

tonight, if he is watching, he would be very proud of her efforts in this regard and in so many others, leading the fight to try to stop the assaults on human dignity.

Mr. Speaker, when I was a much younger man, I entered the Sinai Desert in Egypt. The year was 1979. I was a college student. At the site of the fighting that had taken place between Israel and Egypt in the 1973 war, there was an all-too-familiar scene of a concrete pile of rubble. Scrawled on the side of the concrete pile, both in Arabic and in English, were the words: "Here was the war, and here is the peace."

Mr. Speaker, maybe, just maybe, on this, the remnants of this Christian church where this cross was planted by this Yazidi man who returned to his hometown of Sinjar just recently in January, one day will see those same words that here was the war, but now here is the peace.

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

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on S. 2426.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BRAT). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Nebraska?

There was no objection.

#### CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS—THE WORK CONTINUES: WHY VOTING MATTERS IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Mrs. BEATTY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. BEATTY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members be given 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to add any extraneous materials relevant to the subject matter of this discussion.

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

There was no objection.

Mrs. BEATTY. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening for tonight's Congressional Black Caucus Special Order Hour: The Work Continues—Why Voting Matters in the African American Community.

I am so proud to join my classmate, Congressman HAKEEM JEFFRIES from the Eighth District of New York. He is a member of the House Judiciary Committee. He continues to be a tireless advocate for social justice, working to reform our criminal justice system and to eliminate the overcriminalization of the African American community.

Mr. Speaker, we are here to discuss the current state of voting rights in America, which, unfortunately, are under assault. The freedom to vote is one of America's most fundamentally, constitutionally guaranteed rights. It was 51 years ago this month, Mr. Speaker, that over 600 peaceful, orderly protesters set off to march from Selma, Alabama, to the State capitol in Montgomery to demonstrate the need for voting rights in the State.

Last week, our Congressional Black Caucus chair, Chairman BUTTERFIELD, stated at the first in a series of CBC hearings about the current state of voting rights in America and that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is probably one of the most significant pieces of legislation that was ever passed in the United States Congress.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, as we know, in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down this crucial provision of the Voting Rights Act in the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision. Our work continues because by invalidating section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, the Supreme Court opened the doors for ways to reduce the voting power of minority communities and it put in place new voting restrictions in an effort to make it harder for millions of Americans to vote.

Our democracy has far too many missing voices, particularly those who are already at a disadvantage due to deep-rooted racial and class barriers in our society. By exercising our right, we can do great things. We can hold this country accountable. We can advocate for legislation that supports social and economic progress, equality and fairness for all Americans. We can champion policies that create and sustain jobs and that protect against cuts to social and economic programs that are vital to our most at-risk populations. We can move forward on efforts to address the school-to-prison pipeline and criminal justice reform. We know that the inequalities in access to quality health care still exist between races and that more and more Black children are victims of failing schools.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling on all citizens, including on our community and national leaders, to join the Congressional Black Caucus to work to eliminate voter suppression and to restore what so many people fought for, marched, and died for—yes, the Voting Rights Act. It is up to all of us to protect the most at-risk among us and to expand opportunity for all people. That begins with passing a voting rights act. Our work still continues, Mr. Speaker.

This week, we are celebrating Women's History Month, and I must note the powerful impact that African American women are having at the polls. In the past two Presidential elections, Black women led all demographic groups in voter turnout. That is why voting matters to African American communities. Black women make up the most dynamic segment of the rising American voters. A great civil rights leader said that women are

among the greatest leaders of social reform, and they are fighting, literally fighting, for their political rights.

This past Saturday I had the opportunity to be with the mothers of the movement. We know who they are. They are the mothers of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Dontre Hamilton, Jordan Davis, Sandra Bland, and Hadiya Pendleton; and we have all heard what happened to their children.

As a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, we are calling for action on gun control. We need to do more than just stand up on this floor for a moment of silence. We need to make sure that we are passing gun control legislation, commonsense legislation, that keeps the guns out of the hands of the most dangerous individuals. It is time for us to protect our children.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to give you some examples of what we should include in our call for action.

I go first to my good friend and colleague and classmate who brought it to my attention that we stand up for a moment, and then we sit down. Then we come back to this floor, and it is business as usual. We talk about wanting to keep our families safe, and we talk about the mental health issues. That is all we do, Mr. Speaker. We talk about it.

Congresswoman ROBIN KELLY of Illinois' Second District has legislation, H.R. 224, which would require the Surgeon General of Public Health Services to submit to Congress an annual report on the effects of gun violence on public health. This bill has 140 Democrat cosponsors. I am asking my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to step up and do more than just stand up for 30 seconds.

I am calling on Congress to act on Congressman JAMES CLYBURN of the Sixth District of South Carolina's legislation, H.R. 3051, the Background Check Completion Act, which would guarantee that no gun is sold by a licensed dealer until a background check is completed.

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to say that I am a cosponsor of both of these bills.

I will go on and tell you about Chairman BUTTERFIELD, the chair of our Congressional Black Caucus. He understands that our work continues, because he has focused his efforts on promoting anti-poverty programs and on expanding economic development and job creation. There are a number of things that have happened in his State.

For example, the Moral Mondays are protests in North Carolina that are led by religious progressives. These protests are in response to several actions by the government of North Carolina, which was elected into office in 2013. These events, which spread throughout the South, helped bring attention to voting rights, criminal justice reform, and workers' rights. I think it is very important for us to note that.

Mr. Speaker, tonight my coanchor and I will talk about a number of

issues that explain why our work continues. We are going to talk about why in African American communities it is important for us to understand, if we don't diversify those who are going to vote, we don't represent the diversity of this great America that we are here to protect and to serve.

□ 2030

It is not just members of the Congressional Black Caucus who value and understand the importance of us coming together, the importance of us celebrating our rich history, all tied to the Voting Rights Act, all tied to the movements that we have had of the past.

Let me give you a great example because I am so proud that I am going to have the privilege to yield time to my good friend, Congressman JOHN LARSON from the First District of Connecticut.

He is here, Mr. Speaker, tonight to join with us as we talk about our rich history. He is going to share with us information about the 51st anniversary of President Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech, which was given on March 15, 1965.

I yield to the gentleman from Connecticut.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio and the gentleman from New York for this opportunity to join with them this evening.

I am especially proud to associate myself with the gentlewoman's remarks and all that the Congressional Black Caucus has stood for as I would generally acknowledge that I think most of Americans stand for as well.

I thank them as well for pointing out a historic event that is happening and, in fact, will happen tomorrow evening at the Library of Congress.

Tomorrow is March 15. As the gentlewoman mentioned, it was 51 years ago that President Lyndon Baines Johnson gave his now famous "We Shall Overcome" speech.

It was President Johnson that recognized 8 days after Bloody Sunday what the Nation needed to do. He did this at great political risk, but he did it because of the sacrifice that so many had made.

Tomorrow evening at the Library of Congress we will celebrate two American heroes with the idea that it is far more important to come together as a Nation and understand that these issues that we face and struggle with aren't Democrat or Republican, but at their very core are American.

I want to commend the Bipartisan Policy Center for establishing what will be the first Congressional Patriot Award that will be presented tomorrow evening to JOHN LEWIS from Georgia and SAM JOHNSON from Texas.

This honor will be perpetuated forever. Not only will it be a medal in recognition of their patriotic service to the country, but of their service here in the United States Congress.

One person was nearly beaten to death by the Alabama police, the other

nearly beaten to death by the Vietcong and imprisoned for 8 years, 42 months, in solitary confinement. It was a momentous time in our history in 1965.

Both of these gentlemen serve in the United States Congress. Both of them had to overcome in their lives incredible obstacles. Both of them, after their experience in 1965 and beyond, came back to serve their country, to continue to organize, to continue, in the case of SAM JOHNSON, to be a flight commander.

JOHN LEWIS, as we all know, is the conscience of the House of Representatives. SAM JOHNSON is the most admired Republican on the floor. They are both iconic and American heroes, and tomorrow evening at the Library of Congress they will be recognized.

The Bipartisan Policy Center has been helped by the Library of Congress, the fortress of knowledge, an institution started by the United States Congress, and houses our great history.

Tomorrow on display will be the documents of the civil rights movement and the direct participation of JOHN LEWIS and the documents about the Vietnam war and the captivity and imprisonment of SAM JOHNSON.

Speaking tomorrow evening on behalf of SAM JOHNSON will be JOHN MCCAIN. Who better to speak about being imprisoned in the Hanoi Hilton? Who better to speak about the sacrifice that SAM JOHNSON made, that his family made, for people who put their country first?

We will be honored tomorrow to have a former Member of this body, an ambassador of the United States, and the mayor of Atlanta in Andrew Young being here tomorrow evening.

Who better to talk about all the issues that the gentlewoman from Ohio and the gentleman from New York are bringing to the forefront today than the person who was there by Martin Luther King's side, a colleague of JOHN LEWIS? JOHN LEWIS holds the seat that Andrew Young occupied in this body.

Andrew Young continues to be an advocate for voting rights and is in the forefront of that continued and epic battle that goes on in this country. It will be an outstanding evening.

But the point of it all is to understand that, as Members here in the United States Congress, in the House of Representatives, we must come together and, as President Johnson said 51 years ago tomorrow evening, to overcome, to overcome not only racial prejudices, but to overcome disease, poverty, and ignorance, which is the real plague on this Nation that keeps us confined.

How fitting that this event takes place tomorrow evening and because of the benevolence of an outstanding person like David Rubenstein. Who better to interview JOHN LEWIS and SAM JOHNSON about their experience than David Rubenstein?

I thank my colleagues from the bottom of my heart for allowing me the opportunity here to echo the senti-

ments of their purpose here this evening and to acknowledge this event taking place tomorrow evening at the Library of Congress of distinguished Americans, their history forever perpetuated.

And as Webster says above us in the great quote here:

Let us all, in our time here, in our service to the country, do something worthy of being remembered.

Let us take to heart the example of JOHN LEWIS and SAM JOHNSON and note especially tomorrow that we shall overcome.

Mrs. BEATTY. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman JOHN LARSON.

As I was listening to him reflect on the wonderful program that we are all going to be able to participate in at the Library of Congress—as I listened to his words, 51 years ago the President of these United States could recognize what the Nation needed.

It disappoints me, as I stand here on this House floor and I think about voting rights and I think about the condition of this Nation today and where we are when we talk about casting our votes and who we are going to cast our votes for. I say thank you for Congressman JOHN LEWIS and Congressman SAM JOHNSON.

As I was listening to the gentleman, I thought about so many of the things that Congressman JOHN LEWIS has said to us not only on this floor, not only in private moments, but in our Congressional Black Caucus meetings.

He represents that sense of history of why we come to continue our work, why we come to continue to stand up for the voting rights.

Because he has said to us on numerous occasions, Mr. Speaker, that the vote is the most powerful and most nonviolent tool that we have in a democratic society. We must not allow the power of the vote to be neutralized. We must never go back.

So I thank Congressman LARSON for taking us forward, for taking us on March 15 on a journey that we will remember for a lifetime, because, you see, we stand on the shoulders of those individuals who came before us.

Now our voters stand on our shoulders. Our voters, Mr. Speaker, are wanting us, are thirsty for us, to stand up for them so that their vote counts.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my coanchor to share some thoughts with us on why our work continues, why it is so important in the African American community for us to stand up for not only African Americans, but for our citizens who are discriminated against, those who, when we talk about social and economic programs, we see the disparities in what happens to them in education, in health care, in housing, the juvenile justice system, the criminal justice system.

I could not think of any better coanchor or colleague, someone who is such a great orator, someone who, when he stands up, we listen.

Please, Congressman HAKEEM JEFFRIES, share with us some of your thoughts.

I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished gentlewoman, Representative BEATTY, from the great State of Ohio for her leadership and for moving us forward throughout the past several weeks as it relates to the Congressional Black Caucus' Special Order, this hour of power.

It is 60 minutes where we have the opportunity to speak to the American people about issues of importance to our country, to our economy, to the integrity of our democracy as we are doing tonight. It is an honor to share with you today.

□ 2045

I also want to acknowledge and thank our colleague, JOHN LARSON from the great State of Connecticut, for his continuing leadership and for taking to the House floor today to highlight both the historic significance of the speech that President Johnson gave from this very Chamber 51 years ago, on March 15, 1965, about voting in America and ensuring that every single person, regardless of their race or their color or their background had an opportunity to exercise their franchise, and to point out to the American people that the Congress will pause tomorrow to honor two true American legends, Representative LEWIS and Representative JOHNSON, who served the American people before they arrived in the people's House and through their service here in the House of Representatives.

It is with great humility that I stand today to address a topic that I think is of particular significance at this moment in time that we face in America in terms of the turmoil that many may be feeling, watching, undergoing: the economic changes that have been experienced over the last few decades.

We know that the middle class, in many ways, has been left behind. Wages have remained stagnant, notwithstanding the increased productivity of the American people over the last 40-plus years. When the economy collapsed, many high-income earners were able to rebound in no small part as a result of the bailout that occurred. There are a lot of Americans who are still hoping, looking out for their opportunity to be brought back into the economic mainstream by the people they have sent to Congress to represent them.

Notwithstanding all of the challenges that we have to confront, whether that is our broken criminal justice system or the economy that has still not completely recovered, we have made substantial progress under the leadership of Barack Obama. But of course there is more that needs to be done, and we could welcome some cooperation from folks on the other side of the aisle because all of our constituents were hit hard in 2008, yet President Obama has largely been left to his own devices.

Notwithstanding all of these issues, central to how our government works

is the fact that it is designed to be a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Abraham Lincoln, of course, famously uttered those words in his Gettysburg Address.

If we are going to have that type of government, then everybody needs the opportunity to be able to participate in choosing their representatives in government without obstacle or obstruction.

We understand this is a great country, but it is also a country that has had a stain on its history as it relates to denying some the opportunity to participate fully in American democracy. That is the reason, after all, that, in the aftermath of the Civil War that threatened to tear this country apart, we had a Reconstruction amendment related to slavery and then a Reconstruction amendment related to the equal protection under the law and due process for all Americans; and lastly, of course, with the 15th Amendment designed to make sure that, in the Constitution, racial discrimination, as it relates to the exercise of the franchise, would be prohibited.

But, unfortunately, notwithstanding the 15th Amendment being ratified and put into our Constitution, more than 100 years would pass by until this country really confronted the denial of the right to vote in a meaningful way, particularly in the Deep South, and it happened because of the efforts and sacrifice of a great many people: Dr. Martin Luther King, JOHN LEWIS, Andrew Young, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, the NAACP, and those foot soldiers who were on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965, and almost lost their lives when they were attacked without provocation by Alabama State troopers as they endeavored to cross that bridge on the way from Selma to Montgomery. That, of course, then prompted President Johnson to deliver that address, where he so famously uttered the words upon his conclusion that "we shall overcome."

The 1965 Voting Rights Act continues to be the most significant piece of civil rights legislation ever passed by this Congress, but unfortunately we know that it is currently under attack. It is under attack because the Supreme Court effectively, in the *Shelby v. Holder* case, eviscerated its impact by striking down section 4, so-called coverage clause, which effectively eliminated the Department of Justice's ability to require States with a history of voting rights discrimination to have to preclear any changes that it makes.

Now, what I have been struggling to figure out during my brief time here in the Congress is why voting rights has become such a controversial thing when, it seems to me, it is so central to the integrity of our democracy. For decades, in the aftermath of the passage of the Voting Rights Act, it was actually pretty bipartisan, this notion that in order for our democracy to

work there should be no artificial obstacles erected to prevent people—African Americans, Latinos, immigrant families, and others—from being able to participate in what basically makes America great, what makes us unique: the ability to elect our representatives and for there to be peaceful transitions of power regardless of ideology, regardless of your region, regardless of what State a President may come from in order to keep the Republic going.

When you look at the history of the Voting Rights Act, as I indicated, it has largely been, until recently, a bipartisan endeavor. In fact, every time the Voting Rights Act was reauthorized—and it has happened four times—not only did it pass with bipartisan majorities in the Congress, but it was signed into law each and every time by a Republican President.

In 1970, Richard Nixon signed into law the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. In 1975, Gerald Ford signed into law the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. Then in 2006, President George W. Bush signed into law the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. This significant piece of civil rights legislation was enacted into law and then reenacted on every single occasion with the signature of a Republican President, indicating that voting, participation in the franchise, having the American people in their full, gorgeous mosaic elect their representatives is an American thing. But all of a sudden, it has become controversial.

Now, I don't know if the timing of the election of our current President has anything to do with that. Historians will make that analysis as they move forward. It is above my pay grade. I just find it interesting that this notion of voter fraud, which was always a fiction put forth by the defenders of the race-based Southern hierarchy to deny African Americans the right to vote—and was not an issue when Richard Nixon was elected; it wasn't an issue when Reagan was elected; it wasn't an issue when George Herbert Walker Bush was elected; it wasn't an issue when George W. Bush was elected, notwithstanding the fact that I am still not convinced he won the State of Florida—all of a sudden, in the aftermath of the election of President Barack Obama, apparently there has been an outbreak of this fever that we have got to deal with so-called voter fraud.

No evidence of the fraud, not a scintilla of evidence has been produced by a single proponent of this argument, but when people were elected in 2010, in the immediate aftermath of that election during President Barack Obama's first term, more than 180 different pieces of legislation in 41 States were introduced, all, in the opinion of many objective observers, designed to suppress the right to vote. And at the same time, this challenge was working

its way through the Supreme Court from, of all groups of people, Shelby, Alabama.

Now, the irony of that, JOHN LEWIS almost lost his life, as Representative LARSON indicated, on the Edmund Pettus Bridge down in Selma, Alabama; and yet the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, in a case brought by the folks from Shelby County, apparently thinking that they were victims because of the oppressive nature of the preclearance provision, the Supreme Court, at least for the time being, bought that argument.

So we find ourselves now in a situation here in the Congress where the Court has said to us: Fix it; update the coverage formula. So bipartisan legislation has been introduced, championed by folks like JIM SENSENBRENNER, the author of the 2006 reauthorization and a very distinguished and respected former Republican chairman of the House Committee on the Judiciary, and, of course, JOHN CONYERS, JOHN LEWIS, JOYCE BEATTY, and many others on the Democratic side of the aisle. Yet we can't get a single hearing before the Committee on the Judiciary on something seemingly so fundamental to the integrity of our democracy.

We are not asking you to turn into progressive Democrats. Just act like Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, whom you hold up as someone who is the classic embodiment of conservative politics. Just act like Ronald Reagan did in 1982 or George W. Bush.

Let's fix the Voting Rights Act in advance of the American people having to determine what comes next as it relates to both this Congress and the Presidency—not because it is a good thing for Republicans or because it is a good thing for Democrats; it is a good thing for the country: full and robust participation.

I just want to add, as I close, that it seems to me that this would be a particularly significant time to deal with the Voting Rights Act and to make sure that everybody can participate fully in our democracy at a moment when many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and the Senate have said: We want the American people to decide who fills the Supreme Court vacancy.

□ 2100

Now, I am a little skeptical about that, but let's assume that that is really your view of the world. If, in fact, you don't want to do your constitutional job right now—once the President sends up a Supreme Court nominee and gives that person an opportunity to be heard before the Senate and the American people—because you claim you want the American people to decide who that nominee is through the vehicle of a Presidential election—then let's make sure that all of America can participate in that process. That means let's remove any obstacles to voting in every community.

We haven't seen a hearing in the House, and we haven't seen a hearing in the Senate. I just don't understand. We have had no hearing on the Supreme Court nomination. We have had no hearing on the Voting Rights Act when the Supreme Court told us to fix it. What exactly is going on? The American people are wondering.

We see a lot of frustration right now out there in America directed at Washington. That is because oftentimes there are so many critical issues that we simply fail to deal with.

So I am just hopeful today that, as we mark this occasion tomorrow of these two American heroes being honored—Representative JOHNSON and Representative LEWIS—we can get back to doing the business of the American people in the spirit of service that they themselves have displayed through their life's work and deal with something so central to our democracy such as the right to vote in an unfettered fashion.

Mrs. BEATTY. Congressman JEFFRIES, you have given us a lot to reflect on tonight. You have given us the roll call of how President after President has reauthorized the Voting Rights Act.

As I was listening to you, it appears that there is an uncommon denominator that we now have in this great America: a Black man as President of these United States.

I want to stand here and say, Mr. Speaker, that I am very suspect when I listen to how eloquently my colleague walked us through the history and shared with us how 51 years ago our colleague, JOHN LEWIS, was putting his life at risk with other great leaders as a very young Black man, that it was because he understood what was at stake.

He was probably ahead of his time. But when you think about that, everyone in this Chamber should want to have that experience.

I can remember a year ago, almost to the date, that I took that journey to Selma, Alabama. I took that journey with Congressman JOHN LEWIS and some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, who stood there and locked and latched hands and talked about how we should overcome.

For a moment, Congressman JEFFRIES, it gave me that hope that I came here for, that hope that one person can make a difference and change the lives of others.

It wasn't 48 hours later that we came back to this institution, to this House floor, and all of that was washed away. It was back to business as usual.

There were no hearings, whether it is a budget hearing for funds to fund things from our infrastructure, things to educate and take care of our infants and children, mental health that we have all come to an agreement on with all the things that have happened during the time you and I have been here, Congressman JEFFRIES, with the number of lives that have been lost.

I think about the Emanuel Nine. We talked about that commonality of putting more money into mental health. Yet, the President puts dollars in the budget and we can't get a hearing.

So why does our work continue? Our work continues because it is so important for us, as African Americans, to make sure we protect those who are most at risk.

Mr. Speaker, we have a huge job to do. We are 46 members strong. While we focus on the lives of African Americans and the African American community, we stand here and fight for all children of all races, all ethnicities, because that is what we do because we care.

But as I stand here today and reflect on Congressman JEFFRIES' outline of history, outline of the number of lives that have been lost, outline of the legal process and what we have gone through, it made me recall, Mr. Speaker, that a week ago I decided to write an editorial to my local newspaper, and it was published. Mr. Speaker, that editorial was titled: "Work to improve voting rights."

[From The Columbus Dispatch, Feb. 29, 2016]

#### WORK TO IMPROVE VOTING RIGHTS

(By Rep. Joyce Beatty)

As Black History Month closes, I am reminded of Martin Luther King Jr., who famously said, "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now."

We have come a long way since the era of Jim Crow. Indeed, our nation has laws on the books protecting people from discrimination based on sex, age, race, religion, national origin and ethnicity. Moreover, each February, we collectively reflect on the important contributions and accomplishments African-Americans etched into the cornerstone of America.

Yet, the more things change, the more they stay the same. What do I mean?

Every year, without fail, we celebrate Black History Month and honor the many leaders, heroes and "sheroes" of the black community. However, we rarely discuss the systemic and pervasive barriers still preventing African-Americans from achieving the American Dream.

Our nation is still plagued by the vestiges of segregation and unequal laws and policies. Today, it is more difficult to exercise one's constitutional right to vote, not easier. Inequalities in access to quality health care still exist between races, and more and more black children are victim to failing schools.

As opposed to getting bogged down in the numbers and reciting a long list of statistics and historical grievances, I am calling on all people, including our community and national leaders, to join me in working to eliminate voter suppression I and to restore what so many people fought, marched and died for: the Voting Rights Act.

It is up to all of us to protect the most at-risk among us, to defend the foundation of our democracy and to expand opportunity for all people. It begins with the Voting Rights Act.

In Congress, I am working tirelessly to rebuild the very foundation of the Voting Rights Act undone by the Supreme Court's Shelby County v. Holder decision. As an original cosponsor of the Voting Rights Empowerment Act of 2015 (H.R. 12), I believe we must ensure every American has equal say and the opportunity to vote. This legislation

would do just that by expanding access and putting in place common sense protections for our nation's electorate, no matter the color of one's skin.

It takes a village. So, let's work together in our neighborhood, at work or with family and friends to make this change possible and to help guarantee every American has fair and equal access to the ballot box.

Black History Month should be about the progress that has been made and the journey that awaits us. Remember, the past is our experience, the present is our accountability and the future is our responsibility.

Mrs. BEATTY. It is 2016. I am writing an article that sounds like I was sitting in 1955. That gives me great concern.

So when I think about our topic tonight, our work continues. What matters in the African American community I think we have answered tonight.

Whether it was from Congressman JOHN LARSON, who is not a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, whether it is from Congressman SAM JOHNSON or Congressman JOHN LEWIS, Mr. Speaker, I say to you that we stand here as members of the Congressional Black Caucus because we are the conscience of the Congress.

Mr. Chairman, how much time do I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman has 13 minutes remaining.

Mrs. BEATTY. Mr. JEFFRIES, as I listen to you talk about the rich history and what we are dealing with today, I think about you serving on the Judiciary Committee.

I think about how, as Members of Congress and members of the Congressional Black Caucus, we often talk about our broken prison system.

We often talk about what happens to young children who go to college and then find themselves in that pipeline of education to prison.

I would like to ask you how you think the decrease in Black voters will affect that broken system.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Well, it is a great question. I look at it in two ways. First, when you think about mass incarceration as a phenomenon, one that, hopefully, in this Congress we will be able to do something about, in recognition of the fact that America imprisons more people than any other country in the world, increasingly, we have become a country that over-incarcerates and under-educates. As a result, we have lost generations of young people, disproportionately, African Americans and Latinos.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon declared publicly that drug abuse was public enemy number one. At the time, there were less than 350,000 people incarcerated in America. That was the starting point of the war on drugs.

More than 40 years later we have now got 2.3 million people incarcerated in America. A significant number of those folks—approximately 50 percent at the Federal level and similar numbers at the State level—are there for non-violent drug offenses.

Yet, every single one of those people who have been incarcerated in America

has lost the right to vote, some permanently, some temporarily with an opportunity to perhaps recover it. More than a million people are currently incarcerated from the African American community. So our system is broken. Our democracy is in need of adjustment.

If there is not an understanding that the absence of refraining from participating in that democracy through exercising the franchise yields consequences that public policymakers will choose either intentionally or through benign neglect to allow things like mass incarceration to overwhelm a community, then we are going to continue to see things happen that are not in the best interest of America. Certainly, electoral participation matters to the African American community.

The other thing that we have got to look at in the context of the right to vote—and there is some bipartisan support because Senator RAND PAUL on the other side of the Capitol has been very visionary in this regard—is that disenfranchising people who have been incarcerated in America, paid their debt to society, have moved on with their life—but to permanently restrict them, even in some cases when the conviction is for a misdemeanor offense, is un-American.

But some have used this type of disenfranchisement related to the prison industrial complex to overwhelm many communities because of mass incarceration to, again, set up obstacles to full participation in American democracy.

So we have got to put everything on the table in terms of our effort to fix our broken criminal justice system, which I am pleased, to date, at least in the House on the Judiciary Committee, has been bipartisan in nature.

But we have to take an expansive approach to repairing the damage that has been done over more than 40 years of a failed war on drugs, with millions upon millions upon millions of people stamped with a criminal record, I believe in excess of 65 million people during that time period, disproportionately African Americans and Latinos.

It is one of many issues that is on the table that, hopefully, will result in folks understanding that the stakes are high as it relates to who represents you. And the vehicle is just to participate.

That is the great majesty of our democracy as it was conceived by the Founders and those who came after: Government of the people, by the people, and for the people, through electoral participation.

□ 2115

Mrs. BEATTY. Mr. JEFFRIES, I paused for a moment as I was listening to you, and you are so absolutely right; the vehicle, the power of casting that vote, the power of making a difference.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things that is so significant about the Congressional Black Caucus, that is

our history. It is our fortitude to have the courage to always continue to fight and never give up, because we actually have members of the Congressional Black Caucus who were there during that time.

When you think about Members like Congressman JOHN LEWIS, when you think about Members like JOHN CONYERS, JOHN CONYERS, a Black man, will go down in history as the longest-serving man in this Congress. Just think about it. A man that shared an office for almost 2 decades with Rosa Parks, the modern civil rights leader who decided that she was going to sit down that day because she realized one person could make a difference.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have gone through our whole history of the Voting Rights Act, we have gone through the sections of the Constitution, we have gone through what the Supreme Court has done, and yet we can't get the reauthorization of our Voting Rights Act.

Mr. Speaker, I say this to you tonight. The Congressional Black Caucus will not give up. We are holding field hearings, as I speak, so we can collect the information to come back here and tell you that the vehicle for American people, that vehicle is the ballot box.

Mr. Speaker, as I stand here today, we have resolved. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus don't come just to complain and put issues out there. We are scholars. We like hearing that we are the conscience of the Congress, but we are the scholars. We are Howard, and Morehouse, and Spelman, and Harvard, and Princeton, and Yale. We are the whole spectrum of this America that you and I serve.

So I ask you today, Mr. Speaker, to consider that when we stand up the next time on this House floor, why Members are sitting down. We are sitting down because I think you and Congressman JEFFRIES and all the rest of my colleagues in this Chamber, we have an obligation to do more.

Innocent lives are being taken, and there is something we can do about it. We could start with something that has been bipartisan. Congressman JEFFRIES mentioned it a number of times, and that is something as simple as passing a Voting Rights Act. That would make a difference.

I guess my question is: What are we afraid of?

Are we afraid if we increase the number of those who have been disenfranchised, those who have been discriminated against, that they will actually vote, they will actually have a voice to make a difference in the way they live in this wonderful America?

I am asking you to go to your Republican colleagues and ask them to stand with us that we can leave a great legacy in history, because history will be written. When the first Black President leaves these United States, we will read of all the wonderful things that President Barack Obama did.

But we will also have those who will write part of that history of us failing

to do our job. And I will reflect back on this day when Congressman JEFFRIES and I stood at this Congressional Black Caucus Special Order Hour and we said, the work continues, and why it matters in African American communities that we vote.

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

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, nearly 51 years ago the Voting Rights Act (VRA) was signed into law to prohibit racial discrimination in voting. It was a defining moment in our nation's history that would send a clear message that all voters should have free and fair access to the polls in the United States. The Voting Rights Act became a powerful tool of our democracy that protected voter participation of individuals from all backgrounds. It has given a voice to previously disenfranchised voters, particularly that of minorities who would otherwise be left out of the political process.

Since the passage of the VRA, various groups and individuals have endeavored to reverse those protections. In 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately struck down a key enforcement component of the VRA as unconstitutional. This decision has enabled a number of states across the country to move forward with discriminatory voter laws, the effects of which have not yet been fully realized.

Texas is one of 21 states that have implemented new restrictions on voting since the 2010 midterm election. Texas first passed two harsh voter mandates in 2012, which were ultimately blocked under Section 5 of the VRA. Texas re-implemented these laws requiring valid photo identification at the polls following the Supreme Court ruling—the first time a photo ID was required to vote in a federal election in 2014. The consequences in Texas alone have been dire and disproportionately impact minority voters. The U.S. Department of Justice originally estimated that the Texas law could prevent as many as 600,000 voters from casting their votes at the polls.

The African American community has faced many barriers to voting throughout our history. During the height of the Civil Rights Movement, thousands of protesters marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in order to protest the racial injustices in voting. The will of the people ultimately prevailed, resulting in the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 just five short months after the final march. It was an important struggle that still serves as a lesson for us today.

Voter disenfranchisement poses an incredible threat to the electoral process. The nationwide efforts to create barriers to voting have highlighted the importance of the protections afforded under the VRA. Voting is the principle means through which Americans can have a voice in the political process. It allows us to elect candidates who share a common vision for bettering our nation and advancing our social and economic progress. These efforts to disenfranchise voters stand contrary to our democratic principles as a nation and it is imperative that we fight to reinstate voter protections for all, which have only served to strengthen our democracy and engage voters in the political process.

#### DECLARATION OF GENOCIDE COMMITTED BY ISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) for 30 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, it is always an honor to be able to speak on this hallowed floor.

A report was made earlier today entitled, "House Poised to Declare ISIS Committing Genocide Against Christians, Other Minorities." And, in fact, this report says: "The House is poised Monday to approve a resolution that declares the Islamic State is committing genocide against Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East—putting even more pressure on the Obama administration to do the same ahead of a deadline later this week."

"The resolution passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee with unanimous support and is expected to pass the House with bipartisan backing."

"The resolution comes to a vote Monday evening, just days after the release of a graphic new report by the Knights of Columbus and In Defense of Christians on ISIS atrocities. The report made the case that the terror campaign against Christians and other minorities in Syria, Iraq, and other parts of the Middle East is, in fact, genocide."

"When ISIS systematically targets Christians, Yazidis, and other ethnic and religious minorities for extermination, this is not only a grave injustice—it is a threat to civilization itself," Representative Jeff Fortenberry, Republican, Nebraska, said in a statement. "We must call the violence by its proper name: genocide."

"The resolution will be voted on ahead of the congressionally mandated March 17 deadline for the Secretary of State John Kerry and the White House to make a decision on whether to make such a declaration. The measure is an effort to force the administration's hand on the issue, as the administration has so far declined to take an official position."

"Christians, Yazidis, and other beleaguered minority groups can find new hope in this transpartisan, ecumenical alliance against ISIS' barbaric onslaught," Fortenberry, who is co-chairman of the Religious Minorities of the Middle East Caucus and represents America's largest Yazidi community, said in the statement."

So the measure received the backing of the House Republican leadership, PAUL RYAN, calling on the Obama administration to take action like recent attacks against Christians.

The article goes on, from foxnews.com, indicating: "It is rare for Congress to make a genocide determination."

"In addition to the genocide resolution, the House is expected to vote on a measure to create an international tribunal to try ISIS members accused of atrocities."

Mr. Speaker, it is pleasing to report that H. Con. Res. 75, expressing the sense of Congress that the atrocities perpetrated by ISIL—that is, the Islamic State; and it has used different names, ISIS, ISIL—against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria include war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, that passed by 393 yeas and zero nays.

It is deeply troubling that although this House, in a bipartisan way, could vote 393 for this resolution and zero against, that Secretary of State John Kerry and President Barack Obama are having trouble deciding what they should do.

Gee, is it possible they might just notice that in the House of Representatives we came together unanimously and said what ISIS has been doing is genocide?

For heaven's sake, for the sake of the Christians, the Yazidis, the Jews in the area, is it too much to ask that this United States administration take notice that there is a genocide going on?

And though the administration is not doing much of anything about it, is it too much to ask that this administration at least call it what it is; that this House, on both sides of the aisle, unanimously said the same thing?

Is it too much to ask, even if you are not going to fight the genocide, at least call it what it is, then that will embolden others with courage to stand up and fight more fearlessly? Is that too much to ask?

I hope and pray not, Mr. Speaker.

In the meantime, what we find here at home, while we are still having the administration struggle over whether to call genocide genocide, we have a report from ICE, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE, it is revealed that 124 illegal immigrant criminals released from jail by the Obama administration since 2010 have been subsequently charged with murder.

The Center for Immigration Studies report on the data from ICE to the Senate Judiciary Committee added that the committee is not releasing the names of these masses of murder suspects.

"The criminal aliens released by ICE in these years—who had already been convicted of thousands of crimes—are responsible for a significant crime spree in American communities, including 124 new homicides after the thousands of crimes they have already committed before ICE released them. Inexplicably, ICE is choosing to release some criminal aliens multiple times," said the report written by CIS' respected Director of Policy Studies, Jessica M. Vaughan.

"She added that 75 percent were released due to court orders or because their countries wouldn't take them back."

"What's more, her report said that in 2014, ICE released 30,558 criminal aliens—that is illegal immigrants in the United States who committed