August 23, 2021

Dear Representative:

We write to you as the executive officers of the International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE), a labor union representing upwards of 90,000 members, to express our strong support for H.R. 4, the “John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021,” sponsored by Rep. Terry Sewell. We urge you to vote for H.R. 4 to ensure that participation in our democracy is available to all American citizens and not constrained by discriminatory election laws and policies.

This bill carries on the legacy of Congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis by restoring the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965, long considered to be the most successful legislative accomplishment of the Civil Rights era. The legislation resolves the issues created by the 2013 Supreme Court ruling in Shelby County v. Holder, which gutted the preclearance process created by Voting Rights Act. Just between 1998 and 2013, the preclearance process was utilized in 87 instances by the Department of Justice to block discriminatory changes to voting policies and procedures.

In the years since the weakening of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, changes to state and county laws and election procedures have already threatened a cornerstone principle of our democracy, enshrined in the 15th Amendment: that the right of American citizens to vote shall not be denied “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Recently, numerous states have already enacted restrictive voting requirements that limit access to the ballot box, reduce the number of polling places in specific communities, and place undue burdens on voters. Now – with the once-in-a-decade process of redistricting underway – the prospect of restrictive election policies, the redrawing of districts, and a weakened federal oversight process has opened the door to undoing the anti-discriminatory ballot access gains of the Voting Rights Act. These changes will impact communities of color the hardest and will deny Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American voters in certain states and localities a fair opportunity to exercise their right to vote and elect lawmakers that reflect their individual priorities, preferences, and concerns.

Under the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, the preclearance process would be updated and modernized to comply with the Supreme Court’s Shelby County ruling. The geographic formula in the bill would require a 10-year period for the federal government to preclear any changes to voting changes in states and localities with a recent record of discriminatory election policies. This bill would protect the franchise of voting for American citizens, regardless of the state, locality, or community they live in.

This legislation is critical to repairing our electoral systems so that all Americans have a fair and unencumbered opportunity to participate in our democracy. Therefore, we request you vote for H.R. 4. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact either or us, or IFPTE legislative director Faraz Khan at 202-239-4880.

Sincerely,

Matthew S. Biggs
IFPTE President

Gay Henson
IFPTE Secretary-Treasurer