

simply reflect on President Johnson's words. In a country that has come so far—so far—Americans who struggle financially deserve better than that. They deserve better than to have their elected officials tell them that their worth in this world is tied to their ability to afford health insurance.

ISRAEL HAS THE RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. BROOKS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROOKS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak strongly and unequivocally in support of Israel's right to self-defense, the same right to self-defense we would assert if America were attacked and Americans killed by rockets and other weaponry.

Israel launched Operation Protective Edge in response to relentless and unprovoked rocket attacks launched from Gaza by Hamas, a brutally ruthless terrorist organization. In just the last 3 weeks, more than 2,500 rockets have rained down on Israel, and the targets of these rockets are not military but civilian.

2,500 rockets fired at any country is a lot. It is an act of war that triggers self-defense military responses. But 2,500 rockets fired at a country as small as Israel is even worse. To put the size of Israel in perspective, Israel is smaller than the Tennessee Valley of north Alabama that I represent. If anyone dared to fire even a single rocket at the people of the Fifth District of Alabama, much less if 2,500 rockets rained down on the Tennessee Valley, you can be darn sure that we would demand an overwhelming military response.

In Israel, Hamas fires at communities, at schools, at daycare centers, all with the same goal: to invoke terror by injuring and killing as many innocent Israeli citizens as possible.

Fully 80 percent of the Israeli population is living under the constant threat of missile attacks, having to run into the shelters constantly at a moment's notice, in the middle of the night, at all times of the day with mere seconds of warning. No country on Earth would tolerate such a situation.

So that we are clear, Hamas consistently places and fires its rockets within heavily populated areas, including schools and hospitals. Hamas does this to use their own civilian population as human shields. This means that every time they fire a rocket, they are committing not one, but two, war crimes: targeting civilians in Israel while using human shields in Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it very well in describing the juxtaposition of Hamas firing from civilian areas in the hope of drawing fire and the use by Israel of the Iron Dome missile defense system: "We use missiles to protect our people. Hamas uses their civilians to protect their missiles."

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not emphasize how truly miraculous the Iron Dome missile and mortar defense system is. It is like hitting a bullet with a bullet.

I thank the Tennessee Valley's incomparable defense workers who, working hand-in-hand with very bright Israeli engineers and scientists, made hitting a bullet with a bullet possible. Untold Israeli citizens' lives have been saved as a result of the Tennessee Valley's technological contributions to Israel and the Iron Dome defense system.

Since the beginning of Operation Protective Edge, Israel has discovered more than 30 offensive Hamas terrorist tunnels dug from Gaza under the border and into Israel. These tunnels have 60 different access points, and the entrances have been found in houses and mosques.

The purpose of the tunnels is to allow armed Hamas terrorists to emerge in Israeli communities to murder and kidnap civilians—defenseless mothers, fathers, and children, it makes no difference to Hamas. Hamas kidnaps, tortures, and murders, and seemingly enjoys it.

Israel's only solution, the only path to peace in the face of those who kill in the name of religion, is Israel's disarming of Hamas and the demilitarization of Gaza.

Israel is the only democracy in the tumultuous and dangerous Middle East. Israel is unquestionably America's most reliable ally in the Middle East. The people of Israel are engaged in a fight to protect their home, a fight for survival, and America must stand with Israel without hesitation.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, the right to vote is the most fundamental right in any democracy since it is the right from which all others meaningfully derive.

Deny someone the right to vote, and you may deny them the right to speak, to associate with whom they choose, or to freely exercise their faith. For if these other rights are infringed, how may we seek redress but at the ballot box?

Not even the courts can secure our rights in the absence of an effective franchise. Congress established the inferior courts, and Congress may abolish them. The right to vote alone is foundation to all of the others.

So it is deeply disturbing to see the right to vote being diminished in many States. These new State laws restrict voter registration drives, eliminate same-day voter registration, reduce the early voting period, and require photo identification and proof of citizenship to vote.

In total, 34 States have passed laws now requiring voters to show some

kind of identification at the polls. For many Americans who already are registered to vote and can provide this documentation, these new requirements may not sound burdensome. But although these new laws apply to all Americans, they disproportionately impact young, elderly, minority, low-income, and disabled voters.

Eleven percent of American citizens do not have a photo ID; 7 percent do not have citizenship documents. That means a significant number of eligible voters have been disenfranchised by these new laws.

It has been argued that it is appropriate to put a significant burden on people who simply want to cast their vote because voter fraud is widespread, but it is not. It is true that in jurisdictions which allow people to pay a bounty for new voter registration cards that voter registration fraud exists. But voter registration fraud is not the same as voter fraud, since these false registrations do not result in non-existent people voting.

The fraud artists should be prosecuted for violating the law and cluttering up the voter registration rolls, but legitimate voters should not be disenfranchised. Rather, we should crack down on the bounty system that incentivizes this kind of misconduct.

These new and stringent voter ID laws will not stop voter registration fraud, but they will prevent legitimate voters from casting their ballots. Indeed, in many places, this is their very intention. They are the worst form of voter suppression, not voter protection.

The backward movement on voting rights is not confined to the States. The Supreme Court has also made it more difficult to ensure adequate protection from disenfranchisement.

Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act required that nine States and many other counties and municipalities around the country with histories of voter discrimination obtain Federal preclearance before changing voter laws. However, the Supreme Court, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, ruled that the formula to determine which jurisdictions must get preclearance is out-of-date.

Immediately thereafter, Texas announced that a previously blocked voter identification law would go into effect and that redistricting maps would no longer need Federal approval, actions that could severely undermine minority voting rights in that State.

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In January, the Voting Rights Amendment Act was introduced to restore and strengthen the protections of the VRA that were dismantled by the Supreme Court. This bill was introduced by Congressman JOHN CONYERS and Congressman JIM SENSENBRENNER, demonstrating the bipartisan support for restoring a crowning achievement of the civil rights movement. I am a strong supporter of the Voting Rights

Amendment Act, and I am encouraged that Members of both parties see the need for this legislation.

As a country, we have made incredible progress in expanding the right to vote to previously disenfranchised populations. Now is not the time to turn the clock back. We should, instead, be moving forward, ever forward, and encouraging legal, eligible voters to fully participate in their government, in democracy, and in voting—not working to exclude them.

Congress must commit to passing the Voting Rights Amendment Act and ensuring that the ballot boxes in our States, in our Nation, and in our democracy remain open to all.

CENTRAL ALABAMA VETERANS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with this Congress and with this Nation a story of mismanagement, malfeasance, negligence, and coverup at the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System, or CAVHCS.

I know most of my colleagues can point to at least some problems at the VA systems in their State. But what has transpired in my hometown of Montgomery, Alabama, and central Alabama rises to a level of misconduct and mistrust I am not sure many other systems can match. And I do this not simply just to disparage the system for no reason. I do this to shine a light on some truly disturbing practices so we can finally clean up the mess. I do this so that the 50,000-plus veterans that depend on the Central Alabama VA can one day have confidence in the health care system we promised them.

After Phoenix, when the scheduling scheme began to unravel, it was revealed in early June that the Central Alabama VA had one of the worst wait times in the country. It was particularly bad for mental health patients.

I actually met with our local VA director, who acknowledged the discrepancies and tried to reassure me by leading me to believe that action had been taken to remove those responsible. It turns out that wasn't true. No one was fired. Mr. Speaker, if a Member of Congress can't get a straight answer from the VA, imagine what our veterans go through every single day.

In the wake of this clear breach of trust, we began digging deeper to find out what was really going on at the Central Alabama VA. The information that we received from sources who came forward was alarming. It is also consistent with reports gathered by independent inspectors and some great investigative reporters.

Here is what is being uncovered:

A Montgomery VA pulmonologist manipulated more than 1,200 patient records to show tests that never occurred. After being caught, the doctor was never fired or suspended. He actu-

ally was caught manipulating records again but somehow went on to receive a "satisfactory" performance review;

At least 900 unread patient X-ray tests, many showing malignancies, were lost over a 5-year period. When the tests were discovered recently, top hospital administrators tried to cover up the problem;

Email records show the Central Alabama VA director was alerted to the concerns over patient scheduling practices more than 8 months before taking action;

And finally, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the strongest evidence yet has emerged that the rampant scheduling manipulation at Central Alabama wasn't a misunderstanding at all but, rather, a facility-led standard operating procedure. More than 57 percent of staff surveyed at Central Alabama said they received "instruction" to manipulate patient wait times, 57 percent. Mr. Speaker, that is off the charts. The national average is 12.7 percent, and other systems near Montgomery aren't even close.

There is clearly a systematic problem in Montgomery, and it needs to be corrected. That is why I have joined with Senator RICHARD SHELBY to write the new Secretary of Veterans Administration, Robert McDonald, to call his attention to the Central Alabama VA. Specifically, Senator SHELBY and I are asking Secretary McDonald to review these instances of mismanagement, visit CAVHCS with us, and develop a plan of action to reform the Central Alabama system.

It is so important to remember that thousands of doctors, nurses, and public servants at the VA work very hard every day to give veteran patients the best health care that we can offer. Their service is honorable, and it is a shame that it is overshadowed now by a system that too often fails those it was created to help.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot allow the American people to forget about this. We cannot allow the news media to move on to the next story. I hear from veterans every day who are depending on us to make this right. This will be an uphill battle. I know that. But it is a fight we have to fight. We have to change this culture of complacency. That starts with new leadership, and I look forward to working with Secretary McDonald.

THE BORDER CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of weeks, many of us have visited my home State and have gone to places where I have gone over the decades of service and living in Texas, and that is to our great neighbors who live on the border. Many great citizens of the State of Texas and of the great country in which we live, they have lived and worked and played,

and they have created an economic engine, cities like Brownsville, Laredo, Harlingen, McAllen, and many others. And they have, in fact, experienced over the years an influx of individuals coming to do harm.

As a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee and a member who has served as chairwoman and ranking member on a number of subcommittees, we have made great strides.

I am reminded of the low number of Border Patrol agents some many years ago, and now we are upwards to 25,000 hardworking Americans who serve on both the northern and southern borders.

They have met the challenge of a serious influx. First, the drug cartels. The violence on the Mexican side of the border. We have come together with Mexican Presidents and have worked with the Mexican national defense forces, and we have quashed, to a certain extent, the extensive violence. But yet, our Federal agents of the ATF, the DEA, FBI, and certainly other collaborative efforts have worked to bring this violence down.

We take note of the fact that El Paso is noted as the safest city in the United States, and it is on the border. We note that a great deal of commerce comes through the southern border, as it does the northern border.

Over the last couple of weeks, beginning maybe in 2013, we saw a new phenomenon, an unplanned phenomenon, a phenomenon driven by the devastating and destructive elements found in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Central America, none of which were driven by a pointed pronouncement from the United States or the President of the United States, President Barack Obama. But elements who wanted to misuse and abuse the need for comprehensive immigration reform decided to misrepresent the laws of the United States of America.

Every Member of Congress has adhered to a particular theme. I started using it in the 1990s. We are a Nation of laws and a Nation of immigrants. And the laws are intended to be used to instruct how we guide our hearts and our laws. We still have the Statue of Liberty in the harbor of New York that says, we welcome the forlorn and those who are in need.

Unfortunately, bad information was given to desperate people. Let me say that again, Mr. Speaker: desperate people. Desperate mothers and fathers who saw the beheading of young people, or people in their neighborhood threatened by MS-13 and other horrific gangs who say, if your child does not join, your child will be killed, or your little girl will be raped. Or maybe the 3-year-old that I saw down in Brownsville with a diaper on was given to someone just to save her life.

That is the misnomer and the abuse that has been going on in the debate