

**Caucus Speech on H.R. 4**

**Tuesday, August 24, 2021**

***As Delivered by House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn***

“During recent telephone calls with the Leader and the Speaker, I kept thinking about my parents. Both of my parents attended college after I was born. In fact, my mother graduated when I was 13 years old. And my father never graduated. I never knew that he hadn’t graduated until I was running for Secretary of State in 1978, which is an elected office in South Carolina. I wasn’t running against Henry Kissinger.

“A minister called me and told me he was president of ministerial association in the county of Hampton (South Carolina). We arranged a meeting at an exit off I-95.

“He said, ‘I want you to follow me to the meeting because it is a little complicated to get there, but I need to ask you a question. I have only heard your name one other time in my life, and it belonged to a gentleman who was in school with me, in seminary at Morris College. I never knew his name, but everybody called him E.L.’

“I looked at him, and he said, ‘Would you happen to know him?’

“‘Yeah, that is my daddy.’

“‘Is he still living?’

“I said, ‘Yes.’

“He said, ‘I don’t know what happened to him. He was one of the smartest guys in the class, but he didn’t show up for the senior year.’

“That shocked me. I had been brow beaten by parents about not dropping out of school and studying, and all this stuff, and here was this guy telling me that my daddy didn’t show up for his senior year. I was so dismayed by that, when I finished that meeting, I rushed to a telephone. I went to a telephone booth to call my dad. I told him I was on my way back to Columbia, but I was going to stop through Sumter. And, I did. I didn’t tell him what I wanted.

“My daddy had been diagnosed with cancer, and we knew he did not have long to live. I told him what I had heard.

“And with tears flowing, he said to me, ‘son, when I was in school, they didn’t allow school beyond the 7<sup>th</sup> grade for Blacks. And I repeated the 7<sup>th</sup> grade three years, until the teachers told me they weren’t going to allow me come back because I was too far advanced. And I got a job at a bakery shop. While working in the bakery shop, I studied, I read, and I passed a college entrance exam and was admitted to college. And after the third year, the administration called me in to tell me that until I produced a high school diploma, I would not be allowed to go into my senior year.’

“He couldn’t produce one, because he didn’t have one. Therefore, he never graduated.

“I remember when he was allowed to register to vote. I remember when he came back from registering to vote. He pasted a little sign on the window of our house. Anybody walking in that door would see this: ‘I am registered. Are you?’

“That has stayed with me. This vote today is a vote in honor of people like him. But it also for our grandchildren. If we do not do this, those four grandchildren of mine are going to have to live what my mama and daddy had to live.

“It is going to be fine for most people in this Caucus, but I know where I am from, where Terri (Sewell) is from, where Sanford Bishop is from, it ain’t going to be fine. It is not going to be fine. Those states have worked together over the last several years to frame this Congress. You think about it. They’re the ones who done things in such a way that Terri is the only Democrat from Alabama. I am the only Democrat from South Carolina. Bennie Thompson is the only Democrat from Mississippi. We can go through the South. Louisiana, Troy Carter, the only Democrat from Louisiana. John Yarmouth, the only Democrat from Kentucky. They have done redistricting in such a way to pile all Democratic voters into one or two districts and bleach out all other surrounding districts.

“That is why H.R. 1 is important. That is why H.R. 4, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act is important. We have got to subject redistricting to pre-clearance. If we don’t, it is going to have tremendous impact. Yeah, you will get elected, but you will be forever in the minority. In order for us to keep what we have got – the Terri Sewells, the Jim Clyburns, the Bennie Thompsons, the Troy Carters, the John Yarmouths – we need to keep these people here in the Congress, because the next thing will be to bleach us out as well.

“I have already had my 81<sup>st</sup> birthday, so it’s not going to have much impact on me. I have got a 6-year-old grand and a 9-year-old. It is going to have an impact on them. It is going to have an impact on this country. I think we need to be very serious as we think about this vote today.

“When I wrote my memoirs, in the epilogue there is an open letter to my children and grandchildren. And, I said this to them. ‘If you ever think about running for office, don’t worry about whether people understand you. You get to understand them. If you get to understand the people who ask to vote for you, the rest of it will take care of itself. Please understand the Democratic voters in the country. They believe strongly in the future of this country in spite of what it has been to a lot of people who look like me. They still hold out hope that this country is their best bet for the future and the future of their children.

“Let’s demonstrate that today. Let’s show some unity in this vote today. Let’s say to those people who depend on us, we are your best hope for their future, and we are going to show it by the way we hold ourselves out to you.”