

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield to Mr. HINCHEY of New York as much time as he may consume.

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to stand here this evening with my friends and colleagues and particularly with my friend and colleague, Congresswoman CAROLYN MCCARTHY, to voice my support for H.R. 998, a bill which she has produced and which will enrich the lives of future generations. This bill will collect oral history records from those whose struggles made them among America's most notable heroes, the leaders of the civil rights generation.

The civil rights movement has strengthened our social fabric by extending basic rights to all of America's people through the right to employment, the right to buy or rent a home, the right to education, rights that are the most basic and fundamental in our country.

It is imperative that we collect oral history in order to preserve the rich cultural heritage of our Nation. Preserving oral history gives those in the future a firsthand account of the struggle that Americans went through to change the laws and the lives of our people and our government. These great Americans stood up to violence, they stood up to death threats, they stood up to local, State and government oppression and opposition, and they risked their own economic well-being so that our great Nation could fulfill its promise to all of its people. We must preserve that history that explains the hardship and sacrifice that many African Americans and others went through to get equal treatment under the law.

This history can be most richly delivered by the people who led the movement themselves, those who fought so valiantly, and who can give their account firsthand. This bill will preserve an important part of our heritage through the process of collecting this oral history and making it available. Firsthand accounts, which include the honesty, emotion and accuracy are needed as an important part of our historical record.

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Collecting these first person accounts from the civil rights movement will also give generations, those in the future, inspiration and motivation to uphold and strengthen America's promise for equal opportunity and to be sure that that promise is fulfilled.

It is my hope that our future generations will always be able to access oral histories and will blaze new trails that promote equality and richness in diversity.

Again, I'd like to thank all of my friends who were involved with this bill, especially my colleague and friend, CAROLYN MCCARTHY, for including me to celebrate the culture that makes America the great Nation that it is by taking further steps to allow

future generations to learn from our notable American heroes.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, It is now my pleasure to yield 2 minutes to Mr. COHEN of Tennessee.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Congressman DAVIS and particularly Congresswoman MCCARTHY for bringing H.R. 998.

I do represent Memphis, Tennessee, and much of the civil rights history of Memphis, for better and for worse purposes, have occurred in my district. It is important that the history of that struggle be maintained to teach people about the courageous struggle, the leadership that many, many people had to embark on to achieve their rights that should have been part of 18th century America, but the 18th century America was not complete, and all men were not created equal. Certainly women weren't created equal either, and people had to fight and risk their lives to attain rights for people who today are beneficiaries thereof.

In my community, many of these heroes of the civil rights movement have been dying lately. They're getting old. This bill I wish would have come earlier, but I really thank Representative MCCARTHY for bringing it. It's a start. And there are people like the great Reverend Benjamin Hooks, who's getting up in his years but who's got many stories to tell, and Russell Sugarman. We lost Mr. Ernest Withers, a great photographer of the civil rights movement, this past year.

Time goes by for all of us, and the opportunities to collect history become more difficult as each day passes.

So I'm proud to speak on behalf of this, but mostly as a Congressperson from the Ninth District in Tennessee, I want to express my appreciation to Representative MCCARTHY for having the leadership to bring this and for initiating this process.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that Congresswoman MCCARTHY has brought this legislation forward. As someone who's had an opportunity to travel on the pilgrimages of the civil rights movement with our own JOHN LEWIS, Congressman JOHN LEWIS, I know how important it is for us to act now and to capture the words and the actions and the memories of those who played such an important and historical role in this country.

I urge all Members to support this bill.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the Civil Rights Oral History Project. I want to thank Congresswoman MCCARTHY for her leadership on this issue and for bringing this bill to the floor today.

Oral history is such an important way to capture and share our nation's story.

These are stories that need to be told, and preserved. These are the stories of the civil rights movement; eye witness accounts of the struggle for civil rights.

These are recollections of real people who marched, and even spilled a little blood in the

cause of civil rights and civil liberties, and in the cause of voting rights.

These stories will be collected and preserved by the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress. Future generations will be able to hear the voices of people who were there during the civil rights movement, and hear them tell their stories in their own words.

We have lost too many of those voices in the last few years—Mrs. Coretta Scott King and Mrs. Rosa Parks, and we will continue to lose more courageous Civil Rights pioneers. We must begin this wonderful Oral History Project today, before we lose parts of the story. I strongly support this bill and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. DAVIS of California. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 998, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

EXPRESSING SENSE OF CONGRESS THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AND FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SHOULD ENSURE THAT MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND THEIR DEPENDENTS ARE PROVIDED WITH INFORMATION ON VOTING IN THE 2008 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 388) expressing the sense of Congress that the Department of Defense and the Federal Voting Assistance Program should take certain additional and timely measures to ensure that members of the Armed Forces and their dependents are provided with reasonable information on how to register to vote and vote in the 2008 general elections, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

The text of the concurrent resolution is as follows:

H. CON. RES. 388

Whereas members of the Armed Forces and their dependents deserve every reasonable opportunity to participate in the electoral process given their daily sacrifices to protect our liberty and freedom;

Whereas Congress enacted the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act in part to ensure that members of the Armed Forces and their dependents and citizens living overseas are provided with sufficient information, opportunities, and balloting materials to foster their participation in Federal elections;

Whereas the Election Assistance Commission found that less than 17 percent of the 6 million citizens eligible under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act chose to participate in the 2006 general election;

Whereas the Election Assistance Commission further found that of the 48,600 Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act ballots that were not counted by States and local jurisdictions in the November 2006 elections, 70 percent were not counted due to incorrect or undeliverable addresses;

Whereas the Election Assistance Commission further found that more than 10 percent of all uncounted military and overseas absentee ballots were rejected because they were received past the required deadline;

Whereas the Election Assistance Commission further found that more effort needs to be made by the States and the Department of Defense to ensure that members of the Armed Forces and their dependents and citizens living overseas are made fully aware of their voting rights;

Whereas the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the Federal Voting Assistance Program are required to create and utilize a Federal Post Card Application that allows members of the Armed Forces and their dependents and citizens living overseas to use a single application to register to vote and request an absentee ballot;

Whereas a survey conducted recently by the Inspector General for the Department of Defense analyzed the effectiveness of the Federal Voting Assistance Program during the 2006 general election, and found that only 40 percent of members of the Armed Forces received voting information from the military and only 33 percent were aware of the Federal Post Card Application;

Whereas in April 2008 testimony before the Committee on House Administration revealed that the Department of Defense had not provided all members of the Armed Forces and their dependents with post card applications by the January 15, 2008, deadline as required by Department policy, and that the Department has yet to comply with this requirement; and

Whereas many of Department of Defense's outreach efforts, including its Armed Forces Voter Week, are scheduled to occur 60 days before the November 2008 election, which may not provide members of the Armed Forces and their dependents or citizens living overseas with sufficient time to complete and return the Federal Post Card Applications: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That it is the sense of Congress that—

(1) it is in the interests of the United States to ensure that the Secretary of Defense and the Federal Voting Assistance Program provide members of the Armed Forces and their dependents and citizens living overseas who are eligible under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act with sufficient information regarding opportunities to register to vote and to request an absentee ballot for elections occurring in 2008, including the November 2008 general election;

(2) the Secretary of Defense and the Federal Voting Assistance Program must, on a monthly basis starting September 22, 2008, and continuing on the first of each month through the November 2008 general election, provide all eligible members of the Armed Forces and their dependents with an electronic reminder of the voter registration and absentee ballot process available under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, and, as required by Department policy, provide all members of the Armed Forces and their dependents with an electronic or paper copy of the Federal Post Card Application, along with sufficient instruction on completing and returning the application to the appropriate election official;

(3) State and local election officials should work with the Federal Voting Assistance Program to develop methods, consistent with privacy and security, for obtaining updated addresses and contact information, if possible, for any member of the Armed Forces or dependent and any citizen living overseas who has been identified by the State or local election official as having an undeliverable ballot address;

(4) the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness should report to the Committee on House Administration of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Rules and Administration of the Senate, and the Committees on Armed Services of the House of Representatives and Senate not later than October 15, 2008, on the efforts made by the Department of Defense to—

(A) educate members of the Armed Forces and citizens living overseas on the process of voter registration and absentee voting in the 2008 general election,

(B) provide all eligible members of the Armed Forces and their dependents and citizens living overseas with the Federal Post Card Application to register to vote and cast absentee ballots in such election, and

(C) cooperate effectively with State and local election officials in their efforts to register these individuals and distribute and collect their absentee ballots;

(5) States must redouble their efforts to make sure that local jurisdictions collect the mandated information for individuals who are eligible under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, and should work in partnership with the Federal Government to develop best practices (including the use of electronic means) for encouraging voting participation among members of the Armed Forces and their dependents and citizens living overseas; and

(6) the Department of Defense, the Federal Voting Assistance Program, the Election Assistance Commission, and State governments should examine recommendations made by the Election Assistance Commission in its September 2007 survey findings regarding the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. MCCARTHY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks in the RECORD.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I stand with the House leadership in full support of House Concurrent Resolution 388. This resolution insists that the government strengthen its promise under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act to assist our military and overseas citizens to vote.

House Concurrent Resolution 388 would direct the Federal Voting Assistance Program to provide military personnel and their dependents with electronic reminders about the election process and ensure paper and electronic

copies of the Federal Post Card Application are provided.

According to a 2006 U.S. Election Assistance Commission Report, 70 percent of uncounted military and overseas ballots were due to incorrect or undeliverable addresses. House Concurrent Resolution 388 would also direct election offices to work with the Federal Voting Assistance Program to update contact information as well as expand outreach efforts to military and overseas voters.

I applaud Mr. HOYER and Mr. BLUNT for their leadership in drafting this bipartisan resolution. House Concurrent Resolution 388 reinforces the government's commitment to assisting our military and overseas voters. I urge all Members to support this legislation.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCARTHY of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Con. Res. 388, which would express the sense of Congress that the Department of Defense and the Federal Voting Assistance Program should take additional measures to ensure that members of the Armed Forces and their dependents are provided with reasonable information on voting in the 2008 general elections. This bill will also extend information to civilians living abroad for the same purpose.

Mr. Speaker, recent data compiled by the Election Assistance Commission found that less than 17 percent of the 6 million citizens eligible under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act chose to participate in the 2006 general election. Of the 48,600 Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act ballots that were not counted by States and local jurisdictions in the November 2006 elections, 70 percent were not counted due to incorrect or undeliverable addresses. It is simply unacceptable that thousands of the brave men and women who fight for our freedom each day were denied a voice in the electoral process due to incorrectly filling out a ballot.

In September 2007, the EAC also found that "the third largest reason for rejected ballots was that they were received by election offices after the deadline stipulated by State law."

I have introduced H.R. 5673, the MVP Act, to ensure that military personnel are not left out of the elections process while serving their country overseas. Although my bill has been endorsed by the Vets for Freedom, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars called it "an important piece of legislation ensuring that the men and women who wear our Nation's uniform are not left out of the election process while serving in harm's way," the MVP Act has not yet been brought before the House for consideration. However, I am hopeful that this resolution will create awareness of this issue and lead to more comprehensive reform that will provide a solution to this problem.

In addition to meeting ballot deadlines and correctly completing absentee ballots, there is also an issue with

military personnel receiving information from the Federal Voting Assistance Program. A survey conducted recently by the Inspector General for the Department of Defense analyzed the effectiveness of the Federal Voting Assistance Program during the 2006 general election and found that only 40 percent of members of the Armed Forces received voting information from the military and only 33 percent were aware of the Federal Post Card Application.

We must ensure that the Federal Voting Assistance Program improves their communication efforts and promotes the Federal Post Card Application and the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot so that our service men and women are aware of the resources available to them during an election.

This year, perhaps more than any other year in recent memory, our Nation's electorate is excited to cast their ballots for the candidates of their choosing. For those serving their country overseas, and for civilians living abroad, we must do everything in our power to ensure that they have the information necessary to do so.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 388, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title was amended so as to read: "Concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the Department of Defense and the Federal Voting Assistance Program should take certain additional and timely measures to ensure that members of the Armed Forces and their dependents and citizens living overseas are provided with reasonable information on how to register to vote and vote in the 2008 general elections."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERAN VOTING SUPPORT ACT

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6625) to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to permit facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to be designated as voter registration agencies, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6625

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veteran Voting Support Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Veterans serving in foreign wars have performed a great service to, and risked the greatest sacrifice in the name of, our country, and should be supported by the people and the Government of the United States.

(2) Veterans are especially qualified to understand issues of war, foreign policy, and government support for veterans, and they should have the opportunity to voice that understanding through voting.

(3) The Department of Veterans Affairs should assist veterans in meeting their medical, social, and civic needs, including the full participation of veterans in our democracy.

(4) The Department of Veterans Affairs should make every effort to assist veterans to register to vote and to vote.

SEC. 3. USE OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FACILITIES AS VOTER REGISTRATION AGENCIES.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall permit a State to designate facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs located in such State as voter registration agencies under section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C. 1973gg-5) solely for the purposes of providing voter registration services under such section to individuals receiving services or assistance from the facility (or applying to receive services or assistance from the facility).

SEC. 4. ASSISTANCE WITH ABSENTEE BALLOTS.

In addition to the services required to be provided under section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C. 1973gg-5), any facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs which is designated as a voter registration agency under section 3 shall, with respect to the individuals for whom the facility is required to provide such services—

(1) provide information relating to the opportunity to request an absentee ballot;

(2) make available absentee ballot applications and, upon request, assistance in completing such applications and absentee ballots, except that nothing in this paragraph may be construed to waive any requirement under State or local law regarding an individual's eligibility to receive an absentee ballot or vote by absentee ballot in any election; and

(3) work with local election officials to ensure the proper delivery of absentee ballot applications and absentee ballots.

SEC. 5. INFORMATION PROVIDED BY NON-PARTISAN ORGANIZATIONS.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall permit a meaningful opportunity, including reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, for nonpartisan organizations to provide voter registration information and assistance at facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

SEC. 6. ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY ELECTION OFFICIALS AT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FACILITIES.

(a) DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall not prohibit any election administration official, whether State or local, party-affiliated or non-party affiliated, or elected or appointed, from providing voting information to veterans at any facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) VOTING INFORMATION.—In this subsection, the term "voting information" means nonpartisan information intended for the public about voting, including information about voter registration, voting systems, absentee balloting, polling locations, and other important resources for voters.

(b) VOTER REGISTRATION SERVICES.—The Secretary shall provide reasonable access to

facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to State and local election officials for the purpose of providing nonpartisan voter registration services to individuals.

(c) COORDINATION TO MINIMIZE DISRUPTION OF REGULAR ACTIVITIES.—Any election official providing nonpartisan voting information or nonpartisan voter registration services under this section at a facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall coordinate the provision of the information or services with the Secretary to ensure that the information or services are provided in a manner which minimizes the disruption of the regular activities of the facility.

SEC. 7. ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLIANCE.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress an annual report on how the Secretary has complied with the requirements of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) and the gentleman from California (Mr. MCCARTHY) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks in the RECORD.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

H.R. 6625 will make certain that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs provides the voting assistance and opportunities that our veterans deserve.

H.R. 6625 responds to a Department of Veterans Affairs voting assistance policy established in May, which was misguided and unacceptable. The VA directive permitted voting assistance only if requested. It prohibited election officials and nonpartisan organizations from providing assistance to our veterans at VA facilities. Despite the policy changes made by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs last week, the policy still doesn't offer the meaningful voter registration and voting assistance our veterans deserve.

H.R. 6625 will require the VA to assist our veterans by permitting States to designate VA facilities as voter registration agencies under section 7 of the National Voter Registration Act. In addition, the bill would prohibit the VA from banning State and local election officials and nonpartisan groups from distributing nonpartisan information about voting and providing voter assistance at VA facilities.

Voter registration drives conducted by these election experts have energized millions of voters who historically have not participated in elections. H.R. 6625 requires that nonpartisan groups with the expertise and experience be allowed to assist veterans with the voting process with minimal disruption to facility operations.

My district in San Diego is home to a large concentration of veterans. I