

DIANE NASH
OPENING STATEMENT

Chairwoman Maloney
Ranking Member Jordan
Members of the Committee
Fellow Citizens who are present

I want to acknowledge the work of Reverend James Bevel. He was my former husband, who is now deceased. James and I were partners in our work on the Selma Right to Vote movement, which was one of the major efforts that led to passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Our son, Douglass Bevel is present today and contributed to the forming of my statements to this Committee.

The letter from Chairwoman Maloney inviting me to testify today, said:

The hearing will examine current barriers Americans – especially those in minority communities--face in exercising the right to vote

And

Lessons from the civil rights movement about how we can overcome these barriers to ensure the 2020 election is free and fair.

Black voters and many non-Black voters are in a worse place now than we were when the Voting Right Act was passed in 1965. Then, we did not have Citizens United. Citizens who can't afford to make campaign contributions and those who cannot afford to make large contributions, do not have parity with wealthier voters.

We need to establish “one person, one vote.”

Progress had been made with the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. I believe that Supreme Court Justices Scalia, Kennedy, Thomas, Alito and Roberts who voted to gut the Voting Rights Act, knew that removing the provision that required states to receive federal approval for changes in voting procedures, would result in the curtailing of voting rights for minorities. I do not believe for one second that they really thought the provision was no longer needed, as Justice Roberts wrote. We knew the result would be gerrymandering and voter suppression and those 5 justices knew it also because they are as smart as you and I. So, 5 Justices of the United States Supreme Court suppressed voting rights and undermined democracy--deliberately.

Sometimes those opposed to descendants of enslaved Africans having equal rights, undo progress that has been made and civil rights organizations spend years working to recover progress that was unnecessarily rolled back. They give us a hamster wheel on which to run.

James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, Jimmy Lee Jackson, Viola Liuzzo, Reverend James Reeb and others' lives were taken; people were beaten into unconsciousness, permanently injured, fired from jobs and families were evicted from their homes in order to obtain the vote. I do not appreciate what those 5 Justices did. It's not the first time. In 1857, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney who wrote for the majority, wrote that the Negro had “no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”

Legislation to restore measures lost when the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act is needed. But that is not enough. To stop there would be to climb onto on the hamster wheel.

We need legislation to get money out of political campaigns and have government funding of political campaigns.

We need to abolish the Electoral College.

Political parties need to eliminate super delegates.

All these exist because some citizens try to gain advantage and have more power than other citizens.

We need paper ballots so that vote totals can be documented.

If we expect foreign countries to respect our democracy and not meddle in our elections, we need to stop interfering in their elections. We need to stop with “regime change” when a country chooses a government that the United States administration doesn’t like. “You reap what you sow;” “Chickens come home to roost;” “What goes around comes around” are proverbs that have come about over time because they contain truth and wisdom.

How would we like it if another country did not approve of a president we elected and they bombed our country and installed someone acceptable to them as head of our government? Regime change.

You have to practice fairness yourself. Not just when you are being treated unfairly. We should all be constantly looking for unfairness and trying to correct it.

Some examples of unfairness that I want to cite are--

I think that at the beginning of the primary season during the first couple of debates, all candidates should be given equal time to speak.

Since television is how most people become familiar with candidates and what they stand for, networks should have to give equal time to candidates at least for a reasonable period, at the beginning of the primary season. The networks should not be allowed to usurp the function of the voters by attempting to influence the outcome of elections by featuring some candidates and ignoring others, especially, early in the process.

When I received the invitation to testify before your committee today, I decided that if I could make a contribution, even a small one, towards stopping the slide of our country away from democracy and towards authoritarianism, it would be well worth it to travel here today.

Forces that want to send the United States of America into an authoritarian government, control the Presidency, the Department of Justice, the majority of the Senate and the majority of the Supreme Court.

Even if he loses the election in November of 2020, I cannot envision President Trump making a concession speech. Rather, I can only believe that he is likely to say that the election was unfair and that, in fact, he won.

My counsel is that you should decide now, exactly and specifically, (keywords are “exactly” and “specifically”) who will remove him from office should that scenario occur. Don’t be caught at the time trying to decide who is going to remove him. Just like the intelligence apparatus is being re-shaped, we should assume similar efforts are going on in the military.

When people in the 1960s were risking their lives to get the right to vote, we really thought that if we got a number of Blacks and some right-intentioned non-Blacks in political positions, the lives of Black people as a whole would be improved. What we didn’t see coming was that individuals would be elected to office and would consider their positions their personal jobs instead of representing their constituents. And that many would be more concerned with being elected for additional terms, instead of representing to the best of their ability, their constituents.

The Civil Rights Movement in the southern United States followed many of Mohandas Gandhi’s teachings. Being truthful was one of his most basic teachings. When a person or a country has gotten off the path, Truth will lead one back to a better direction.

One of the principles of Nonviolence is that it is a mistake to cooperate with wrong things. Some examples of what I think were mistakes:

About a year before President Obama’s term was over, the Senate refused to consider the president’s appointment for the Supreme Court. Republicans were allowed to get away with that.

Democrats were fond of saying, “No one is above the law.” Yet, when persons ignored subpoenas issued by the House of Representatives, they were allowed to be above the law. Violators should have been treated like most Americans are treated if we ignore lawful subpoenas. Marshals should have arrested them and court challenges should have been worried about later.

When Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination for the Supreme Court was in question and only a sham investigation took place, he was allowed to become a Justice.

When witnesses and documents were denied as evidence in the impeachment trial, that was allowed.

The government should have been shut down until all the documents and witnesses you wanted were produced. You should still shut it down until you get the documents and witnesses you want. They were necessary in order to have a fair trial. Now they are necessary for voters to have the information we need in order to cast informed votes in November.

The House of Representatives has more power than you have been willing to use. You can stop funding certain items. Be proportional. Smaller issues require less stringent measures. Very important matters require serious responses.

What are you putting up with now? Is the Senate refusing to act on bills you have sent to them? Are some of those bills designed to protect our elections including the election of November 2020?

You can stop cooperating until what you need to have happen, happens.

To persons who are fired or resign from this administration, please do not just go away quietly. Speak up! Hold a press conference. Tell the voters what is happening. We need to know so that we can make informed choices.

When you are dealing with people like those in the current administration, who are willing to be unlawful and who disregard the Constitution, who will take and promptly violate oaths, you have to be as bold as they. "You teach people how to treat you," as Dr. Phil says. Democracy and the republic are being assaulted. The democratic elements in the government and we citizens had better begin to act accordingly. Our grandchildren and their progeny are depending on us not to allow the republic to be lost on our watch.

I was coordinator of the Freedom Rides (to desegregate interstate bus travel) in 1961. Before they boarded the buses, several Freedom Riders gave me envelopes that they asked me to mail in the event of their deaths. The founding fathers and mothers took up arms against the king. If they had lost the Revolutionary War, they would have been executed. It took work and sacrifice and courage to establish this republic. Keeping this profound gift, the republic they obtained for us, will continue to take work and sacrifice and courage.

Like Irving Berlin, my prayer for our country is that the Creator will

Stand beside her and guide her
through the night with a light from above.

God bless the United States of America and all the people of this planet!