in my Congressional District of northern Illinois, Thomas Middle School, installed a one-kilowatt solar array on its roof in November 2007 with a $10,000 grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation. The photovoltaic panel produced enough energy to date to offset more than 730 pounds of carbon dioxide. The output so far is equivalent to the energy needed to power 6 homes for one day, or operate one TV for 2,565 hours.

Thomas Middle School teachers also use the solar array data to help teach students about the importance of renewable energy. Classes use the information from the solar panels in experiments about energy conservation and environmental protection.

I applaud Thomas Middle School Principal Tom O'Rourke and science department chair Jay Bingaman for taking such an initiative to improve the school, environment and education of their students.

We are introducing the Green Schools Act to encourage schools all around the country to follow the example of Thomas Middle School. This legislation provides up to $10,000 in matching grants for schools to undertake green construction and improvement projects. The bill would also reauthorize the Qualified Zone Academy bonds program, which is used to fund renovations and repairs at schools in low-income neighborhoods. The bill would require that any improvements or rehabilitations be energy efficient. Since its establishment in 1997, the QZAB program has provided nearly $1.7 billion for school improvements projects.

I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this bill to improve the health and education of our children and provide financial security to schools.

CAGING PROHIBITION ACT OF 2009

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 6, 2009

Mr. CONYERS. Madam Speaker, today I rise to introduce the Caging Prohibition Act of 2009, a much needed reform to our election system. As the 111th Congress focuses on election fixes and greater voter protections, this legislation is a critical contribution to such efforts. Prohibitions on voter caging will ensure that our democracy lives up to the belief that every eligible citizen is entitled to the right to vote.

Voter caging, though just recently given media attention, is a disenfranchisement tactic that has been around for over 50 years. This undemocratic tactic often involves sending mail to voters at the addresses at which they are registered to vote. Should such mail be returned as undeliverable or without a return receipt, voters' names are placed on a ''caging list,'' that list then being used to challenge voters'' eligibility.

Those suggesting that voter caging is necessary to weed out ineligible voters must recognize this practice is unreliable and dangerous for such purposes. Mail may be returned as undeliverable for any number of reasons unrelated to an individual's eligibility to vote. For example, mail is returned due to typos, transposed numbers, new street names, and improper deliveries.

Voters in my home State of Michigan have been subjected to voter caging controversies in the last two Presidential elections. In the 2008 election, a voter caging strategy meant to politically capitalize on the subprime mortgage crisis was identified. Those voters whose homes had been subjected to foreclosure were targets for caging on the basis that they no longer resided at the addresses at which they registered to vote.

During the 2004 election, challengers monitored every single one of Detroit's 254 polling stations. This strategy was consistent with a Michigan lawmaker's effort to ''suppress the Detroit vote.'' It was widely accepted that this statement was synonymous with ''suppress the Black vote,'' as Detroit is 83 percent African American.

Our most vulnerable voters racial minorities, language minorities, low-income people, the homeless, and college students—always seem to be targeted for caging and other voter suppression campaigns. However, all voters are susceptible to voter intimidation and suppression. For example, during the 2004 election, Ohio and Florida caging lists included the names of soldiers whose mail had been returned as undeliverable because they were stationed overseas.

It is because no one is immune to caging and other disenfranchisement tactics, that I have introducing the Caging Prohibition Act. This bill is really quite simple, as it one, requires election officials to corroborate their caging documents with independent evidence before a voter can be deemed ineligible. And two, limits all other challenges that do not come from election officials to those based on personal, first-hand knowledge.

By eliminating caging tactics, we restore what has been missing from our elections—fairness, honesty, and integrity. I ask that my colleagues in the Congress join me in supporting the Caging Prohibition Act of 2009. Please stand with me in protecting the very core of our democracy.

INTRODUCTION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HOUSE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2009

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 6, 2009

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, today I am introducing, I believe for the last time, the District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act, simultaneously with our Senate partners, Senators JOE LIEBERMAN and ORRIN HATCH. The bill we introduce today also will add two permanent House seats, the first increase in 96 years. It therefore carries a triple bonus: the first vote for the District of Columbia after 212 years, an additional seat for Utah, and two new permanent seats for the House of Representatives itself. The citizens of the District of Columbia are deeply grateful for the persistent partnership and bipartisan dedication that Senator LIEBERMAN and Senator HATCH continue to bring to this bill, and for the continued support of Utah Governor Jon Huntsman.

Because of the importance to the city of achieving the vote after more than two centuries, the D.C. House Voting Rights Act is my first bill of the 111th Congress. This year we introduce the bill as members of the armed services from the District of Columbia are again engaged in war abroad. In gratitude for the service of our residents serving today, and of those who have served since our country was founded, I dedicate the bill this year to the first soldier from the District to die for his country in the Iraq War, 21-year-old D.C. National Guard Specialist Daryl Dent, and to the District's first unknown soldier to die after picking up arms to fight for liberation on the promise of no taxation without representation. Although two centuries apart, the first to die in these wars had in common fighting for the vote. Our first residents here fought in the War for Independence. Specialist Dent gave his life ensuring the vote for Iraqi citizens, a right he did not live to get for himself.

Today's bill is the first in the Free and Equal series of bills that I will introduce this session to complete the full roster of citizenship rights for residents of the Nation's capital that the first soldiers were promised and for which today's soldiers continue to give their lives and their service for our country. There can be no doubt that the revolutionaries who invented America's most quoted national slogan did not create a new Nation in order to get the vote, only to turn around and deny the vote to the citizens of their capital.

This bill was passed by the House in the 110th Congress, thanks to Speaker NANCY PELOSI, who has long fought for the rights of D.C. residents and personally insisted that this legislation go forward as a bill of historic importance; Majority Leader STENY HOYER, my long-time regional friend, who has been an especially outspoken champion of this bill; Judiciary Chairman JOHN CONYERS, who gave the bill his priority attention, emblematic of the strong support he has always brought to our rights throughout his long service in Congress; and Chairman HENRY WAXMAN, who as ranking member and then as chair of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, also was a central figure in ensuring passage; and many others among my colleagues in both Chambers and both parties, who have made special efforts for passage of the D.C. House Voting Rights Act. My special thanks to Tom Davis, my good friend and a strong partner on this bill, who retired at the end of last session. It was Tom's idea to pair the District with Utah after Utah narrowly missed getting a seat following the last census. I will always be grateful to Tom for the unfailing bipartisan spirit that characterized all his work as chair of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, especially his consistent respect for home rule and for affording me every opportunity to fashion this bill when he was a member of the Republican majority and I was a minority member. I must also thank the two important coalitions of organizations that have led this fight. the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, whose leader, Wade Henderson, also has been a close advisor throughout the many years of this struggle, and D.C. Vote and its leader, Ilir Zherka, who gave our bill a big quantum leap in strength it never had before through a superior indispensable grassroots organization that was born to lead the successful lobbying strategy here and nationwide and that singlehandedly raised the funds necessary to make D.C.'s struggle a national campaign.

There is every reason to believe that the D.C. bill will finally prevail this year. The bill easily passed in the House in 2007, and now

has an estimated 64 votes in the Senate, considerably more than the 60 needed. The addition of seven Democratic senators, who replaced seven Republican opponents of the bill, together with the eight remaining Republicans who supported the bill, should assure that our bill will have significantly more than the 57 Senate votes it received in 2007. We are equally encouraged that President-elect Barack Obama, who was a co-sponsor of the bill in the Senate, will sign the D.C. House Voting Rights Act when it reaches his desk.

My service in Congress has been defined by the search for ways to get full representation for the city where my family has lived since before the Civil War. That search has been guided by the pursuit of the maximum that was possible, including the two-day debate followed by the first and only vote on statehood more than 10 years ago, the vote I won in the Committee of the Whole during my second term, and the ''No Taxation Without Representation'' Act for votes in both the House and Senate. Our struggle has always been driven by what was required but we also have insisted on all that was possible, as with the District's first floor vote, the Committee of the Whole vote on some but not all matters on the House floor and the Home Rule Act, the path-breaking bill enacted before I came to Congress that gave the city partial self-government.

The Congress. which has always been divided by regional and parochial concerns, virtually never does all that is required at one time, even granting a vote to American citizens who are second per capita in Federal income taxes paid to support their Government and served in every war, including the war that created our country. However, the people of the District of Columbia have never ceased demanding the full measure of their rights, while insisting on all that is possible for each generation. The people of the Nation's proud capital will never give up until achieving their full rights as American citizens. Today's bill is another big step to achieve full and equal citizenship.

INTRODUCTION OF DECEPTIVE PRACTICES AND VOTER INTIMIDATION PREVENTION ACT OF 2009

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 6, 2009

Mr. CONYERS. Madam Speaker, today I rise to introduce the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act of 2009. During our elections, including the 2008 election, we have witnessed numerous attempts, some of them successful, to disenfranchise our eligible voters. Deceptive practices and voter intimidation, age-old voter disenfranchisement tactics, continue to keep voters away from the polls today.

The Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act is a critical effort in ensuring fairness and integrity in our elections. It is a direct response to the fraudulent tactics used to undermine our elections. Every eligible voter should be able to vote free of intimidation, harassment, and harm.

Numerous accounts indicate that deceptive practices have been employed throughout the country in our elections. Voters have been told to vote on the wrong day. They have been told they could not vote with outstanding parking tickets. Ultimately, they were misled, deceived, and disenfranchised.

During the 2008 election, a phony flyer circulated in Virginia telling Democratic voters that they were to vote on Wednesday instead of Tuesday. During the 2006 midterm, Latino voters in Orange County, California, were threatened with incarceration if they voted and African American voters in Prince George's County, Maryland were given fliers with false endorsements. As evidenced in California and Maryland, our most vulnerable voters—immigrants and minorities—are often those voters that are targeted for deceptive practices.

No matter who is targeted for these tactics, however, such actions are despicable and those responsible for them must be held accountable. This country's long history of voter suppression must end now. We must protect the right to vote for all of our citizens and that is what this legislation will enable us to do.

Under this legislation, those that engage in deceptive practices and voter intimidation will be held accountable. Deceptive electioneering practices are clearly defined and prohibited so there is no confusion as to the rights and protections afforded voters.

Additionally, the Federal Government will be held responsible for protecting and advancing the right to vote. The Attorney General and the Department of Justice are required to combat and counteract deceptive practices. These measures will ensure that voters are not left to fend for themselves when their right to vote is threatened.

If we allow deceptive practices and other such behavior to continue, we jeopardize the very core of our democracy, the right to vote. I ask that my colleagues in the Congress stand with me in support of this legislation, so that we may begin eliminating barriers to the polls.

INTRODUCTION OF THE VOTING OPPORTUNITY AND TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENT RIGHTS (VOTER) ACT OF 2009

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 6, 2009

Mr. CONYERS. Madam Speaker, today I rise to introduce the Voting Opportunity and Technology Enhancement Rights or VOTER Act of 2009. I introduce this legislation, more than 200 years after the founding of our democracy, because we have yet to realize a government that is truly representative of the principle, ''of the people, by the people.'' Not until every eligible voter has the opportunity to cast a ballot and have that ballot counted, will we have a proper democracy.

Though the 2008 Election did not present the widespread irregularities and improprieties that were witnessed during the 2000 and 2004 Elections, it was still an election in which voter disenfranchisement was attempted and accomplished. Voters' names are still missing from voter rolls. Voter harassment and intimidation continues.

In fact, over the years, the methods that are used to disenfranchise voters have just become more contemporary and sophisticated as evidenced during the 2008 Election. For example, in my home State of Michigan, in the midst of the current subprime mortgage crisis, a strategy to challenge a voter's eligibility based on home foreclosure status was devised. In Virginia, a flyer telling Democrats to vote on Wednesday November 5, 2008, circulated.

Anything short of a perfect election system is unacceptable. I have introduced VOTER so that we may work towards a more perfect system, one that reflects legitimacy, integrity, and inclusivity. VOTER will protect and expand voting rights in Federal elections, as well as ensure the proper administration of Federal elections.

VOTER will:

(1) provide for a uniform Federal write-in absentee ballot;

(2) require States to provide for a verified audit trail;

(3) count provisional ballots cast in the proper State;

(4) properly allocate voting machines and poll workers;

(5) provide for election day voter registration;

(6) protect against improper purging of registration lists;

(7) mandate early voting;

(8) require verification and audit ability for punch cards;

(9) simplify voter registration requirements;

(10) allow voter identification by written affidavit;

(11) provide for a study of nonpartisan election boards;

(12) strengthen the EAC with funding and resources;

(13) require the EAC to (a) enhance training for election officials; (b) require the use of publicly available open source software; (c) provide uniform standards for vote recounts; and (d) prohibit voting machine companies from engaging in political activities;

(14) prohibit deceptive practices and intimidation;

(15) prohibit caging and other questionable challenges;

(16) restore voting rights to former felons; and

(17) treat Election Day as a federal holiday.

Some of these initiatives have already been implemented by States, the success of which was observed during the 2008 Election. There are 32 States that currently provide early voting, including Florida, a State that witnessed over one million voters turn out to the polls the weekend before the election. There are also 28 States that currently provide no-excuse absentee voting.

Such practices were critical to managing an unprecedented voter turnout. More than 130 million people turned out to vote in the 2008 Election, the highest turnout in any presidential election. With this many longtime and new voters engaged in the 2008 election process, I suspect that voter participation will only increase in 2012.

As such, we must pledge to fight for election reform in this Congress. The right to vote and to have that vote counted is one of our democracy's most fundamental principles. It is with VOTER that I intend to protect this fundamental principle, and I ask that my colleagues in this Congress join me in this fight for fair and just elections.