

Transcript: No More Excuses Voting Rights Now 8.24.21

Virginia Kase Solomón: How's everyone doing? Are we ready to fight for some voting rights today? Good morning everyone, all you Voting Rights Activists. What a day for our democracy. The people are here. I am Virginia Kase Solomón. I am the CEO of the League of Women Voters of the United States and it is an honor to be here with you today. I am so thrilled we have so many amazing partners in democracy. Thank you to Black Voters Matter, the lawyers committee, Democracy Initiative, people for the American way. We have Black Voters Matter here we have the declaration for American democracy team and we have so many others. We have so many great people here today in this lineup and I also want to say a special thank you to my friend and partner and brother in justice Ben jealous from the people for the American way for standing with us in this moment, we are excited because we know that today matters. Folks, we are here because our democracy is in crisis. Our voting rights are under attack like we have not seen since the days of Jim Crow but we're not going back. We have been hundreds of new anti-voter laws and bills this year alone that would silence our voices. Millions of Americans stand to lose access to their right to vote and who stands to lose the most? People of color, women, people with disabilities and young people. But it doesn't have to be that way. We have solutions. We have two bills in Congress right now. That would restore and protect the freedom to vote for every single American. But there's a problem. Lawmakers in the Senate are deadlocked on voting rights. Why? Over partisan stupidity. And the Biden administration guaranteed to make voting rights a priority but we have yet to see the full power of the executive branch. President Biden spent more than 30 years in the Senate. He knows how to get things done. And that is why we are here today at the White House. Because it is time for President Biden to live up to his promise to make voting rights a priority of this administration. And we will not stop today's just one day of many. We will not stop we will keep our foot on the back of these politicians to hold them accountable for our voting rights. And we are here to send a message, Mr. President, you have the power to bring lawmakers together from both sides of the aisle and ensure that the voting right bills become law is only a barrier if you allow it to be now the American people are counting on you, Mr. President, and we are holding you accountable. So, we have a great program here today. We are so thrilled we have amazing individuals but we want to start with a blessing because we all know whether you are a person of faith or not. We need to make sure that we are calling upon our higher powers to put their hand over this crowd to keep us safe and to make sure that our mission can be accomplished. So, with that I want to bring up Rabbi Jonah Pesner and Reverend Tim McDonald to bless the crowd

Rabbi Pesner: Good afternoon civil rights family good afternoon voting rights family. Pastor McDonald and I are here. We want to remind everybody what happened on January 6. A white supremacist racist mob, an antisemitic and anti-Muslimism bigots invaded our nation's capital, because some people want some people's votes not to count. Some people want white supremacy to stay in power and control of this country after 400 years of enslaved African people. Slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration and yes, voter suppression. But something else happened on January 6. You cannot make this stuff up. A white Jewish kid who grew up in Atlanta, who was bar mitzvah at the temple, which was the site of the bombing by the Ku Klux Klan because the Rabbi Rothschild works with king and was a civil rights leader was elected the first Jewish Senator from the state of Georgia, alongside pastor, Reverend Warnock, who was the pastor at kings church, which was the sister church to the temple in Atlanta becoming the

first Black Senator in the state of Georgia. So, on this day in offering a blessing on this crowd, I invoke the names of Goodman and Cheney and Shorner, two young white Jewish men and a young Black Christian man who gave their lives for the right to vote. And we are now a much broader multiracial multi religious, multiethnic democracy in America where in the face of some people not wanting some people's votes to count we say Black, white, brown, Asian, Latino immigrant. We say Muslim Christian Jews, [unintelligible] Hindu friends, people of all faiths, people have no faith. We stand together in the acknowledgment, that our safety is in our solidarity and the redemption of this nation built on hundreds of years of systemic racism, the redemption of this nation. Might, come through our democracy voting rights now. Amen.

Reverend Timothy McDonald: thank you so much, Rabbi. I'm Reverend Timothy McDonald, vice chair of the board of people for the American way. I had the privilege at the age of 23, serving as the full time assistant pastor of the historic Ebenezer Baptist church. When Dr. King served then as has been emeritus, Dr. Gilda Roberts was the senior pastor and I served for six years with that he and Dr. Roberts as the assistant pastor, I had the privilege of serving with the southern Christian leadership conference on the national staff. For Dr. Joseph Lowry. Why do I say this? This fight is not a new fight. This fight for voting rights has been going on for far too long. But we knew then as we know now, we are not here for an event. We are here to continue a movement and this movement will not cease until voting rights become the priority for our house this house behind us that we call the White House this is our house built by slaves and we're going to make sure that the occupant of this, our house understand that we are here for the marathon race that we are here for the long haul and that we are not going to give up we are not going to turn back. We are not going to throw in the towel but we are going to fight until every voters vote gets counted. I don't care if it's white, or Black or brown, was it republican or democrat? We are here to protect democracy we are here to protect the rights of every American citizen to know that when I cast a ballot that it that my ballot will be counted. It is time for President Biden to do the right thing. And fix the filibuster. Let the filibuster work for the voter let the filibuster work for our democracy. Let the filibuster work for the people not for special interest groups, not for the money groups, but for the citizens of these United States of America. I am so proud that our country is striving to help out in Afghanistan. That is a good thing. But Mr. President, we got problems right here. That need to be fixed the vote in America. Needs to be fixed democracy in America needs to be fixed. To move our nation forward to regain our self-respect, we must make sure that we stop these voting suppression bills. The last thing I will say I'm from Georgia the first voter suppression bill that passed in the United States of America. Came through Georgia. Dr. King was from Georgia John Lewis served as our Congressman from Georgia Joseph Lowry served as head of the silk in Georgia we need to send a message. And I want to thank you for being here today. Because they're going to hear us in our house. They're going to hear us today. They're going to hear us. They're going to feel us and it won't be just a one day event. We will come back again and again and again until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing stream. Because we am not going to let nobody turn us back now. We've been out here too long it is too hot out here. We've been fighting and fighting. And now we want resolution fix America fix democracy fix our vote and let's do it now to save our democracy to save the image that our country is perpetuating all around the world. This is our house, and we want our house back. This is our house, and we want our house back. This is our house and we want and will take our house back. God bless you. Good keep you. Be strong and let's keep on fighting.

Ben Jealous: good afternoon. My name is Ben Jealous, I'm President of people for the American way it was an honor to be joined by Rabbi Pesner and co-chair Reverend Tim McDonald. I want to thank each of you for joining us today in the midst of all these covid anxieties. As I wipe this microphone and I want to thank the League of Women Voters. Is serious about covid protocol, y'all and I want to thank the 10s of 1000s who are watching this live stream right now. And the more than 400,000 who signed the petitions that we delivered to the White House two weeks ago. The White House knows what this is about this is a moment when this movement is escalating because we have pleaded we have asked politely and we've received no joy as we'd watch voting rights bills introduced into states across the country. They go down and voter suppression bills introduced in states across the country have passed. We now see Arizona and Texas and Georgia giving corrupt politicians the ability to overturn the people the people didn't give the politicians that power the politicians gave themselves that power. Joe Madison who led the arrest after arrest after arrest at the south African embassy in the 80s Joe Madison who is a powerful voice for DC statehood right now. Joe Madison

Joe Madison: [unintelligible] The best deals in America and civil disobedience is a tool that used and you'll find it very interesting in the two minutes that I have. When a Ben Jealous or Dick Grady. Or any of you go to jail. You obviously will be joined by a lot of brothers and some sisters that are already there. And when they see you, they ask. What are you here for? What did you do? You now have an opportunity to educate those who are locked up and who will be locked up forever and they'll be coming out today for example, in North Carolina. Ex-felons now have the right to vote I've only stopped by because one my respect for Ben Jealous my respect for those who spoke before Reverend mentioned Joe Love, Martin Luther King, John Lewis, Rosa Parks. But one thing they all have in common is they're no longer with us. They've passed on the torch. But what I'm so delighted to see today is a multi-generation from the very youngest under the tree to some of us old heads, gray hairs and I'm sorry Ben, no hair. But I've come by to tell you, none of us can afford now to pass the torch and so I'm here to tell you I'm not passing my torch. I'll light your torch I'll light your torch because if I pass my torch I'm in the dark. I'll light your torch so that we all can have the light going forward together. And I would also say this in closing. Don't make this a moment. What you are part of is a movement. And the difference between a moment and a movement is sacrifice. If you think it's hot now, we ought to make sure it's damn hotter in the United States. Senate and that they pass that John Lewis Voting Rights Act Biden, he owes that to us his ass would not be sitting in the White House. If it wasn't for those of you out here and the millions of others who voted for him. And it's time for him to pay. It is time for him to pay up. The filibuster is not in the constitution of the United States constitution. It's made up and they can change it tomorrow. If they can change the filibuster rule to make sure that we can pay for airplanes and the federal budget. Then they ought to make sure that they change that filibuster to take care of the most fundamental constitutional right Every single one of us has in the United States. And that's the right to vote be prepared to make this moment a movement. God bless you.

Virginia Kase Solomón: Alright so I also want to give a big round of applause to Billy Sanders our American sign language interpreter, thank you. We have next, I am proud to Introduce, Dr. Deborah Turner who is the President of the board directors, of the League of Women Voters of the United States.

Dr. Turner: Alright thank you Virginia and hello America. We are here today because we will not turn back and we will not give up. just over 100 years ago brave women stood on this very spot with much the same message that we deliver today. Those suffragists were calling on the President to expand voting rights for women. Today we gather in front of the White House to continue their fight for full and

equal voting rights for all. Right now, we are faced with an assault on our democracy that threatens the voting rights and freedoms of millions of Americans, particularly voters of color, women voters, disabled voters and young voters. Our President has given us his word that he will be a champion for voting rights. But we have yet to put those words into action. We have yet to see him use the full power of the executive branch to advance the For the People Act. We have yet to see him bring lawmakers together on voting rights the way he did on Infrastructure. Our freedom to vote is the cornerstone of American democracy. Now it's the time to ensure a national standard that will protect and expand our access to the ballot. The Voting Rights Act has always received bipartisan support. And that's because the right to vote is not a partisan issue. The right to vote is the foundation of our democracy. The right to vote is not a partisan issue. It is an American issue. Now is not the time to sit back and hope our Congress does the right thing. President Biden must use the full power of his office. He must compel Congress to pass voting rights legislation and ensure the freedom to vote for all of us and the freedom to vote for every American. Attacks on our freedom to vote are meant to drown out the voices of those least represented in our democracy. When one person lets me say that again when one person is disenfranchised our entire democracy is weakened. Speaking of those misrepresented, our call for democracy reform must absolutely positively include statehood for the District of Columbia. Residents of our nation's capital have been subject to taxation without representation for our country's entire existence. This is shameful. We cannot call ourselves a great democracy until all our people have full and equal representation in our government. The President must not leave the people of DC behind. It is time that the White House truly shows us that voting rights is a priority. This is about the soul of our nation. Mr. President, we hope that people, we the people will not accept words any longer. Mr. President, hear our voices. Hear our cry. Mr. President, we demand voting rights now.

Charly Carter: Hello, everybody it's not hot out here yet, it's not hot until they start feeling it inside the White House. I want to thank everybody for coming out. It's an honor for me to be here today. I want to thank Dr. Deborah Turner, Virginia Kase Solomón Ben Jealous and the incredible team at the League of Women Voters and people for bringing us all together here. My name is Charly Carter, I'm the executive director of the Democracy Initiative. We are a unique intersectional coalition of 75 labor organizations, environmental organizations, civic groups, civil rights groups, people who don't ordinarily share the same room or the same table but we are united in understanding the right to vote and the need to protect the right to vote. I'm here to tell you that we're with you all 45 million of us. We're in this fight to protect our right to vote. We're mobilizing with our affiliates. In all 50 states from Arizona to West Virginia. I want to give a special shoutout to Penny Shoran and the delegation from Arizona League of Women Voters. They along with the Democracy Initiative and a broad coalition, have turned up the heat on their Senators to support the For the People Act. In fact, they turned up the heat so high that Senator Mark Kelly, a Senator Christian Sinema are [unintelligible] their constituents during this recess. Arizona we got your back and we're not backing down. There are so many great leaders here and great organizations here today. I want to give another shout out to our friends at Black Voters Matters. Right. And it's appropriate that we're here today because if there's one person in America, who should really understand that Black votes matter, it's the guy who lives in the house across the street. Joe Biden. If it weren't for Black voters and brown voters and young voters and disabled voters and women voters Joe Biden wouldn't be in the White House today. We showed up for Joe Biden and now it's time for him to show up for us. Our message today is no more excuses. The filibuster is not an excuse. The big bad Republicans is not an excuse. Democrats control the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives. Now is the time to take action on the central issue of our

democracy the reason that we are called the superpower our right to vote we can't have the moral authority to enforce and grow democracy around the world and then have other countries demanding the united nations investigate elections right here in our soil. Now's the time to center this discussion on the rights of voters. Not the privileges on the entrenched politicians. I want to go back into history because almost to this day in 1965 Lyndon Johnson negotiated he twisted arms he threatened cajoled and did whatever needed to happen in order to ensure the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Like President Biden he was faced with bitter opposition and procedural obstacles that seemed impossible to overcome. Unlike President Biden, at least so far, Lyndon Johnson did not let these hurdles get in the way of standing up for voting rights for all Americans. This moment is President Biden's. Lyndon Johnson Voting Rights Act moment history will not be kind if he fails to show leadership. It's clear to everyone that we're not going to get this done unless we fix or nix the filibuster. As a 36 year veteran of the Senate, President Biden has the experience and the moral authority to stand up and tell the nation this Jim Crow era rule has got to go. The filibuster creates gridlock. He ought to know he was eight years and the filibuster frustrated nearly every agenda item he has it allows a minority to overrule the majority and ignore the will of the voters. It's not part of the constitution. you just heard that once we get to fix or nix the filibuster, we know there's a majority in both houses of Congress for voting rights. I'm sorry, Mr. President, but the answer is not to out organize voter suppression. We did that in November when we put you here. you can't organize after all the rules are written and brand new Jim Crow structures are in place to suppress our votes. The answer is to organize now to fix or nix the filibuster and to honor the voters who put you in office in the first place. Thank you so much for inviting me. Thank you for coming out. We're here with you. Day in day out we're not going to let up until every person's vote is protected. Thank you.

Ben Jealous: Sisters and brothers, First of all, let's hear for Charlie Carter after Democracy Initiative they've married together the green movement and the union movement and the civil rights movement, it's good to know that the environmentalists understand that without the Black and brown vote, there is no green vote. Now I want to bring up one of the greatest civil rights lawyers in our country. Damon Hewitt on the lawyers committee for civil rights. Damon.

Damon Hewitt: Thank you brother Ben, to My brothers and sisters at P For where you at? League of Women Voters where you at? [unintelligible] where you at? Brothers and sisters I'm here today to tell you today that you have been told some myths and you are being fed some lies. it's time for us to talk about some truth. First myth and lie, you're being told that all of these bills in state houses around the country were designed to preserve the integrity, the sanctity of the vote. Nothing could be further from the truth; we know it's Jim Crow 2.0 because it makes it hard to vote as hard as possible. They target Black and brown people. They criminalize regular behaviors, like helping people get water and stand in those lines and then they tell you to tell us for your own good. That's a myth. That's a lie. We're being told well; these provisions aren't racist it is just partisan. The supreme court said it's okay. And it's just politics as usual. That's a myth and that's a lie Because you can call it a partisan, but when it's on the backs of Black and brown people, of Black and brown communities that is racism. Pure and simple. You've been told the myth that what is a party apparatus so we can campaign and organize around and it doesn't matter. That's a myth and that's a lie because that means you're being taken for granted. Not just your vote but your voice, your vitality, your life being taken for granted. And there's another myth that's near and dear to my heart because I'm a lawyer, and as Ben Jealous said, lawyers committee we got some bad motives. We litigated over 50 voter rights lawsuits last year alone. That's one for every

state in the union and yes, we did litigate in Alaska. And in California. All over the states. All over the continental US and beyond. The myth is well we have legal apparatus and that's enough to litigate or way out of it. Let me tell you, I'm proud of our lawyers I'm proud of what we accomplished but we cannot litigate our way out of this mess. We need federal legislation. We need it not just to stop bad things from happening, but we need it to help good things happen. We need legislation not just to stop people being squashed. We need legislation to make the elusive promise of democracy real to make it real for you and for you. And for my mom and for my cousins and for your sister and for your brother for everybody because if it's not real for all of us. It's not real for anyone. There's two more myths. One is that the hallowed traditions of the Senate are here to protect us and keep us safe. Keep things orderly. They're here to keep things racist. The filibuster has racist roots and racist traditions. As our dear President used to often say anyone who says the word filibuster is our friend that's malarkey. Say President Biden that's malarkey. That's his word not mine. Alright. There is a final myth the myth is that we are here wasting our time that we've been out for protest every week almost in the last 678 weeks. That is just a few of us. That nobody hears us that it doesn't matter that the fate is sealed. That the Senate is what it is the Senate is going to do what it's going to do the myth the lies that we can't make a difference. I say we can move mountains because we always have if you believe we can move mountains let me hear your voice. Shout it out. But here's what it's going to take folks. it's going to take for us to move on all cylinders. We move in the courts we move in Congress we also have to move in communities. And not only just here in DC talking about DC statehood or the national's capital. I mean everywhere, we know this weekend, there's going to be actions all throughout the country commemorating and marking the anniversary of the march on Washington. Which We're all now going to march on voting rights. There's multiple actions it's not just something under one umbrella. It's many umbrellas. The key for us is can we sustain can we come together? Can we stay together? Can we keep can keep fighting? Until we actually see the day we move that mountain together. I think we can do it. I know we can do it I'm proud to stand here. Thank you.

[chanting]

Virginia Kase Solomón: Alright we have up next Jana Morgan she is the director of the declaration for American democracy and this badass woman has been fighting for our voting rights now for some time, coordinating our coalition and doing the work of the people. Jana.

Jana Morgan: Hello everybody my name is Jana Morgan and I'm the director of the declaration for American democracy we are a coalition of more than 230 organizations working together to realize the promise of American democracy by passing the for the people and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. Now our members work on so many issues that are important to Americans from gun violence prevention to advancing racial justice, to tackling climate change, but we all understand that we will not see progress on the issues that we care most about until our democracy works for us the people. So, when I say for the you say people. (x2) Now after the historic voter turnout in the 2020 election delivered pro-democracy majorities in the house, the Senate and the White House. Extremist politicians in states across the country have introduced more than 400 anti-voter laws, many of which specifically target Black voters and other voters of color. And right now, these same extremist politicians are beginning to draw Congressional maps to pick their voters for the next decade disenfranchising countless Americans in the process. President Biden and the Senate have the power to fix this but we are running out of time the Biden administration promised to protect our freedom to vote, but we have yet to see the White House use the full power of the executive branch to get this done. We saw the

White House bring lawmakers together to pass the infrastructure bill. But the administration has not made the same effort to protect our sacred right to vote. And that's why we're here today. Our democracy is facing the biggest threat of our lifetimes. And President Biden must let nothing stand in the way of protecting our freedom to vote. And ensuring fair elections. Both the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act are our best tools to stop the crisis unfolding in state legislatures, across the country, the For the People Act would protect the freedom to vote knock down the anti-voter laws that have been passed around the country, stop partisan gerrymandering and get big money out of politics. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act underscored and strengthened our freedom to vote by making sure that any changes to voting rules that could discriminate against voters based on race or background are federally review so that we all have an equal say in our future and our rights are protected. So, the Senate and President Biden must return to work and deliver the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to create national standards to ensure that we can safely and freely cast our ballots. Have our voices heard, and elect leaders that actually deliver on their promises. Both of these bills Together are necessary to restore and to protect the freedom to vote. So, I'm going to speak directly to the President right now. President Biden...

Host: We are here today to say step up Joe. And now you know one of the organizations that's really captured the public's imagination in this moment is Black Voters Matter. The co-founder with LaTosha Brown is here.

[chanting]

LaTosha Brown: Listen I know it's hot so I am going to be short. Right but I want us to take a moment right now, because we're talking about voting rights. But this is so much greater than voting rights y'all. This is literally around our imaginations. This is literally around how we want to create a nation that we deserve that we envision, that we are working for to build that is not yet been realized. that is what this moment is about. wherever you are. I want you to close your eyes. And my question to you what would America look like? If she really was a democracy? What would America look like? If all human beings felt valued and respected what would this nation look like without racism. Now open your eyes. I don't know what your answer is. I don't know what you saw. I don't know if you were able to see anything. But that is why we're here y'all. That is why we're here. at end of the day, we're going to transform not only this White House, not only everybody that is in here, but when the people rise, change happens. You have to know that I am a descendant of formerly enslaved people in this nation that were brought here were treated like they were less than dogs yet here I stand because someone had a vision of a freedom, even though they didn't taste it in that moment and so I ask you to use your imagination that is really not just about policy. It's not really just about legislation. It is about the spirit of a movement. Which is really about the spirit of humanity. You've got to touch something deep in you that as you look around look around. You. Every single human being deserves to be respected and honored. Every human being has the right that as a person, shouldn't I have the right to make a decision. On policy that impacts me and my family. We've got to think in those terms you all. What I know for sure is that I am the product of those that believe. What I know for sure, is that I stand here and the League of women stand here because let's be honest, in this country women were denied the right to vote. Black people and brown people Indigenous people and also white men if you didn't have any land. You were denied the right to vote. And So, what we're saying is we're turning we're going to a new level. It is no longer acceptable we're not going to beg someone for our rights. you're going to get it together. or you're going to get out the way. We've got to be consistent around. This nation spent \$1 trillion on a 20 year

war supposedly in the name of democracy, so why the hell do we have to be out here in the sun fighting for something as basic as voting rights. So, in that spirit I will leave you with something because I want you to take a moment and know that love always wins y'all. That love always wins. We have to love each other we have to really change this nation and those love the truth will stand in the truth. They will fight for the truth. We will create and continue until we actually have the nation that we all deserve. Right that what is in the constitution that all men and women are created equal. And endowed by their creator. How many of y'all believe it? So, as I leave you, I want to leave you with something because I am from a little town called Selma, Alabama. Has anybody heard of Selma? And there were people in Selma Alabama they didn't have money, they didn't have politics on their side they had a belief in their humanity that if I stand in a space alive in my humanity that I can change the world. And they did which is why we're here now. So, in that space and in that spirit I'm going to leave you with something I've learned from this, [sings] Family. Keep your eyes on the prize. When we work together we win. [Chanting] We win. Thank you.

Virginia Kase Solomón: Please give it up for my sister Latosha Brown. Alright we'll everyone here you see these things going around. You see the big sign over there? We want you to Scan this QR code it will give you all the information you need about upcoming actions and events so you can know how to get involved I also want to mention that Black Voters Matter. Is sponsoring a rally this Saturday as the Lincoln monument we want you to come information is in here so you can join them and us for that event. Next up, we have my brother in justice cliff Albright he and Tosha are doing all of the work in the south and across this country to ensure that not only Black voters but every voters voice is heard and with that cliff please.

Cliff Albright: How y'all doing. Y'all give it up again for my sister again LaTosha brown please give it up for LaTosha brown. I need to hear somebody say, somebody say pick a side. Because We are out Here today to deliver a message to President, Biden, we're standing right outside what he might consider his house, but we know there's our house, right. Whose house? Our house. So, we are here today to deliver a message that we need President Biden to pick a side because at the end of the day, you can't be on the side of voting rights. And on the side of the filibuster, you can't work that line you got to pick a side. You can't in one sentence in one passive speech tell us that we faced with the greatest attack against voting rights ever since the civil war. But then in the next sentence, tell us but I can't change the filibuster. You can't do that. You got to pick a side. So, we're out here today to deliver a message to the President. We need him to use everything that he's got at his disposal. All the power that he's got as the President all the power all the experience that he's got from over 40 years in the Senate. you can't tell me you got over 40 years of experience in the Senate, but then try to tell me you can't win one vote. So, we need him to use all of that. For the people and For the People Act and for the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, we need him to use everything that he's got. off the top when I say this people say well, cliff what do you want him to do? Like what he's not in the Senate? What do you want him to do? Well, how about this because we know that the Senate just passed the bill a big infrastructure bill, they all excited about it right. The moderates excited about it; the progressives excited you even got some right wing folks excited even though they don't want to admit it because Biden took credit. For it right. Everybody's excited. Well, how about this If the President says, I'm not going to sign that bill, until you pass the Voting Rights Act or until you pass the For the People Act. He's got that kind of leverage. But the question is will he use the Power that he has and will he use the power that we gave him the question is will he pick a side will he value us will he put the same energy into our voting rights that he's

been putting into the, into the, into the infrastructure and some of the other priorities now don't get me wrong. Infrastructure is nice. We need infrastructure right? We need infrastructure in our communities, we need it in rural communities. We need it in urban communities we need it in this country but we also need our voting rights because at the end of the day, our voting rights is the infrastructure of this democracy. At the end of the day our voting rights is the infrastructure that makes all the rest of it possible. So, we need him to pick a side. And we need him to pick a side now. The filibuster has got to go. In fact, [Chanting]. So, I'm going to leave y'all, I'm going to leave y'all with this, because the other thing that we are hearing people talking about well you know we don't think it's going to pass. It's dead. The votes aren't there it can't be done. But they're saying the same thing now about this voting rights bills that they were saying to some folks in Georgia, anybody out here from Georgia? they're saying the same thing that they said just a few months ago, when they said there's no way that you can win two Senate seats in the state of Georgia there is no way you can win there's no way you can flip the presidency in the red state of Georgia, that can't happen. But we went out and we made history and we did the impossible. They told us when we went to Texas a few months ago, and [unintelligible] a whole bunch of great organizations in that Texas coalition and they said, you know why y'all wasting your time going out there? There's no way you can stop that Texas bill that Texas voter suppression bill is going to pass it's going to pass easily. But we went out there and we joined forces with the coalition and they made history they stopped that bill once then the democrats left and they stopped it a second time and I'm going to tell you this I don't care what you're reading about what's going on in Texas and the [unintelligible] they're going to stop it a third time. Because that is the business that we are in. we are in the business of talking that which everybody else says is impossible and we make it possible. That is the business that we are in. our history shows that When we work together, you heard what my sister said, when we work together, we win we work together we win when we work together we win. Thank y'all.

[Chanting]

Ben Jealous: And you know who knows the filibuster has Got to go is the mayor of DC and should be the governor of DC [Chanting] it is my honor to bring up Dr. Robbie berry the chair of the political science department at Howard university and a leader in DC vote Dr. berry.

Dr. Berry: Good afternoon everybody. Do you mind repeating after me? [Chanting] I want to remind everyone where you are right now. We are DC. (x6) Thank you for joining us here. This is such an important event. We are gathered here today. To do what millions have done before across several generations, generations of our ancestors. We are here to literally speak truth to power. Literally speak truth to power. What is the truth? The truth is that the people of DC suffer under a potent form of voter suppression one that we've suffered under for over 200 years. One that can only be fixed by DC becoming the 51st state of this commonwealth. We're literally here to speak truth to power. What is the truth? The truth is the people of DC call on President Biden to act now. Act now. Act Now on his long support for DC statehood. You know we ought to be ashamed that just a few steps from here over a half a century ago, Dr. King told and showed us how to make real those policies of democracy and how to make justice a reality. He reminded us that it is a testament of hope, that the luxury of leisurely approach to urgent solutions the ease the gradualism helps us to ignore and prolong issues that we know are unjust. And Issues that we know are inhumane issues like the 700,000 plus Washingtonians that don't have full voting rights in their own country. so yes, Mr. President you are the most vocal President ever for DC statehood, but that's not enough. As my Black mama says, don't talk just do and be. We again have the legacy of, Dr. King, who said steps from here that he was a creative extremist,

who was not afraid of the KKK who was not afraid of white citizens council but was afraid of white moderates, moderates confused with an illusion of order over justice. Sounds like to me order and complacency and maintenance of the status quo are the same. Or perhaps are deformed triplets. Sounds like it could be like my favorite television show in law. And order. Got the last part of their name wrong. Is not about law and order. It's about law And justice. We asked Mr. President to fight for us. We want you to go down in history as the President who finally ended didn't just talk about but ended 200 years of discrimination against the people of Washington, DC. DC vote proud to represent DC vote which has been working for more than 20 years to advance equality for DC residents and for DC statehood equality for DC residents like me will only come with statehood. every state of the union since the original 13 colonies have been emitted by the majority of us Congress all we need is the President support HR 1 HR 4 HR 51. As a political scientist I know that government is as good as the citizens like us who make it work and who participate in it. So, be proud of us for being here today. But We also have to show up tomorrow. We also have to show up this weekend. We also have to show up online, you also have to show up at the kitchen table at the dinner table with your friends. With your nieces with your nephews with your cousins with your pastors with your [unintelligible] loving friends. Everybody has to be on the same core that justice denied is always justice delayed. I think this is an important event because statehood for every American citizen, statehood for all the people living in the nation's capital is just one part of this democracy challenge that we face. It's important that we have to remember that one in four matter, but without 51, 1 in 4 don't have the same meaning because you can't leave out 700,000 people from democracy and call it democracy it won't be. So, it's not enough to just pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act it's not enough to just pass the For the People Act we have to pass the DC admission act and we have to pass it today. The only way we do that, is by eliminating the filibuster, it's been crystal clear that we have to do that. In order to win and I study politics every day and I can tell you this, something that you all know unless you win there is nothing that we can work on in our interests. but you have to win first and in order for us to win the filibuster has got to go so I'm going to leave you with one chant. again, the spirit of Dr. King who on a summer hot august day not so long ago a few steps. From here reminded us why we gather. We gather because we want all of our rights. We want them here and we want them now. join me in echoing Dr. King I had a dream in 1963. repeat after me I want all my rights. We want them here and we want them now. I hope you join DC vote on the effort to support statehood by please pulling out your phones and texting. 51st Five one ST to 52886 we need your help. We've been doing it for over 20 years and we'll be doing it until this place is called a state and this place is part of this commonwealth. God bless.

Virginia Kase Solomón: All right. Thank you so much Dr. Berry. Now We also have some new amazing leaders. Who have been working in this space for some time. Who are going to share some important stories with all of us. I know it's hot I know were in the shade, I know a lot of us are hot but I want you to give a warm welcome to Roman Sandino. He is a senior organizer with FIRM and community change [unintelligible] youth organizer.

Roman Sandino: Thank you Virginia, good afternoon everyone! My name is Roman Sandino I am a senior organizer with community and the fair immigration reform movement. [Chanting] I came to this country at the age of four in the arms of my mother when we crossed the border, the southern border. I used to be undocumented, a dreamer. In 2011 I became a citizen. The first thing I did was vote in my local elections where I lived. I grew frustrated that there was decisions being made in my local city that impacted brown Black and immigrant families without the voices of Black brown and immigrant people.

And that is what impulse me to run, to run for local office. And I'm happy to tell you that this past June I was sworn in in my local city as the first immigrant who used to be undocumented council member. And that's part of the story that when we vote we win. When Black people vote we win, when brown people vote we win, when immigrant people vote we win. Within FIRM at the national level, FIRM represents 40 organizations within 30 different states. And this year, I'm happy to share that we have gotten the closest that we've ever gotten to win citizenship and dignity for immigrant families in this country. Immigrant people essential workers, families, students that have been on the front line, and helping us keep this country running in the midst of this global pandemic. And it's our duty, our duty to make sure that every one of these people become new American citizens, new voters just like the League of Women Voters, help inform and equip voters around 100 years ago. But we are not blind to the fact that as we get closer to winning citizenship for undocumented people in this country, there are forces doing everything in their power to suppress the vote of Black, brown and immigrant voters in this country. So that's why our call this afternoon is to urge President Biden to do everything in his power to pass the Voters Rights Act and to pass it now. And I'm happy to share also this space with Megan so I'm going to turn it over to Megan now.

Megan: Hello to my fellow activists [unintelligible] the League of Women Voters [unintelligible]. My name is Megan and I am here representing Casa. I am a Chicana from a small community in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Growing up, we didn't know that we had a right to vote or that we have to power to change policies. Our community takes care of one another we thought. Politicians and policymakers don't care about us we thought. Politicians listen to rich donors, not poor voters or so we thought. But today, I am filled with gratitude to be able to say that he's a generation of my community has been afforded more opportunities than the former, during my degree I learned that civic and electoral structures depoliticized communities of color intentionally. This happens with young people, people that are affected by poverty, descendants of immigrants like myself and people that are disabled. These people are my community and systems of oppression such as racism sexism ageism are written into our legislation making voting more difficult and making it so that some peoples vote count more than others. These systems silence our voices. Earning my degree taught me that voting is the most essential right it is not a privilege afforded to a certain demographic, age bracket, neighborhood or language and if we care about our community, if we care about our future, if we care about our families, our health care we must be guaranteed the equal right to vote. Going through an election during a pandemic has made this even more apparent and undeniable how much we need voting reform now on behalf of Casa, we run comprehensive voting reform that must include the elimination of gerrymandering and redistricting excuse me that silences the diversity in urban cities. Thank you. We demand money out of politics, a cap on advertisements and donations to politicians. We demand complete eradication of voter suppression laws and disenfranchisement. We demand time off work for voting especially for the essential worker. We demand facilitation of voting for single parents, people with disabilities and marginalized communities. We demand translators for non-English speaking voters. We demand and should be able to freely, safely and equally vote. We will not lose our right to a voice in this country. No more excuses. Voting rights now!

Ben Jealous: Alright, next it is my honor to bring up one of the most courageous voices in the state of Arizona. The day that this brother showed up in the Arizona House of Representatives, he was the legislative Black caucus because there's only one there's only ever one sometimes there's two once they had three but then there's always just one. Now he is the minority leader of the House of

Representatives in the state of Arizona and he's running for secretary of state. I bring to you brother Bolding from Arizona, Reginald Bolding.

Bolding: [chanting] Today we are here in front of one of the most symbolic and recognized buildings in the world. The White House. Not only does this building symbolize hope but it symbolizes democracy. It symbolizes a nation where we say in this country your voice is your vote and that vote is sacred. That vote is powerful. That vote, we allow freedom to ring throughout the nation with that vote. But the reality is today that that vote in our democracy and the legitimacy of even having a building like this is in jeopardy. Legislatures across the country with no minced words have said they don't believe that everyone should have the right to exercise their voice by exercising their vote. From Arizona to Texas from Texas to Georgia from Georgia to Florida and everywhere in between we know that power building organizations lawmakers voters and communities and a special shout out to the League of Women Voters from Arizona here have stood up to fight back. But the person we need more than anybody to stand up and fight back is President Joe Biden. Mr. President you told us that this White House would fight tooth and nail for voting rights. Now is that time. No longer can we wait. We must pass federal voting rights legislation today. We want both the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and the For the People Act passed today and I know that when we move and when we work together we will win. [Chanting] Let's fight and let's pass federal legislation now. Thank you.

VKS: Thank you, Representative. Next I want to welcome to the stage Sylvia Albert who is the voting and elections director for Common Cause, one of our partner organizations who have been fighting with us for justice and for voting rights for a very long time. Sylvia!

Sylvia Albert: So, I'm here representing our 1.5 million activists and members who are demanding democracy that works for all of us now. In a democracy there's nothing more fundamental than the people's right to vote. Our elected officials do not represent us if we don't have access to the ballot box. But just like southern states once used full taxes and literacy tests, states are now passing laws that make it harder for Black, brown and low-income people to vote. And federal legislation that would protect our communities freedom to vote is being blocked by Senate republicans using the filibuster. In past decades, the work of keeping our republic has always crossed party boundaries. The Voting Rights Act has always been bipartisan. All five bills to strengthen and extend it were signed into law by republican Presidents. When Ronald Reagan signed the Voting Rights Act, it was because in his words, "I pledged this long time in a position to hold the constitution no barrier will come between our citizens and the voting booth." George W. Bush also designed the Voting Rights Act and said in the America promised by our founders every generation has a responsibility to add its own chapter to the unfolding story of freedom. We've made progress toward its equality, yet the work for a more perfect union is never ending. And here we are today with Senate republicans blocking voting rights bills and state legislatures making it harder to vote and rather than adding our own chapter of the story freedom. Our country seems to be going backwards, to a less perfect union. There are two paths forward. One is the path we are currently on where government by the people is becoming more and more limited and more barriers to voting are created. Where a parliamentary maneuver created to block anti-lynching legislation and protect Jim crow laws is allowed to block the For the People Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. The other path would be a new chapter in our country's unfolding story of freedom. A chapter dedicated to the restoration of Voting Rights Act and solutions that guarantee our government is truly for the people. Here we are calling on President Biden to ensure that we go forward not backwards in our work for a more perfect union that we take the path towards restoration and not the

path towards Jim crow President Biden please help us go forward and urge the Senate to pass the For the People Act and the John Lewis voting rights advancement act and bring it to your desk.

Ben Jealous: now it's my honor to bring up our last speaker, powerful voice from the deep south Gary chambers, founder and President of bigger than me. Jared.

Gary Chambers: You know, far too often history has required that people stand up and demand that justice and equity exist for us all. It is amazing to me that a President who got more votes than any other President in the US history to be elected can't flip one vote in the US Senate. If you can convince 80 million people to vote for you, Joe surely you can convince Senator Manchin and Sinema to do their job in the US Senate and expand and protect voting rights. If we are going to have a democracy for all people, that your words where you said that we are in a moment where the very right to vote is under attack and your job is to help protect it. 36 years old is how old I am. That's how many years you served in the US Senate. So, if it is that you have three decades of experience in the Senate, don't tell me that you can't flip a vote Joe. If we have come this far I want you to understand one thing that there's a generation waking up and they'll stand at your door too. And they'll demand more of you and you can't tell us that you're with us. You're going to have to show us that you're with us by what you do with the powers that you have. I am from a state that ranks 50th in the nation, so when I come here, the burden of coming 1100 miles to speak for people who cannot often afford to come be heard outside the White House, who are too busy trying to get people in state legislatures to do right by them in a state that is 34% Black. Where we are underrepresented in our legislature and in the us Congress. And Mr. President you have the power to do something about it. If we build a more just and a more inclusive democracy then the people who come to DC to speak for us and represent us will look like us rather than look like what it has looked like for 400 years. Where I'm from we make gumbo and we talk loud and we dance and we make noise, but we fight for change. And we believe that America is only as good as it's people. And while you still sit in the people's house, it is your job and your duty to honor the people who put you there. If you got 80 million votes Joe, go ahead and flip the last two.

Ben Jealous: [Chanting] Sisters and brothers. those here and those gathered online watching right now. it is time for us to take this to the next level. we have had months of protests at the Congress. it is time for the President of these United States to understand that his voice matters more than any in this moment. it is time for President Joe Biden [unintelligible] Deborah Turner from the League of Women Voters, Charlie carter from the Democracy Initiative, all right, Jenna Morgan from Declaration of American Democracy, Arizona House of Representatives, LaTosha Brown and Cliff Albright co-founders of Black Voters Matter, Rabbi Jonah Pesner. [unintelligible] Each of those folks has agreed today to commit an act of civil disobedience. To begin what will be delighting self-disobedience here at the White House until President Joe Biden calls on the Senate to restore the Voting Rights Act, to stop the corruption in Georgia and Texas and Arizona, to pass the For the People Act, to pass the John Lewis bill and to eliminate the filibuster.

[clips of protesting]