

California facilitated by the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BENTZ), chairman of the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries, and hosted by the gentleman from California (Mr. DUARTE).

We were talking about the water supply issue for the State of California. Why do my colleagues have to hear about water in California? These are the crops that California grows right here on this poster. Somewhere between 90 and 99 percent of them are grown in my home State.

If they aren't grown there, then U.S. consumers will not receive them. They would have to get them from somewhere else, some other country, with whatever quality and supply steadiness issues they might have there. It is important that the water supply in California continue to be directed to agriculture instead of directed to the Pacific Ocean.

We are losing tens of millions of acre-feet because we can't seem to harness the water with the existing dams we have because they let it all out due to dubious supposed environmental needs, whether it is fish, whether it is the smelt, which no longer really exists in the delta, so they find another smelt to call endangered and take more water away.

We need water for agriculture to feed this country.

#### FULLY FUND THE IDEA

(Ms. TLAIB asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. TLAIB. Mr. Speaker, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or what we call IDEA, is a landmark civil rights law in our country, offering a promise of equal education for all of our students living with disabilities.

We continue as a country to fall short on this promise, a 50-year-old law that is now chronically underfunded. Teachers and parents in my district repeatedly tell me how we are not doing enough to meet the demands and requirements for IDEA.

The Federal Government promised to cover 40 percent of the extra costs of special education with the passage of IDEA in 1975. That pledge has never been met. Federal funding covers just under 15 percent, creating a shortfall of billions for many of our districts across the country.

My colleagues have been introducing a bill over and over again for almost 25 years to get it fully funded, and we haven't seen it yet.

We must follow on the promise of IDEA. That is why I cosponsored the IDEA Full Funding Act.

The problems today are real for our children. When we fail to fully fund these services, school districts are stuck and end up providing less than the law requires, cuts are made, and children are turned away.

Mr. Speaker, let's fund the IDEA.

#### INQUIRY INTO THE DEATH OF PATRICK FINUCANE

(Mr. NEAL asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. NEAL. Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the decision today by the British Government to reopen the inquiry into the death of Patrick Finucane, who was brutally murdered in his home in front of his family in February of 1989.

This high-profile murder of a human rights solicitor by loyalist gunmen connected to the British security forces was one of the most controversial and shocking events of the Troubles in the north of Ireland.

Throughout my 35 years in Congress, I have been a steadfast supporter of the Finucane family and their tireless effort to get truth and justice. After years of public apologies, we are acknowledging today a state of collusion and numerous roadblocks that were set up.

I welcome the British Secretary of State Hilary Benn's comments and his intention to proceed with reopening this case. Pat's wife, Geraldine, and their family are entitled to the truth in hopes that this decades-long ordeal can finally be put to rest.

As co-chairman of the bipartisan Friends of Ireland Caucus, I will continue to advocate for the Finucane family as this process moves forward in our hopes that it is one more step toward peace, justice, and reconciliation on the island of Ireland.

#### IN RECOGNITION OF THE INDUCTION OF JIM LEYLAND TO THE MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

(Ms. KAPTUR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a man whose legacy now stretches from the ballfields of Perrysburg, Ohio, to the hallowed halls of Cooperstown, New York.

Jim Leyland, a son of northwest Ohio, recently became only the second native of northwest Ohio to be enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame, following Toledo's own Roger Bresnahan, who was inducted almost 80 years ago in 1945.

What a momentous achievement that reflects not just on Jim's hard-won success as one of the greatest managers in baseball history, but also honors his hard work, humility, and dedication, qualities that define our region.

From his modest beginnings in Perrysburg, he rose through the ranks with perseverance and grit, leading teams to greatness and even winning a World Series. Through all of his accomplishments, Jim remained loyal to his roots, giving back to his community in countless ways and serving as a role model for generations of young athletes.

As he takes his rightful place in baseball's hallowed halls in Cooperstown, Perrysburg and all of northwest Ohio could not be more proud.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Jim on this historic, well-deserved honor.

#### STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY: THE PEOPLE UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ALFORD). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. RAMIREZ) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order hour.

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

There was no objection.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, today is 9/11, and I start our Special Order hour by paying tribute to the 2,977 people who lost their lives at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Somerset County, Pennsylvania, and the thousands of people who were injured that day.

I ask that we observe a minute of silence as we remember the families torn apart, futures stolen and irrevocably changed, and the lives that we lost that day.

As Progressives, we are committed to making our democracy work, repairing the places it is fractured, strengthening the places it is vulnerable, and defending the places it is effective.

In April, the Congressional Progressive Caucus released our platform for 2025. In it, we outlined the work we are committed to, ensuring our democracy is strong.

Today, I have the honor to stand with a number of my colleagues who have been the movers and shakers in protecting our democracy and working toward strengthening our democracy and helping expand our democracy. I am pleased, as we get started with our Special Order hour, to yield to my colleagues who will share the progress that they have made and what Congress must still accomplish to further deliver on the work their communities sent them here to do.

Mr. Speaker, I will start by yielding to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RASKIN).

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding and for organizing this Special Order hour on the most important problem of our time, which is democracy.

Will we have democracy, or will we lapse into some other form of government, like autocracy or theocracy or plutocracy?

I thank the gentlewoman for her leadership and for leading us in that

beautiful and moving moment of silence for the victims of the terrorist attack on our country on 9/11.

A true Republican President, the founder of the Republican Party, spoke of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. That has been the beautiful, tantalizing vision of America, but we can't say that is how America began. We began as a slave republic of White, male property owners over the age of 21 years old.

It has been through successive waves of popular, political, social struggle and constitutional amendment that we have opened America up and come much closer to forming a more perfect union and reaching the ideal that President Lincoln proclaimed from the battlefield of Gettysburg in 1863.

Still today, Members will come to the floor, Mr. Speaker, and say: We are not a democracy. We are a republic. My colleagues think that they have struck some kind of knockout blow against the overwhelming sentiment of the American people, including President Reagan, who gave a great speech in Europe about American democracy and never once used the word "republic," but constantly invoked democracy.

Yet, there are Members who say: We are not a democracy. We are a republic.

Well, what is a republic? A republic is just a representative democracy because 300 million people can't fit in the U.S. House of Representatives or in a school board meeting. We use republican institutions in order to have the democratic will expressed.

If the Constitution is read the way I read the Constitution, the whole trajectory of American historical and constitutional development has been toward greater democracy.

Look at the amendments we have had since the original Bill of Rights.

The 13th Amendment abolished slavery.

The 14th Amendment gave us equal protection and due process.

The 15th Amendment said no race discrimination in voting.

The 17th Amendment shifted the mode of election of U.S. Senators from the legislatures to the people.

The 19th Amendment doubled the franchise in America by giving women the right to vote and establishing their political equality in the country.

The 23rd Amendment gave people in Washington, D.C., at least the right to vote for President of the United States, although not voting representation.

□ 1800

The 24th Amendment abolished poll taxes and the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18. The whole movement of our history has been toward incorporating, encompassing, and including people who had been formerly disenfranchised, marginalized, and excluded from equal political participation.

It has been a seesaw struggle throughout our history. There have always been people who have wanted to

revoke other people's voting rights, undermine other people's voting rights, disenfranchise them, strip away their ability to register to vote.

Tocqueville said in "Democracy in America" that he observed that democracy and voting rights in our country are either shrinking and shriveling away or they're growing and expanding.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Progressive Caucus for this session because we have got to get democracy back on the growth track in America. We have got to get away from all of the voter suppression and interference tactics that we have seen grow up, at least since 2013 when the Supreme Court rendered its dreadful decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, essentially decapitating the Voting Rights Act, knocking out the preclearance requirement for covered jurisdictions, saying that no longer did they have to submit voting changes to the Department of Justice or to our Federal district court before they could implement those voting changes.

We have since seen more than 100 voter laws passed all over the country, around half of them in the original covered jurisdictions under the Voting Rights Act. We have seen new obstacles to voter registration. We have seen massive closure of precinct voting places, mergers of different precinct voting places.

I just got back from Texas where a group of students came to see me from the University of Texas to say this is going on there right now where the Governor has closed down a polling place and then relocated one in Austin on the campus of the University of Texas away from a well-traveled thoroughfare, a big, bright building to putting it in the basement somewhere else on campus. These kinds of tactics are used all over the country in order to suppress the vote.

We need to be moving forward in terms of voting rights, and I am very eager to hear what my colleagues have to say about that.

Mr. Speaker, I will point just a couple of things out.

We are in 2024. This is the 21st century. It is time for us to be electing the President of the United States the way we elect Governors, Representatives, Senators, mayors, and everybody else. Whoever gets the most votes win. We have had five popular vote losers become President, twice in this century in 2000 and 2016, under the creaky, antiquated, and obsolete mechanisms of the electoral college, which is subject to fraud and manipulation.

As we saw in this very Chamber, the electoral college can get you killed in the 21st century because it offers more opportunities for strategic bad faith actors like former President Donald Trump to try to revisit a result and reopen results in an election.

We need to be moving forward to a national popular vote for election. We spend tens of millions of dollars a year all over the world teaching people

about democracy and the one thing they never come back to us with when they are writing a new Constitution is the idea that, oh, you know that electoral college thing you have? We think we will import that to our country. We never hear that, right? We should be able to learn from our own experience and from the experience of democracies around the world.

Another important ingredient to democracy is statehood. That is how communities that have been formerly disenfranchised and subordinated have been able to lift themselves up. We are in the Nation's Capital, which is the only Nation's Capital on planet Earth which is not represented in their own national legislature. Mr. Speaker, 713,000 taxpaying, draftable U.S. citizens are completely disenfranchised in the House of Representatives and in the U.S. Senate. They don't have representation.

If you told the people of Paris they could not be represented in L'Assemblée nationale because they breathed the same air that other people's representatives breathed, you would have another French Revolution on your hands.

When we passed it in the 117th Congress, the D.C. statehood legislation, and I was one of the floor leaders for that, I had the honor of telling the people of Washington, D.C., this: Thank you for having a bona fide real political grievance and not coming down here and beating the daylight out of our police officers the way that the MAGA mob did when Donald Trump falsely convinced them that they had won the Presidential election, which Trump had lost by more than 7 million votes, 306-232 in the electoral college.

They didn't come down and storm the Chamber and try to overthrow the Constitution. They did it the right way. They had a Statehood Constitutional Convention. They are asking for admission. We should admit the people of Washington, D.C., as an equal State into the Union using our powers under Article IV of the Constitution.

It is the same thing with 3.5 million American citizens in Puerto Rico. They should be given the opportunity to become a State, as well.

We have got to keep the trajectory of democracy moving forward so we don't lapse into some other form of government. This has been a tough time with challenges to the basic constitutional structure when you have Presidential candidates saying, just set the Constitution aside. We saw a violent insurrection supporting a political coup in this very Chamber. That is the alternative to moving forward with everything that we are going to be talking about tonight in terms of improving representation through ranked choice voting, in terms of campaign finance reform so we don't have money drowning out the voice of the people, filibuster reform, ethics reform at the Supreme Court, all of those things are essential and we need the momentum of

a prodemocracy movement to keep us from becoming like Vladimir Putin's country or Viktor Orban's country, the close buddies of Donald Trump that he invoked in the Presidential debate last night that he conscripted as character witnesses for him in this election.

We have got a very clear choice for America moving forward. I thank the Progressive Caucus for offering so much leadership. We know that it is tough, and it is a struggle.

Frederick Douglas from my State said that if there is no struggle, there is no progress. The struggle may be moral, it may be physical, it may be more unphysical, but there must be struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand.

John Dewey said that there are no ills to democracy that cannot be solved without more democracy. Democracy is the corrective to the impediments to democracies.

What we are suffering from today is the obstacles and the impediments to democracy, but we have got the means, and we have got the will in the country to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mrs. RAMIREZ for giving me this opportunity.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, Congressman RASKIN is absolutely right. We are committed to progress. We are committed to moving forward. We are committed to strengthening our voting rights. We are committed to improving representation. We are committed to campaign finance reform. We are committed to fully funded Federal agencies. We are committed to ethics, courts, and filibuster reform.

There is someone who has been doing this work for a very long time and has developed the leadership among other Members to continue this work even after he leaves this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to another gentleman from Maryland (Mr. SARBANES), a friend, someone that I am inspired by. I am committed to make sure that we carry on this legacy of progress.

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. Speaker, I thank Representative RAMIREZ for yielding.

I salute the Progressive Congressional Caucus for pulling together this Special Order to talk about the importance of strengthening our democracy.

You are absolutely right to begin the discussion tonight by reminding us that this is the anniversary of September 11, the tragedy that struck our country.

This is a day when, as patriots, we stand up as Americans. We salute the flag. We salute our history. It is very appropriate that it is a day on which we want to speak to the need to strengthen and deepen our resolve when it comes to making sure the democracy of this country, that connected tissue, is as strong as it can possibly be.

The sad reality is that over a period of years now, many Americans have become more cynical because they look at Washington, they look at the places

where laws are made, and they feel that it is more distant from them; that it doesn't fully express their voice, their dreams, their hopes, and aspirations.

A lot of that has to do, as you know, with throwing obstacles in the way of voters as they try to access the ballot box or making it difficult for their priorities to be carried forward because of the insidious influence of dark money and other forces that are behind the curtain.

We have applied ourselves over a period of many Congresses now to try to channel the grievances that our constituents have expressed into pieces of legislation that can begin over time if we can get them passed to restore that fundamental faith in democracy.

These include the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would restore the protections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. By the way, a piece of legislation that at every opportunity for reauthorization, until very recently, was supported in a bipartisan fashion. Republicans and Democrats understood that you needed to have these voting protections in place.

Unfortunately, over the last few years, for reasons difficult to discern sometimes, our Republican colleagues have fallen away from this commitment, and we have had to carry it ourselves.

That is one important piece of legislation that Democrats are supporting that repeatedly we have brought to the floor of this House, and we have passed here. It has been a more difficult prospect on the Senate side, but we have the hope that that opportunity will present itself, as well.

Another critical piece of legislation that I felt privileged to carry and exercise some leadership on is the Freedom to Vote Act. It started out as the For The People Act. It has evolved over a period of two or three Congresses. We have passed it four or five different times out of this Chamber, again, running into the blockade on the Senate side. This is a bill where every provision of it is designed to respond to that cynicism that Americans are feeling. The first 300 pages of the Freedom to Vote Act were penned, were authored by our late colleague, John Lewis, the freedom fighter who inspired so many of us before he came to Congress and during his time in Congress.

He understood that we had to make it possible for people to access the ballot box without having to run an obstacle course every 2 years, to put in place these fundamental reforms that every American and every community can benefit from: automatic voter registration, same-day registration, early voting, mail balloting.

All the things that make it possible when somebody gets up on the morning of that day when they have decided to cast their vote and know that that is not going to be a difficult transaction. They can do that. They can access their democracy in a straightforward

way. That is one centerpiece of the Freedom to Vote Act.

Another grievance we heard from Americans for many, many years is, why should politicians be able to choose their voters instead of the other way around? We have seen what extreme partisan gerrymandering has done across the country. It means that in the House of Representatives, we don't actually have a fair representation of what the vote is out in the country.

This makes average people out there feel disrespected. Voters feel like their voice is not being given the weight and the due that it deserves, so included within the Freedom to Vote Act are provisions that would establish an objective, independent way of determining how districts should be drawn so that we are respectful of the voters. It is another key piece of this reform package.

The last critical dimension of this is what to do about the undue influence, the sinister, insidious influence that money has over the political system.

□ 1815

Your voice consists of two basic components in a democracy. One is that you can cast your vote freely and fairly, but the other dimension of it is if you send people to Washington, if you elect them, if you pull the lever for them, your expectation is when they get there, they will fight for your priorities and won't get hijacked or captured by special interests and big money. The reality is very different, unfortunately, and it leaves people feeling disempowered.

Two key reforms that are included within this legislation are the DISCLOSE Act, which would require that we have transparency in terms of this dark money that is flooded into our system, and another piece, which I know Representative RAMIREZ feels very passionately about, is a small donor matching system that can support candidates' efforts to get out there and run their campaigns free from dependence on big money and deep pockets.

This legislation would create a system where for every dollar you raise from small donations, grassroots donations, you get a 6-to-1 match from something we call the Freedom From Influence Fund.

By the way, that fund would not be taxpayer underwritten. We would put a small surcharge on government settlements with big corporate lawbreakers and high-end tax cheats. That would go into a special fund, and that would underwrite the matching funds to come in to support these candidates.

What I like about that is the people who are leaning on our democracy and trying to break it are going to have to pay to create a system that can lift up our democracy.

All of these things are designed to respond to those grievances that Americans feel. These key pieces of legislation—the John R. Lewis Voting Rights

Advancement Act, the Freedom to Vote Act, the Native American Voting Rights Act, the D.C. statehood bill—are very simple in what they are trying to achieve: Give a voice to all Americans.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Progressive Caucus for pulling us together this evening.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman SARBANES for his remarks. He couldn't have said it more perfectly as we are wrapping up here.

I often ask myself what it would look like if money didn't determine elections, if qualifications did, if competency would. What would it look like if we got big money out of politics, which is exactly what we should all be prioritizing?

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOWMAN). I don't think anyone can speak better about that issue than him.

Mr. BOWMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank Representative RAMIREZ for her leadership and for allowing me to participate in this really important discussion. I thank her for bringing this issue to the forefront of the American people.

There are many who believe we no longer have a democracy. There are many who believe our country is controlled by an oligarchy. Many believe our country is controlled by a few wealthy Americans who act as puppet masters over Members of Congress and who act as puppet masters over elected officials across the country.

We are not engaging in the arena of new ideas. We are not engaging in the arena of shared values. We take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution against enemies, foreign and domestic, but if we allow people with wealth to undermine our Constitution, we are not doing our job.

Yes, I can speak personally to this issue because, in my primary race, I had special interest groups spend more money against me in my primary than has been spent against any Member of Congress in United States history.

My district was bombarded with advertisements, with mailers, with misinformation and disinformation, and with ideas and policies that reflected the values behind the big money that was being poured in.

What made it worse is a lot of this big money came from unknown sources. Because of Supreme Court decisions like *Citizens United*, we don't have to publicly know where these dollars are coming from as we engage with super-PACs.

We absolutely need democracy reform, and it starts with getting big money out of politics. One important way to do that is to overturn *Citizens United*. We must overturn *Citizens United*. If you want to support a candidate, your name must be public, period. Not only that, but if you believe those who say, and I do, that our democracy is no longer a democracy because it is controlled by an oligarchy, the wealthy elite, we have to look at

the outcomes that our democracy is currently producing.

Why don't we have universal healthcare? Why don't we have fully funded public schools? Why don't we have paid leave for all? Why don't we have a Green New Deal? Why do one in five children go to bed hungry in our country? Why do we have consistent economic and wealth inequality?

I would argue it is because those in the oligarchy class want things to remain that way. As a result, Members of this body continue to vote in favor of special interests.

We couldn't even raise the Federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15 an hour. If you grow up or live in a red-lined community, redlined by American politicians in this body, your schools are less funded than wealthier communities.

A strong, vibrant, healthy democracy must include every single person in our country voting in every election, but they are being disenfranchised by the big money, and they have lost hope because of the big money.

Again, I thank Representative RAMIREZ for her leadership and for allowing me to say a few words. In order for our democracy to be as strong as ever, both on the domestic front but also supporting democracies around the world, we have to get big money out of politics.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman BOWMAN for his remarks, and I am committed to working with him here and out of here to ensure that happens.

When we talk about the issues that matter most, as Congressman BOWMAN mentioned, everything from housing to healthcare to education, we understand that when democracy is weakened, our ability to move reforms because of these issues is also impacted.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Vermont (Ms. BALINT), someone I have had the opportunity to serve with for the last 21 months, a fierce advocate for our communities, not just in Vermont but all over, making sure that justice, equity, and strengthening democracy is at the forefront.

Ms. BALINT. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to serve with Representative RAMIREZ and to speak here tonight about an issue that is incredibly important to me, and that is the health and strength of democracy.

When I ran for Congress, the issue I heard the most about was just that, the health and the strength of the democracy.

Yes, of course, Vermonters care about particular issues for our district—housing, the workforce crisis, the mental health crisis, all of these things—but they said more than anything, they are worried about the health of the democracy.

I came to the job having come up through the Vermont State Senate, and before that, I was a teacher and tried to instill in my students the im-

portance of being involved in the democracy to keep replenishing it with the energy and attention it requires.

What I have noticed over the last few years is that there is, indeed, a cynicism creeping in, as my colleague mentioned earlier, and cynicism has a corrosive effect, not just on the democracy but on our own health and stability and the health of our communities.

It is, in fact, the voice of the status quo. It is about convincing people that you can't actually make change, so why even try, that it is futile.

The stakes are so incredibly high. I will tell you that my family knows firsthand that democracies don't fail overnight. My grandfather was killed in the Holocaust, and I grew up with the understanding that people can be horribly cruel to one another and can perpetuate horrors upon individuals and families when the law does not protect the most vulnerable and when people turn away from each other and demonize each other. I can tell you in earnest that we have seen this in this country in the last few years grow to a fever pitch of dehumanizing and demonizing our fellow Americans.

I see it in my committees, whether it is attacking immigrants or migrants, attacking the LGBTQ community, or attacking the poor.

It is not about coming together as Americans and finding common cause with other Americans. It is often about making people the scapegoats.

Democracies fail little by little as our rights are stripped away from us, as democratic norms are upended, and as people are scapegoated.

My parents never took for granted the rights and privileges provided to us by the U.S. Constitution and that we must be vigilant and take our responsibility of supporting and protecting the Constitution seriously.

I was very concerned, coming up on almost 2 years ago when I started in Congress, because I knew that 139 Members of this body did not vote to certify a free and fair election. Of those 139, 124 ran for reelection, and 118 are still serving in Congress. They serve with us in committees, and we have to see them on the floor, people who did not support a free and fair election and the peaceful transfer of power. This sickens me.

In moments when I am home in Vermont, it is very difficult to convey to my constituents what it feels like sometimes to be here as a public servant supporting the democracy, supporting the ideals that supposedly we all hold so dear, and to serve alongside people who still will not admit that Joe Biden is the rightful winner of the 2020 election. It should outrage all of us.

How can we make the case to our children and to my former students that democracy is something to protect, that it is sacred, that we all have a stake in making sure it is healthy when there are Members of Congress

who still will not admit that Joe Biden is the rightful winner of the 2020 election?

□ 1830

We must commit, all of us, to rising above this dangerous nonsense because we all know the truth. We do. We know the truth. As we head into another election season, I know what I fear. I fear that once again we will be faced with a critical moment of courage, and that some will fail that test.

When I heard that the topic tonight was about strengthening the democracy, I said: Absolutely, I will be there. None of these things—strengthening our voting rights, improving our representation, making sure that we have campaign finance reform, supporting our communities, and on and on—can happen if we do not have a commitment from the people in this Chamber to admit the rightful winner of an election and to stand in this Chamber and certify those election results.

I look forward to seeing some courage, regardless of the outcome. I hope that I am not, once again, deeply, deeply disappointed and disgusted by the lack of courage and fortitude of those who say that they support the Constitution, the rule of law, and this great democracy.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congresswoman BALINT. Her words could not have been more powerful.

We are at a crossroads right now, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus is committed to strengthening voting rights because our caucus wants to make sure that we protect the right to vote by passing broad and comprehensive voting rights bills that eliminate barriers to voting for U.S. citizens.

We want same-day, automatic, and online voter registration. We are committed to improving representation because we are the party that wants to abolish the electoral college, grant statehood to the District of Columbia, and establish a democratic process for the people of Puerto Rico to determine the island's future political status.

We are committed to bold campaign finance reform. We are the party that wants to end corruption and get big money and corporations out of politics by finally eliminating dark money in elections.

We are committed to fully funding Federal agencies that invest in Americans' health, education, and well-being. We are the party that wants to ensure that Congress funds vital Federal agencies and prevents the privatization of government services.

We are committed to eliminating or reforming the filibuster, and we are the party that wants to allow for the democratic consideration and passage of essential legislation.

We are committed to ethics reform. We are the caucus that wants to ban stock trading and ownership for Members of Congress and the Federal judiciary and impose an enforceable code of conduct on the Supreme Court, includ-

ing instituting accountability measures and restrictions on gifts and requiring judicial disclosures and recusal.

We are committed to reforming the Court. We are the party that wants to expand the number of Justices on the bench, implement term limits, and create new judgeships across the Federal system.

Folks, as you heard from my colleagues here, we are committed because it is important to remember that this week extreme Republicans are attempting to hold the government hostage so they can advance a bill that creates barriers to voting for U.S. citizens.

Bottom line: It is already illegal under current law for noncitizens to register to vote or to vote in Federal elections. Despite numerous recounts, challenges in court, and the deep dives by Conservative think tanks, there has been zero evidence of widespread voter fraud.

Folks, it is a scare tactic, and extreme Republicans are trying to scare Americans—the fear-mongering—into giving up their right to exercise their vote in an accessible and unburdensome election process.

The SAVE Act is voter suppression, plain and simple. Requiring citizens to show documentary proof of citizenship to register to vote places an extreme burden on countless Americans, including military voters, Native voters, people who have changed their names, including tens of millions of American women, the elderly, the young, the poor, and naturalized citizens.

The SAVE Act's burdens on rightful voters are extreme because most Americans would be unable to register to vote using their driver's license or other State-provided identification alone. Even Real IDs do not meet the SAVE Act's requirements.

Millions of Americans, including tens of thousands in each congressional district, would be prevented from registering to vote easily, if at all. Americans would not be able to use military IDs or Tribal IDs alone when registering to vote. U.S. citizens who are putting their life on the line would have to go get a passport and other documents to prove their citizenship.

People who have changed their names, including millions of married women, would not be allowed to use their birth certificates when proving their citizenship.

Registration applications would need to be presented in person, essentially ending mail-in voting and creating barriers for same-day voter registration.

The SAVE Act makes it clear exactly who extreme Republicans believe should have an easy time accessing the right to vote and, more importantly, who they believe should have a difficult time.

It is in this moment, in this context that my colleagues and I come to this Chamber to convene this Special Order hour, to make it crystal clear exactly

who is committed to doing the work of repairing and strengthening democracy.

Repairing, strengthening, and protecting our democracy is one of my greatest priorities in Congress. I have the honor of co-chairing the House Task Force on Strengthening Democracy, where I meet with my colleagues to discuss legislative solutions to act on Americans' desire to fortify the basic building blocks of healthy democracy.

During the August recess, I launched my democracy working groups in Chicago and DuPage County. I convened constituents, grassroots leaders, and organizations to share what they have seen, what they have learned, and what they have felt as they do the work on the ground of building a democracy that works for everyone.

I hosted a teletownhall focused on making government work for Illinois-3 and a Wheaton townhall focused on the topic of defending democracy. Listening to the voices of our communities and ensuring those voices are heard and valued is part of our democracy, and it is what is most important.

What we learned and affirmed is that democracy is a work in progress. It is not perfect, by any means. We have heard that we cannot simply strengthen democracy, simply preserve democracy. We must repair it and expand it where it is not living up to its potential.

We need democracy that truly works for the people, where government is responsive to the needs of its citizens, where we keep big money out of politics, where there is ethics reform both in our Supreme Court and Presidency, where we protect our election workers and our right to vote, where we defend public institutions from privatization and elimination.

That is why I am so proud to cosponsor numerous substantial pieces of legislation across the broad aspects of democracy and good governance, including bills like the Freedom to Vote Act by Congressman SARBANES and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act by Congresswoman SEWELL, which must be among the first bills we take on in the 119th Congress.

As I wrap up our Special Order hour in a few minutes, I do want to talk about some of the movers and shakers that are helping do this work to repair, strengthen, and protect our democracy.

To do so, I want to start by recognizing an organization that serves the State of Illinois led by one of my constituents, Mary Ellen Daneels. She is improving access to information, amplifying the voices of young people, and breaking down barriers to their participation.

Illinois Democracy Schools Network is a vital initiative committed to educating the next generation about the civic process. The growing network of middle and high schools is dedicated to expanding civic learning opportunities across Illinois, particularly in schools

serving students of color to ensure all students are prepared to meaningfully participate in public life.

By creating high-quality learning experiences, the Democracy Schools Network helps foster informed, active, and equitable civic engagement among young people. On behalf of Illinois' Third Congressional District, I do want to thank the Illinois Democracy Schools Network for nurturing the foundations of our democracy.

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of our democracy. It is why I cosponsored and am cosponsoring several pieces of legislation that protect and expand ballot access, as we just talked about.

I do want to go into H.R. 11 a little deeper. Expanding voter registration and voting access prohibits voting roll removal, establishes election day as a Federal holiday, and enacts other voting rights and election reforms.

H.R. 14, the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, strengthens voting rights by expanding and strengthening government's ability to respond to voting discrimination.

Defending the right to vote is defending our communities. Let me say that again. Defending the right to vote is defending our communities. Therefore, I will continue resisting and challenging any attempt from extremists in our government to undermine our democracy and erode our rights.

We all have a role to play. I encourage us all to get engaged: register people to vote, serve as election judges, combat misinformation. We have to fight for the democracy that we deserve.

There is an organization that has been doing this work around the clock, defending democracy, and that is Midwest Voting Rights Program of the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights.

This vital initiative focuses on ensuring fair access to the vote and upholding election laws. Through their Election Protection program and litigation, they provide critical resources on election day. They partner with incarcerated and returning community members to expand voting rights. They ensure racial equity in redistricting. They defend civil rights and advocate for equitable election laws in Illinois and Indiana.

A notable leader in this work is Clifford Helm, senior counsel for the program and a proud constituent of Illinois' Third Congressional District. I thank Clifford and Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights for their dedication to eliminating barriers to voting and enhancing civic participation, especially in marginalized communities.

We also need organizations that create and provide citizens tools to hold our officials accountable, and that is why I am proud to recognize Indivisible, a grassroots movement dedicated to strengthening our democracy through education and civic engagement.

Through Indivisible Civics, they provide invaluable resources, training, and tools to empower local groups and activists, including to engage with their local elected officials and hold them accountable.

Since the beginning of 2019, Indivisible members have made 73,625 calls to Congress and have organized over 2,000 grassroots events in all 50 States. Their focus on building civic knowledge and skills helps individuals become effective advocates and informed citizens.

In Illinois' Third Congressional District, active Indivisible chapters in Illinois and civic leaders like Dianne McGuire, Deborah McCoy, Kathy Tholin, Geri Kahn, Patricia Graham, and Denise Poloyac are working tirelessly to engage their neighbors in the civic process. I thank Indivisible for their commitment to fostering a well-informed electorate and a stronger democracy.

While extreme Republicans demonstrate which Americans they believe should have access to vote and who they believe shouldn't, I am honored to recognize the nonprofit Chicago Votes for their efforts in fostering civic engagement among the next generation of leaders in our city.

Their Unlock Civics program works to increase democratic participation from justice-impacted adults, from registering over 5,000 voters in Cook County jail to advocating for legislation to make the jail the first in the Nation to serve as a primary election voting location.

Chicago Votes also works to engage young people in local civic processes, from their regular parade to the polls to creating nonpartisan voting guides to support educators around civic curriculum.

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Their fellowships and leadership development opportunities for youth and justice-impacted individuals, including their Democracy Corps, build stronger leaders for a stronger, more informed democracy. I thank Chicago Votes.

I also want to acknowledge the work of organizations like the Latino Policy Forum. The Latino Policy Forum is doing the work to protect our multicultural, our multiracial democracy from attempts to scapegoat, silence, criminalize, and persecute our Latino and our immigrant communities.

Through their efforts in coalition, the forum has engaged Comunidades Latinas in the civic process of our democracy.

Whether by expanding participation in the Census or access to multilingual and culturally competent educational voter material, the organization is fighting to ensure equitable representation and fair investment in our communities.

The work has been possible thanks to the efforts of its staff and its president and CEO of the Latino Policy Forum, Sylvia Puente, who after 16 years of service, announced her well-earned retirement.

Her unwavering leadership has been instrumental in driving positive, meaningful change for our communities.

In the face of the cruel policies that are looking to hurt our communities, I thank Sylvia for inspiring us with her leadership. "Gracias por luchar por nuestra comunidad contra viento y marea." "Thank you for your fight for our community against all odds."

As I wrap up here, I want to thank all my colleagues who join tonight's Progressive Caucus Special Order hour. I want to end with this: I am the product of community organizing. I am the product of a movement that continues to fight for what is right even when the attacks just keep coming and coming and even in the face of fear, even in the face of loss and hardship.

We are and have been a nation at a crossroads. We say we are facing an existential crisis, but the truth is that we have been facing this crisis for a very long time. This country has consistently faced a crossroad to choose fear or to choose hope, to choose love or to choose hate, to choose bigotry or to choose equity, to choose oppression or to choose justice.

We face those all-too-familiar crossroads again. Will we choose democracy or will we submit to dictatorship?

Democracy is a grand experiment of collective experience, and it cannot be taken for granted. It is precious and fragile, and it requires that we strive to be the best of ourselves.

I am encouraged that each time this country faced a crossroads, organizers were there bending the arc of history towards justice; fighting like hell.

We fight like hell for our communities. Our communities have always been the target of injustice. We also know that we fight like hell for our children and the future. We fight like hell against Trump and MAGA Republicans and Project 2025, as they are a fundamental threat to our children.

The people want big money out of politics. The people want us to reform the Supreme Court. The people want us to protect the integrity of our elections. Our democracy will be repaired, strengthened, and preserved when we fight for democracy.

I believe that the people united will never be defeated because we have something to fight for. I fight for my husband, a Dreamer. I fight for my nieces and nephews. I fight for every Latino who aspires to public office. I fight for the movement. The fight ahead is worth it.

There is no greater honor to fight alongside you, to protect, preserve, and expand democracy.

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

#### FOREIGN POLICY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the gentleman from Utah (Mr. MOORE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.