

Numerous employers have begun to cut workers' hours to avoid this obligation, and many of them are doing so openly. The impact is two-fold: fewer hours means less pay while also losing our current health benefits.

These are the presidents of three major unions.

So it's not just Republicans, Mr. Speaker. It's the public beginning to focus on this now, because this bill is becoming the law of the land January 1. I wish it had worked as smooth as it could. It has not. And it has not because it's not doing what it promised, which was the single most important thing, which is cut the cost of care so more of us out there could afford to have it.

Mr. GINGREY of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to thank all of the members of the House GOP Doctors Caucus who participated tonight. If I tried to add up the number of years of clinical experience in our group of about 21 members on the Republican side of the aisle in this caucus, it would probably be 600-plus years. So we really do know of what we speak. We don't have every answer, but we know of what we speak; and we want to get it right. That's what this is all about.

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

#### PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAMALFA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. POCAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise on behalf of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Tonight, the Congressional Progressive Caucus would like to talk about voting rights and how important that is to this country and to every single person in our country.

Last week, both the Senate and House Judiciary Committees held hearings on the Voting Rights Act and what steps we need to take forward to protect the right to vote in this country. There's potentially no right that is more important, no issue that is more important to this country that we should consider than our right to vote. It should be our most fundamental right. It's the right that preserves all other liberties that Americans hold dear.

When aspiring Americans take the citizenship test, they're asked, What is the most important right granted to U.S. citizens? And the correct answer: the right to vote. Protecting this right should be the primary concern of our democracy. So you would think that when that question is asked, What are our most important rights, and the answer is, The right to vote, it would be something that's enshrined in our U.S. Constitution and you would think there is explicitly a right to vote. I certainly thought that. But you would be wrong. It's startling to think, at first,

It seems against everything you think you've been taught and against the principles that our country has been built on. But within our Constitution there is no explicit right to vote.

We have to remember that when our Constitution was originally ratified, the right to vote was specifically not guaranteed. In fact, it was an incredibly restrictive law. Only white male property owners above the age of 21 could vote. That was less than 20 percent of the country's population at the time. Many of our Founders specifically did not want to expand the franchise of voting, believing most in society were unqualified for the privilege. In fact, John Adams famously wrote:

It is dangerous to open so fruitful a source of controversy and altercation as would be opened by attempting to alter the qualifications of voters. There will be no end of it.

Mr. Speaker, since that time, our Nation's attitudes towards voting have changed slowly but very progressively. But the fact that we have needed constitutional amendments prohibiting discrimination based on race, gender, and age demonstrates that we possess no guaranteed right to vote in our Constitution.

Meanwhile, these accomplishments have oftentimes been accompanied by a myriad of tactics, laws, and strategies meant to suppress the vote: literacy tests, poll taxes, grandfather clauses, voter intimidation.

□ 2045

These targets of discriminatory efforts have changed as well. Our first literacy tests were adopted to keep Irish-Catholic immigrants from voting. Then we saw a wide array of efforts to stop African Americans from going to the polls.

Now, today, the bills introduced to restrict the right to vote may be a little less obvious and voters lawmakers wish to suppress are a little harder to define, but these efforts are nonetheless discriminatory.

We have seen burdensome registration requirements and reduced early voting opportunities, which are often critical for low-income Americans who cannot take off work on Election Day. African Americans and Latinos, in particular, have utilized early voting days in very high numbers.

College students have been the targets of a number of efforts to decrease their participation, from disallowing student IDs as an acceptable form of voter identification, to stricter residency requirements, to limited polling locations on campuses.

Voter ID and burdensome registration requirements often make it harder for senior citizens also to be able to vote. In Wisconsin, we've had this issue before us. Many senior citizens no longer carry their driver's license because they no longer drive, and yet that's one of the very things that they may need to go vote with a photo ID.

I myself didn't realize the full extent of the attack on our right to vote until

voter ID laws were actually introduced in my home State of Wisconsin. As is often the case with voter ID laws, Republicans justified the photo ID requirement as a way to counter voter fraud in our State.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is this crisis of voter fraud is a fraud in and of itself. As the Brennan Center for Justice points out, you are more likely to be killed by lightning than you are to commit voter fraud in your lifetime. To be killed by lightning is more common than voter fraud in this country.

Now, in Wisconsin, we're very proud that we're one of the top three States for voter participation—Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—and we're known for our clean and effective elections. Our chief elections officer found that since the year 2000 in statewide elections the State has seen about 20 instances of voter fraud out of more than 6 million votes cast. Most of those instances of voter fraud involved felons who were ineligible to vote but voted—a problem that doesn't get fixed with a photo ID.

So why did the Wisconsin Legislature believe we needed to combat against voter fraud? What does it mean when you have a cure in search of a disease? Well, in my experience, there's usually an ulterior motive. And in the case of restrictive voting laws, the design is to suppress the vote, to encourage lower voter turnout in the hopes of influencing elections. In other words, it's about elected officials trying to pick their voters rather than the voters picking their elected officials.

Now, in Wisconsin, we're very fortunate because our State constitution specifically guarantees the right to vote. Because of this provision, the suppressive voting laws that have been introduced in our State have largely been blocked by the courts.

But what I did realize is that, while Wisconsin had a strong amendment that protected our right to vote, our U.S. Constitution does not. Unfortunately, without a guaranteed Federal right to vote, we will continue to see the types of disenfranchising efforts that have become a plague on our modern society.

Mr. Speaker, that takes us to today and last month's Supreme Court decision that struck down section 4 of the Voting Rights Act. Section 4 was the act's preclearance formula, the formula that determined which States and counties needed to get Federal approval before they make voting law changes. The Court ruled that the formula was outdated and, thus, unconstitutional.

Now, I think the Court may have forgotten that when we reauthorized the Voting Rights Act, overwhelmingly, just from 2006, we had 390 supporters in the House of Representatives and a unanimous 98-0 vote in the Senate. Clearly, there was strong support in the legislative body for the Voting Rights Act that was now turned aside by the Supreme Court.

Either way, what we know for certain is that before the ink was even dry on the Supreme Court decision, State legislatures began to act. Of the nine States that were fully covered by the Voting Rights Act, six have already started to move on legislation that would restrict the right to vote. Let me just read you a couple quotes from a couple of these States.

Texas—this was really quick. This is the headline: “That was quick: Texas moves forward with voter ID law after Supreme Court ruling.” That’s from the National Journal on June 25:

The Texas law requires voters to show photo identification to vote—a measure that was blocked by the Justice Department, arguing the law would discriminate against racial minorities. At the time, Attorney General Eric Holder called the law a “poll tax.”

And that’s where Texas went as soon as that Supreme Court decision happened.

In Mississippi, the headline: “Mississippi’s Secretary of State Moves to Enforce Voter ID Law.” Their new voter ID law may seem innocuous, but more than one out of 10 of every eligible voters do not have a government-issued ID, clearly making it harder for people to vote in the State of Mississippi.

Finally, just another example is in the State of North Carolina. The headline: “Senate Republicans Unveil Stricter North Carolina Voter ID Bill.” Again, according to the article from the Charlotte Observer, Republican lawmakers are emboldened in their effort to push a photo identification requirement for in-person voting after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key part of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The ruling means the bill would no longer need Justice Department approval before it becomes law.

So we’re seeing in State after State after State that was protected by the Voting Rights Act that States now are trying to change those laws and make it harder for people to have that ability to go out and vote.

Now, I happen to agree with the Court that the formula was outdated. As I previously detailed, it doesn’t reflect the current attempts to restrict the right to vote. In fact, it underestimates them.

Let’s look at it this way: under the Voting Rights Act, nine entire States and certain counties in six others were covered, but just this year already, more than 80 restrictive voting laws in 31 States have been introduced.

Given my experience in Wisconsin and what I’m seeing in States across the country, I knew that we had to take action at the national level. So I got together with Congressman KETH ELLISON from Minnesota and we worked with FairVote to work on a right to vote amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would guarantee an affirmative right to vote for every single American.

Our amendment is as simple as it is necessary. It says that every American

citizen possesses the fundamental right to vote in any public election where they reside, and Congress has the power to protect this right.

This amendment would create an important change from current policy. No more would Americans have to prove that their right to vote has been infringed. If you live in a State right now, you have to prove that that State, in changing voting laws, has somehow infringed your ability to vote in order to have success. Instead, under our constitutional amendment, the burden of proof would go to the States, and the States would have to demonstrate that any new law they put in place would not burden any of their citizens’ ability to have a right to vote.

Now, our vote is the great equalizer in this country. My brother and I have one thing in common with the Koch brothers: we each come with one single vote. The average person in the world, you may not have billions of dollars like Sheldon Adelson, but the one thing that you have in common with Sheldon Adelson is that you each have one single vote.

Now, I understand that ratifying the Constitution is not an easy task, but on this measure, it’s a deeply important one. We can, and we must, build a grassroots movement needed to ensure our most fundamental right is not subject to the partisan whims of State legislatures.

I am holding in my hand pages and pages of people across the country who support a national right to vote constitutional amendment. Over 28,000 people have signed petitions. They’re circulated by U.S. Action and PCCC, Bold Progressives that have got signatures saying we need to make our Constitution work for every single American, that every single person has that right to vote. This has 28,000 names right here of people who support this most fundamental right.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, the right to vote is not a Republican right or a Democratic right, it’s an American right. And if the recent Voting Rights Act decision demonstrates anything, it’s that we need to do everything we can to help protect that right.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to reinforce that the Congressional Progressive Caucus is going to do everything that we can to make sure that every American has the right to vote, and that a right to vote amendment to the U.S. Constitution is the most sure, most effective way to get that done.

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

#### CHALLENGES FACING INDEPENDENT AND COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) for 30 minutes.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Well, it’s good to be here at the end of a day in

which there’s been a lot of excitement here on the floor, a lot of voting going on, a lot of debate, which is what we’re up here for.

One of the things that I have committed to, as we talked about a little bit last week, is pointing out some things that may fall a little bit under the radar but actually matter a great deal to the people of not only the Ninth District, but to the people of the United States.

Up here, we can get, many times, lost in what I’ll call the big picture items or the latest of what’s hot, so to speak, and tonight I want to talk about our local pharmacists.

I have a little pharmacist I go to. We have several, but one of the main ones I go to is Woody’s Pharmacy, Kevin Woody. And I go in there and I know that when I ask him about the drugs for myself, for my wife, my kids, he gives me answers. He helps me know why they interact, what goes on. We’ve got pharmacists in all kinds of settings that do that every day for folks. But our local pharmacies, and especially our community pharmacies, right now are under attack.

I’m going to be joined, hopefully, here in a little bit by the gentleman from Pennsylvania to talk about the challenges facing independent community pharmacies. You see, local pharmacists play a vital role in America’s neighborhoods and communities, particularly in the more rural areas of northeast Georgia. They provide unparalleled guidance, assistance, and resources for families, including my own. I’m committed to protecting access to independent and community pharmacists and helping to level the playing field through effective and robust oversight of pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs.

It’s a tough enough task to survive in this economy, and the overregulation by the administration is only making it more difficult. I am committed to working with my colleagues, particularly the gentleman from Pennsylvania, to promote legislation that will provide consumers with greater choice of pharmacies, require fair standards for PBM pharmacies, support access to diabetes testing supplies, protect traditional pharmacy compounding, and ensure that our military families can enjoy the many benefits that community pharmacies provide.

In many cases, independent and community pharmacists have dedicated their careers to providing quality patient care. However, they’ve been continuously cut by unfair reimbursements, overbearing audits, and a take-it-or-leave-it approach to contracts. Over the next 30 minutes, I look forward to discussing the challenges facing independent and community pharmacists and the important role they play in the lives of many of our constituents.

Although we cannot sufficiently cover these issues in the next half hour, I hope this will be the first of