

I do not think there is anything partisan about Medicare prescription drugs or HMO reform or coverage for more people who do not have health insurance.

The bottom line is, the Democrats believe in certain principles. We know some of the Republicans will come along with us, but we need to have more come along with us, and we need the support of President Bush if we are ever going to get anywhere with this.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my colleague, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY), one of the co-chairs of our Health Care Task Force, who has been outspoken on this issue and many others.

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey for yielding to me, and I appreciate his leadership ever since I have been in the Congress on these issues, and everything that he has done.

As everyone knows, last year's Presidential race was the closest in history. The Senate is evenly divided, the House is very closely divided. I do not believe that the close elections give a mandate to gridlock. The American people expect us to get something done, and they should.

Health issues are certainly among the most hotly debated issues in the campaign. Both sides promised to advance a Patients' Bill of Rights and Medicare coverage for prescription drugs. I see no obstruction or barrier that is so great that Congress and the new President should not be able to work out important ideological differences that exist, and reach an agreement soon.

Last week I was happy to join with others in introducing a bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights legislation that will ensure that every American with private health insurance has basic guaranteed protection.

While some HMOs behave responsibly, the legislation is desperately needed to protect the vulnerable from insurance bureaucrats who place profits above all else. I encourage President Bush to come to the table and work with us to ensure a meaningful legislative package is enacted this year. For the sake of thousands of patients who are inappropriately denied health care daily, time is of the essence.

I want to also speak just a minute about prescription drugs. No single issue places a greater toll on our senior citizens than the outrageously high prices that pharmaceutical companies charge for prescription medicine. It is absolutely time that we do something about it. Drug spending over recent years has been climbing steadily at 15 to 20 percent a year. According to a study released last year by Families U.S.A., from January of 1994 to January 2000, the prices of prescription drugs most frequently used by older Americans rose an average of 30.5 percent. This increase was twice the rate of inflation.

In order to meet the needs of America's seniors, Congress should take immediate action to create a Medicare drug benefit and reform the pharmaceutical marketplace to be sure that it is fair to all Americans and all people. It only makes sense that the government should use the purchasing power of 40 million Americans on Medicare to win prescription drug discounts and not break the bank in creating a prescription drug benefit under Medicare.

I am encouraged that President Bush sent a prescription drug plan to Congress last week. However, I am disappointed that after an election in which the prescription drug issue was front and center, that the White House chose to unveil it in such a low-profile manner.

I agree with the concerns raised by members of both parties that instead of putting an emphasis on block grants to States that only attempt to help low-income seniors, a much more comprehensive approach should be taken that gives all seniors the opportunity to receive a prescription drug benefit under Medicare.

I look forward to working with members of both parties and the new administration to put a serious effort into seeing that meaningful HMO reform and Medicare prescription drug benefit is enacted in time to help all Americans who desperately need that help today.

I have been in this people's House now for a little over 4 years. We had these same problems when I came here. It is very distressing to think that we yet allow this to go on when it is a very simple thing to stop it and to help our seniors, and to be sure that people do not get mistreated by insurance companies that are willing to put their health and safety second behind profits.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for coming down here and joining me, as he has on so many other occasions.

Quickly, the gentleman is absolutely right, we have been talking about this for 4 years. I think we were very hopeful during the campaign when we heard President Bush then talk about these issues, the HMO reform, prescription drug benefit, that we were going to see quick action on it. Even in the beginning of the Congress, at the time of his inauguration a month ago, it seemed like this was going to be a priority.

We have heard very little about it. We have heard about the tax cuts, about defense spending, we have heard about a lot of other issues. When he unveiled his prescription drug benefit, it was almost like it was not even important. I just hope that that turns around, but we are certainly going to make sure that turns around. I thank the gentleman.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON). Under the Speaker's an-

nounced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Mrs. JONES) is recognized for 40 minutes, the remainder of the time, as the designee of the minority leader.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE). He has stood up on this issue. Last year was my first term in the U.S. Congress, and there was not a greater voice on the issue of health care than that of the gentleman from New Jersey.

I appreciate the gentleman yielding the balance of this hour as we celebrate Black History Month this year, and I thank the gentleman, who should let me know when he needs a speaker and I will be there for him.

Mr. Speaker, Black History Month is an excellent time for reflection, assessment, and planning. A full understanding of our history is a necessary and crucial part of comprehending our present circumstances and crafting our futures. An understanding of our history helps illuminate and inform the present discussions concerning voter rights, particularly the travesty we recently witnessed in Florida, a social, political, and legal travesty ultimately sanctioned by the United States Supreme Court.

At this time, the subject matter of our special order is black history. We are going to be talking about voting rights, and historically, the disenfranchisement that occurred through the years.

It gives me great pleasure to yield to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON), the chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio for yielding to me. I also thank her for her leadership in leading this series of speakers tonight here on Black History Month.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to open the Congressional Black Caucus' annual Black History Month special order. This is the year that we will focus on a very important area for every black American; that is, voting rights and election reform.

We do this in the spirit of Sankofa. In Africa, Sankofa is more of a philosophy than a single word. It means that we learn from the past, work in the present, and prepare for the future. So in the first year of this new millennium, it is fitting that we honor African-American heroes and heroines, on whose broad shoulders we stand.

Mr. Speaker, we must mention those who paved the way to freedom in thought and deed, such as W.E.B. DuBois, Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington, Mary McLeod Bethune, Sojourner Truth, Malcolm X. As Members of Congress, we must also take note of those who served in the political realm, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior, Ralph Bunche, Barbara Jordan, Fannie Lou Hamer, Adam

Clayton Powell, Marcus Garvey, Shirley Chisholm. I could go on.

These African-Americans and countless others whom I have not mentioned by name are the reason that I am standing here today in the well of the United States House of Representatives as chairperson of the Congressional Black Caucus. They paved the way for me and for many of my colleagues in Congress.

However, when I look at the past, we cannot forget essential elements of political representation and the right to vote. African-American men were first granted the right to vote as a result of the 15th amendment to the Constitution. That post-Civil War amendment to the Constitution guaranteed that newly-freed slaves would not be denied the franchise simply because they had been held captive.

As a result of the 15th amendment and the use of Federal troops in the formerly Confederate States, black people were able to enjoy the fruits of liberty. They were able to vote, and their votes were counted.

Between 1870 and 1900, there were 22 African-Americans who served in the U.S. Congress, and countless more serving in State and local governments. However, this era of reconstruction began to fade away, and in State after State the right to vote and to participate in democracy was whittled away by oppressive means such as the poll tax, the grandfather clause, and the literacy test. The right to participate was brutally wrenched away by the intimidation of the night-riding Ku Klux Klan and the questionable imprisonment of large numbers of black men on trumped-up vagrancy and other minor charges.

We have to recall this history and be mindful, because we do not want to repeat it. But for most black Americans, the right to vote was a withdrawn promise that had been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency, the compromise of 1877 which allowed Rutherford B. Hayes to become President, who withdrew the last Federal troops from the Confederate States and ended the era of reconstruction.

By 1900, segregation was firmly established. Jim Crow was the law of the land, and terrorism and lynching ruled the South. Between 1929 and 1965, only eight black Members were elected to Congress. It would take the passage of the Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 to begin to restore African-Americans to the right to participate in representative government that every other racial and ethnic group in this country had freely enjoyed.

This was under a Texas President. The President was Lyndon Baines Johnson. We stand here today with another Texan as President, and I know that he can do no less.

Today the Congressional Black Caucus is 37 strong, dynamic, informed, and committed leaders. But here we stand, almost 40 years after the landmark 1965 legislation, and again are

confronted with the question of whether African-Americans will be allowed to vote and whether their votes will count. In the words of the great Santayana, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

□ 2045

We have read the past. We remember many of the past. All of us that are here remember the march from Selma to Montgomery. And, Mr. Speaker, for all of these reasons, I believe it is imperative that the first thing we address in the 107th Congress is election reform.

As far as I am concerned, the entire integrity of our democracy is at stake for voting, and having one's vote counted is the very crux of any democracy. And our reputation and standing in the world is on the line. The world is watching to see if America, the matriarch of democracy, will right the wrongs of the election system which was so badly exposed in the last Presidential election, not just in Florida, but many other States around the country, including my home State of Texas.

Mr. Speaker, last week, at the Democratic Caucus retreat in Pennsylvania, we were visited by our President, and when I was able to ask him a question, I asked him to support comprehensive election reform for this fiscal year 2002. In his budget, he responded positively. Election reform must be a part of the national discussion now, and we must solve the inadequacy of our system in time for the 2002 election cycle. But in order to do that, we would like to pass election reform legislation, not later than the 4th of July of this year. That is the anniversary of the United States claim of independence from the British system which refused to allow American colonists representation.

We do not want any American to be refused representation. If we enact legislation by this date, State and local officials should have sufficient time to implement uniformity of our election system that it so critically needs. However, they must also be given adequate resources and incentives to ensure the blessings of liberty for all Americans.

Now, our critics may say why is the Congressional Black Caucus talking about election reform? Why are they not talking about education reform, tax policy, the budget, maintaining a strong national defense, health care reform, fighting the scourge of AIDS in the U.S., and in Africa where this dreaded disease is killing entire villages and societies, to them I say we will address these issues, and the Congressional Black Caucus plans to be at the forefront of all of these issues and many others.

But we strongly believe that our liberty and our democracy will not be free until we fix our election system such that the public and the world must have faith that in any election held in the United States, that the true winner wins, then the confidence that the

world has in our great democracy will be damaged beyond repair. If we do not do it, our reputation will be damaged beyond repair.

We cannot allow this to happen. I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, the world is watching. And as I have visited outside this country since that election, the question has been posed, would not the American people go to the UN and ask for elections to be overturned if they did not feel that it was a fair election? And yet, the greatest power of the world has not raised the question about this election.

So it is over, and it has been decided by the Supreme Court, but we cannot move on. And so in this month of black history, as we reflect and as we celebrate our history and think about our African American mothers, fathers, ministers, teachers, officers, firemen, nurses, doctors, lawyers, painters, maids, maintenance people and any other community leader, we must say to them that your vote is as important as a vote of the Supreme Court, for it is us who must elect a President, and we cannot do it until we are assured that our election system is fixed.

We simply must fix this system to ensure that we have a bright future for America. Remember, the words of Santayana, remember the past or we might be condemned to repeat it.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, in 1901, the last black to leave Congress as a result of the Jim Crow laws was George Henry White from North Carolina, who stood up on this floor and declared, "you have excluded us. You have taken away the right to vote, and so I am the last one to leave."

This, Mr. Speaker, is perhaps the Negro's temporary farewell to the American Congress. But let me say, Phoenix-like, he will rise up some day and come again. These parting words are on behalf of an outraged heart-broken, bruised and bleeding, but God-fearing people, fateful, industrious, loyal people, rising people, full of potential force.

The Congressional Black Caucus, 37 strong, are the Phoenix that have risen up, just as George Henry White said back in 1901.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. MEEK).

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio (Mrs. JONES) for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my illustrious sister and colleague who has given us a chance to help America understand what Black History is all about and what it means to all of us and to my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to stand with my colleagues tonight to celebrate, educate and share the rich culture and accomplishments of African Americans. God has been good to us. The 37 Members of us who have been able to now reach the pinnacle of success in the United States Congress. To date, we not only celebrate African American history month, but American history as well.

The history of African Americans is intricately woven into the framework of this country. We helped to build this country. We love this country.

None of us are who we are simply by some kind of divine intervention. We are who we are because of many experiences and the many people with whom we have come in contact with, and because of those who have gone on before us. We have made a great difference in this country and a great difference in our own lives.

Many of those who have proceeded us in this life and in this body have fought hard to give us the right to vote. Some, Mr. Speaker, have even died. The right to vote is a fundamental right of all Americans, and it is not to be taken lightly. It is a part of our quest as the Congressional Black Caucus to be sure and emphasize the fundamental right of all Americans to vote.

And, I believe, it is the responsibility of government to protect this so basic and fundamental right, which has been guaranteed to all its people. It seems to me and the people that I represent that after what took place this past fall, that our government has let us down.

In my own case, my grandfather was a slave. He had no rights at all. I grew up in a southern town, Tallahassee, Florida. My father used to take me to the State Capitol. Every inauguration day, he came to see the governor take his seat; that was the only time we were welcome in our own State Capitol. It was a public building, but we were not welcome. We are welcome today.

America has changed. America will continue to change, but we must have America understand that it is still a basic human right for everyone to be treated fairly and for everyone to have the right to vote.

Within my lifetime, every conceivable effort was made to keep African Americans from voting and to keep our votes from being counted. My generation, like my parents' and grandparents' generation struggled mightily against poll taxes that we had to pay before we were allowed to vote, and literacy tests that required African Americans, and only African Americans, to recite whole sections of State constitutions or answer obscure questions to the satisfaction of examiners who could never be satisfied.

African Americans are alive today who were denied the right to vote in white-only primaries and who had to search for polling places that were moved with no notice in the black community, or moved so far that it was hard to get to them.

I remember the intimidation of being greeted at the polls by disdainful and unhelpful poll workers, or even police officers at the doors. So, please, refrain from telling us to get over it. We cannot get over the many years of hurt and shame and disdainful action on the part of some and of our country.

African Americans today remember when the district lines for cities and

counties and legislative districts were gerrymandered and drawn to exclude our neighborhoods or to dilute our vote. We remember how registration records would disappear when we showed up to vote and how the law, administrative procedures and the official discretion of public officials, were used to postpone and delay our attempts to assert our rights.

The Voting Rights Act was supposed to change all of this, Mr. Speaker, and the government was supposed to be a protection and helpful and on the side of equality and inclusion. In the case of Florida, government has failed us miserably.

During the last election, voting machines and equipment and precincts where African Americans lived predominantly were of the oldest vintage and the poorest quality. Ballot procedures were unclear and overly complicated.

A disproportionately large number of votes cast in African American neighborhoods were disqualified. It is clear that the phrase "voting rights" is only a mere platitude to many of our justices and government officials. One local official was even ignorant enough to opine that it was not anyone's fault if people could not understand the directions on the ballots.

What a shame in a country that leads the entire world. It is a failure of government and our electoral system when any person who wants to vote, any person who wants to vote is denied the opportunity to do so.

It is a failure of government and our electoral system when courts, the laws and government officials do not do everything humanly possible to ensure that every vote is counted and that the final vote is correct.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it is a failure of government and our electoral system when the outcome of an election is certified without counting all the votes. Never again, the Black Caucus says in its old refrain, must we allow hard-working, tax-paying Americans to be disenfranchised.

Never again must we allow voters who did everything they were supposed to do who studied the issues, who did their civic duty and went to the polls and who voted in massive numbers to not have their votes counted.

Never again must we refuse to count all the votes cast.

I encourage this Congress, and with the help of the Congressional Black Caucus, we will help America understand and we will help this Congress to make fundamental election reforms.

It is the highest priority for us and for all Americans to ensure that what happened in Florida this past election never happens again. Never again, Mr. Speaker.

To protect the integrity of our Nation's election system, we must move with all deliberate speed to make sure that what happened in this past election will never happen again.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues have already said, we

cannot get over it. Every time someone raises their voice to question the results of the most recent election, we are told to get over it. Well, I am not ready to get over it, and neither are millions of Americans who watched with horror as the votes of so many people were discounted, and the Supreme Court that we had every reason to hope would protect the rights of all citizens went out of its way to trample on those rights.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my colleague, the gentleman from the great State of New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE).

□ 2100

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, let me thank the gentlewoman from the great State of Ohio for conducting this annual black history hearing. Congressman Stokes did it so many years, and she has certainly filled in the gap.

Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate Black History Month, I rise to join my colleagues in reaffirming our strong commitment to voting rights and our determination to ensure fairness in the electoral process. Of course I was active during the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s when I marched in the South and Selma and other places and welcomed Dr. Martin Luther King to my hometown of Newark. I am keenly aware that many people gave their lives so that future generations could freely exercise their right to vote: Medger Evers, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and others.

During the Presidential election dispute in Florida, we heard many reports of voter intimidation and irregularities in the voting process in predominantly African-American precincts. Unfortunately, this is not new and it is not confined to Florida or the South in general.

In my home State of New Jersey, during the recent Senatorial election, white voters began receiving phone calls in the middle of the night between midnight and 4 a.m. on election morning telling them that African Americans were urging them to vote and to vote Democratic. Of course the process was to anger voters, waking people up in the middle of the night, as a way of disrupting the flow.

In New Jersey, Republicans actually have to seek preclearance from the Department of Justice under a consent decree before they do anything out of the ordinary because of past widespread election abuses. Their voter intimidation tactics have included hiring off-duty police officers as so-called "ballot security" police; videotaping of voters at African-American polling places; the posting of threatening signs warning that potential voters could be arrested and sent to jail.

There was a high profile incident in New Jersey which gained national attention when a top campaign official in the gubernatorial race bragged about paying African-American ministers to keep minority voters from the polls, all lies.

As members of the Black Caucus, we are here to say that we will stand up for the right to vote guaranteed by the Constitution and reinforced by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

At the top of our agenda for this Congress, we should be having a thorough review of voting problems and an investigation into the disenfranchisement of thousands of voters. Combating voting abuses and ensuring fairer elections in the future is the best way for us to honor the memory of those heroes that I mentioned before.

It is ironic. In 1981, we had an election for governor that was only a few thousand votes out of the 3 or 4 million votes cast in New Jersey decided the outcome. At that time, it was this ballot security group that came out and intimidated voters and so forth.

In Florida, we heard the Supreme Court decide the future of this country by stopping the vote and giving the election to the now-President George Bush. The Supreme Court used the 14th Amendment involving the equal protection under the law, an amendment stating that you cannot have different standards in different counties for looking at votes. But it is very ironic that the 14th Amendment came about after the Dred Scott case where Judge Taney said that Dred Scott, who was a slave and was taken from his slave State to a free State, that the owner could not continue to have him as a slave, but Judge Taney said, yes, blacks have no rights that white men have to observe.

The 14th Amendment was passed in the middle 1860s to say that there is equal protection under the law and therefore the Dred Scott decision was overturned by the 14th Amendment. It is ironic in Florida the 14th Amendment, which was used to free Dred Scott, was used to deprive African Americans of their right to vote.

As I conclude, I once again thank our chairperson of this night for her leadership.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, “get over it; get over it.” That is what those in power often say to people whose rights have been violated yet still have the audacity to raise their voice in protest. Get over it. We have heard that whenever our objections make it inconvenient for those in power to peacefully relish the fruits of their wrongdoing.

But it is important that this Nation understand why so many people cannot get over this one. The inability to get over it is not based upon stubbornness or misdirected anger or a victim mentality or an eagerness to play the race card. It is the logical and understandable by-product of years, decades, and even centuries of concerted efforts to disenfranchise minority voters in this country. We must not look at this as an isolated incident, a fluke, or an aberration because it is not. Instead, we must view it in its proper historical context.

When we do this, we see why the debacle in Florida is the latest, but cer-

tainly not the only example of why the long struggle to win the franchise is not over.

Attempts by blacks to gain the right to vote go back even back before the Civil War.

We have already heard some of the testimony and statements given by my colleagues, and I note that I have been joined by another one of my colleagues, who I would like to give an opportunity to be heard.

Mr. Speaker, I yield time to my colleague, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. HILLIARD).

Mr. HILLIARD. Mr. Speaker, today is one of those days that we set aside to pay tribute to our forefathers, their history, and what they have done for America.

When you consider all of the groups that have come to America and when you consider all of the contributions that have been made, there is no question that the contributions of African Americans to this country is so immense and so extraordinary it cannot be recorded in its entirety anywhere in the pages of American history. It is just that vast. But when we think of the manner in which African Americans were brought to this country, we think of slaves. We think of someone who had no freedom. We think of someone who was physically restrained and in many cases physically incarcerated.

But the loss of freedom is not just being physically restrained or physically incarcerated.

When a person mentally sets up a defense because of rejection or because he is treated differently, that also is a form of slavery.

When a person is denied the right to vote, when a person's vote is not counted, that also is a loss of freedom. It is a shame and an unpardonable sin that in the year 2001 African Americans still do not have rights and freedoms that all other Americans enjoy because of the views of this country and its majority.

In the past election, African Americans were encouraged to vote. Every manner and every medium of communication were used to get them to vote, to get them to the polls. And all the while we were making those plans, there were those who were making plans to minimize that effort. We were talking of ways of getting people to the polls, ways of encouraging them to vote, and there were those who were thinking of ways to intimidate them, ways to keep them from voting, methods of not counting their votes.

That, Mr. Speaker, was a destruction of freedoms. That set up a form of slavery. We must eradicate all vestiges of slavery. The only way that can be done is to ensure that every American, every American, has the right to vote and has his vote counted, has his vote counted in every way and every town. That is the way of freedom.

So when we look at all of the great things that African Americans have done for this country, all of the great

things that have been done to build this country to where it is now, we must recognize that in that greatness is the right of freedom, the right of freedom, and the right of citizenship. So as we celebrate black history of African Americans this month, we must remember that America is not free until every citizen is afforded all of the freedoms that every other American enjoys.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, as we continue this special order, many want to know why we have chosen to focus in on the electoral forum and to replay what happened in Florida. It is history. It is history that many of us lived through. It is a history that we do not want our young people in this country to forget. It is a history where we want to encourage those who are out listening to us to remember how precious the vote is, to not be discouraged and not feel that we cannot talk about this, to not think that their vote does not count.

We should be more encouraged that now more than ever we must bring all of our people to the polls. We must turn out as many as we can. We must educate our people on the issues that are coming to the ballot. There is not a Presidential election again for 4 years, but there will be elections in every city and State over the next 4 years and we must have our voice heard.

Attempts by blacks to gain the right to vote go back before the Civil War. In the 40 years prior to the Civil War, none of the new States that joined the Union recognized black voting rights. By 1869, 4 years after the Civil War had ended, only 6 northern States had extended the franchise and no State with a large black population had accepted the notion of black suffrage. Obviously prior to the Civil War, none of the slave States granted the vote to blacks.

Following the Civil War, the Federal Government made numerous efforts to expand suffrage rights to blacks. Southern States intimidated and blocked newly freed slaves from voting by using literacy tests, the grandfather clause, poll taxes, “white primaries,” and other schemes. Southern States did all in their power to continue to subjugate their former slaves. Only when the Federal Government stepped in and sent Federal troops into the South were blacks able to vote.

Nevertheless white Southerners continued their efforts to recapture political control of State governments. Recognizing the vote as the great equalizer, they immediately set about undermining the 15th Amendment. In “From Freedom to Slavery,” noted historian John Hope Franklin cataloged a number of tactics used during that period that are disturbingly similar to some of the things that we saw in Florida: “Elaborate and confusing election schemes, complicated balloting processes, and highly centralized election codes were all statutory techniques by

which blacks were disenfranchised," he wrote.

Sounds familiar, does it not. The Hayes-Tilden deal of 1876 sold out blacks and signaled that the Federal rights to protect the former slaves would yield to States rights, which would put blacks at the mercy of hostile State governments. That deal nullified the 15th Amendment and restored exclusive political controls to whites.

The ingenuity of opponents of the franchise for black Americans is what prompted the United States Supreme Court, in a series of voting rights cases, to remind the Nation that "The 15th Amendment nullified sophisticated as well as simple-minded modes of discrimination." Nonetheless, efforts at disenfranchisement continued throughout the first half of the century necessitating Congress to enact the 1957 Voting Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Those laws aimed at protecting the voting rights of African Americans were passed after a long and shameful orgy of lynchings, capped by the assassinations of Harry T. Moore in Florida, Medger Evers, Michael Schwerner, James E. Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Viola Liuzzo in Mississippi.

□ 2115

There is one major difference, however, between past disenfranchisements and what we saw in Florida. Traditionally, we could generally count on the Federal Government, particularly the Supreme Court, to step in and stop the rampant violations of minority voting rights in this country. Sadly, that is no longer the case.

In our last election, our U.S. Supreme Court not only failed and refused to protect voting rights, it used a ludicrous constitutional argument to actively thwart voting rights, and in so doing validated the obnoxious tactics we watched with such horror. Knowing this, why are people so surprised that so many of us look at the Florida situation not as a fluke but as a continuation of a pattern of disenfranchisement? Anyone looking at this in the context of the history of voting rights in this country would understand why we will not just get over it. We will not just get over it. We will not just get over it.

I thank my colleagues for listening and participating in this Special Order on black history and voter reform and the history of voting in our country.

SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, what is facing the United States Congress right now is a decision of where do we go to help make sure that the economy keeps growing. What do we do in terms of President Bush's sug-

gestion on tax cuts? How far should we go on those tax reductions to achieve tax fairness? How do we make sure that what we do is going to help make the economy stronger in the long run?

I would like to start with a chart that represents how the Federal Government spends money. This chart represents the spending of the Federal Government. And as we see from this pie, the largest expenditure is Social Security. So Social Security takes 20 percent of what the Federal Government spends. The next largest, of course, is the domestic discretionary budget. That is what this Congress, this body, the House and the Senate, with the White House, debate and argue on every year in 13 appropriation bills is the discretionary spending, in addition to defense. Defense spending is 17 percent; interest is 13 percent. That is why paying down the debt and continuing to do that is very important.

Today, this House made a decision that we were not going to spend any of the surplus coming in from Social Security taxes or Medicare taxes. I think that is a good start. Our goal has got to be to try to reduce the increase in spending of the Federal Government because the question that everybody in this Chamber needs to ask, the question that America needs to ask is how high should taxes be. Is there a point where taxes are so high that it discourages some people from going out and working, starting a new business and hiring more people? Is it possible that taxes become so high that people do not go get that second job to try to do well for their family because government takes most of the money?

Mr. Speaker, I ask everybody that might be listening to make an estimate of how many cents out of every dollar the average American taxpayer earns goes to pay for government. The answer is a little over 41 percent. Forty one cents out of every dollar that an individual earns goes for local, State, and Federal Government. And it would be my suggestion that we lower that. So I support President Bush's suggestion that we have greater tax fairness; that we leave a little more money in the pockets of those individuals that earn it.

One of the challenges, probably two of the biggest challenges that face this Congress, that face this country in terms of government programs, is Social Security and Medicare. When Social Security started, Franklin Roosevelt said, coming out of the Depression, that we need some alternatives except going over the hill to the poor house. So we started a Social Security system.

Social Security was supposed to be one leg of a three-legged stool to support retirees. It was supposed to go hand in hand with personal savings accounts and pension plans. One-third. Today, a lot of people depend, over 90 percent, on just their Social Security check. So it is understandable during this last Presidential election that

some seniors became concerned when Vice President Gore suggested that they might be losing benefits if we hired this other Governor Bush to be our next President.

I think the challenge much greater than that is not doing anything on Social Security. So I would encourage this administration to move ahead as aggressively as possible to try to make sure that we do not just talk about putting Social Security first but we move ahead to make the kind of changes that are not going to leave a huge debt for our kids and our grandkids and will make sure that Social Security is solvent, and to do that without cutting benefits and without increasing taxes on American workers.

The Social Security system right now is stretched to its limit. Seventy-eight million baby boomers begin retiring in 2008. Social Security spending exceeds tax revenues starting around 2015, maybe a little sooner. And Social Security trust funds go broke in 2037, although the crisis arrives much sooner than technically when the trust fund goes broke.

Let me try to give my impression of what the Social Security trust fund is. Starting in 1983, when we had the Greenspan commission to change Social Security to make sure it kept solvent for the next 75 years, we passed into law a bill that the experts said would keep Social Security solvent. And the action that was taken at that time was to dramatically increase the taxes that American workers paid and to reduce benefits. And that has happened several times throughout history. So I suggest that it is very important that we not delay or neglect making the changes in Social Security now so that it will keep solvent without lowering benefits or increasing taxes.

Insolvency is certain, and that is because we know how many people there are and we know when they are going to retire. We know that people will live longer in retirement. We know how much they will pay in and how much they will take out, and payroll taxes will not cover benefits starting in 2015, and the shortfall will add up to \$120 trillion between 2015 and 2075. The shortfall. In other words, there will be \$120 trillion less coming in from the Social Security taxes than is needed to pay the benefits that are now promised.

Right now Social Security gives a wage earner, on average, a 1.7 percent return on the money they and their employer put in. So in 10 years we are looking at a situation where retirees will be receiving someplace maybe even closer to a 1 percent return because of Social Security taxes continually increasing, and the suggestion of expanding benefits is ever on the minds of this body. So the challenge before us certainly is how are we going to keep Social Security solvent. What are the changes that can be made? How do we get better than a 1.1 percent return on that particular money?