans during the post-Civil War Reconstruction period in the form of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments which guarantees that all male citizens, regardless of race, would receive equal treatment under the law. For the next century, however, until the Voting Rights Act was signed into law in 1965, Jim Crow laws such as literacy tests, poll taxes, religious tests, and property ownership requirements were used to deny immigrants, non-white citizens, Native Americans, and other marginalized groups the voting rights granted under the Constitution.

It was not until 1920, with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, that women were granted suffrage. In practice, however, the same restrictions that hindered the ability of poor or non-white men to vote also kept poor or non-white women from the polls. In fact, universal enfranchisement was a work in progress throughout much of the twentieth century. The Snyder Act (1924) granted all Native Americans citizenship and the right to vote. The Magnuson Act (1943) granted Chinese immigrants citizenship and the right to vote. The Warren Court (1953-1969) handed down a series of landmark decisions which helped establish the nationwide one person, one vote electoral system and prohibited tax payments and wealth requirements for voting in state elections. And not until 1986, with the passage of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act were military and uniformed service members stationed overseas granted the right to vote. To this day, incarcerated Americans and many formerly incarcerated Americans are still denied the right to vote.

Suffrage is not a result of altruistic decision making, but a direct response to popular struggles and mass political pressure. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s did not spring up out of nowhere, nor did it disappear with the implementation of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. Rather, the Freedom Movement of the 1960s was one episode in a centuries-long struggle for human rights and civic dignity that continues to this day. It was a movement that grew out of what came before and evolved into the struggles being waged today.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted many states to expand vote-by-mail to provide an alternative to in-person voting and reduce crowds on election day. Anticipating an avalanche of absentee ballots, the U.S. Postal Service recently sent detailed letters to 46 states and Washington D.C. warning that it cannot guarantee all ballots cast by mail for the upcoming November election will arrive in time to be counted — even if they are requested before state deadlines and promptly mailed back. In April, the bi-partisan USPS Board of Governors requested \$25 billion in financial assistance for the postal service, warning of pending insolvency. Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives recently included \$25 billion for the USPS in their coronavirus bill in May, along with an additional \$3.6 billion in election security funding, and Postmaster General, Louis DeJoy, stated he would suspend cuts and operational changes at the postal service until after the election to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

Nonetheless, President Trump continues to attempt to preemptively delegitimize the results of the upcoming presidential elections and Americans have worked too hard to solidify voting rights over the last two centuries to allow for the systematic disenfranchisement of voters in the upcoming elections. The City of Los Angeles has a responsibility to not only acknowledge and support efforts to achieve universal suffrage, but also work to ensure that every Angeleno who casts a ballot on election day has their vote counted.

AUG 26 2020

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Clerk be instructed to report to Council on the feasibility of installing ballot drop boxes in city facilities to ensure voters have easy and safe access to cast their ballots, including security for drop box locations and a process to ensure all ballots deposited at a drop box are delivered to the County Clerk's ballot receiving location by the ballot submission deadline.

I FURTHER MOVE that the City Clerk be instructed to report to Council on all efforts being made to ensure vote-by-mail ballots submitted in the upcoming November 3, 2020 elections are counted.

PRESENTED BY: _____



DAVID E. RYU
Councilmember, 4th District

SECONDED BY: _____

BOB BLUMENFIELD (verbal)
Councilmember, 3rd District