Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, the hardship of all those involved in the recent tragic developments at Penn State University is heavy on our hearts as this community moves forward and these individuals and their families continue to cope with their heartache and pain.

Despite these tragic events, I rise today for a different reason, something my community, the Penn State community, can be most proud of. The Chronicle of Higher Education recently reported that Pennsylvania leads the Nation in outgoing faculty Fulbright grants for the 2011-2012 academic year. Penn State has received a total of 16 grants, 14 of which were awarded at the University Park Campus in State College.

The Fulbright Program, a program of competitive, merit-based grants for students, teachers and other professionals, is the U.S. government’s premier international educational exchange program. Individuals will go on to expand our Nation’s educational endeavors by strengthening partnerships with other leading institutions around the world.

These success stories also serve as an encouraging example that every individual can achieve their potential through hard work and dedication. These talented individuals have much to be proud of. Congratulations to each recipient on this esteemed award.

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I’m delighted to join my colleague, Congressman CLAY. And before I do that, let me rise as well to express my support for the Gabe Zimmerman legislation that we will address today and pay tribute to his bravery and certainly his loss.

We come to the floor today as partners with many in this Congress against voter intimidation and to speak on behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus, to collaborate with our many friends across the caucuses and the Interamericans and intimidation Caucus, and certainly we hope to include our friends on the other side of the aisle.

Since the 2010 election, over 40 States have implemented voter ID, voter suppression laws. Madam Speaker, we are not against knowing who is voting, but are against turning the clock of what the Voting Rights Act attempted to do some 40-plus years ago when before that time a poll tax was utilized, or asking those from the African American community how many jet beans were in a jar.

Just recently, I sent a letter to the U.S. Attorney’s Office regarding voter intimidation and voter oppression. We rise today to say that we will stand against such oppression and ask the Justice Department to not clear voter ID laws.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the need to protect democracy, to protect the voice of the American people, and to ensure the right to vote continues to be treated as a right under the Constitution rather than being treated as privilege.

I am joined by my colleagues here today to call on all Americans of good faith to reject race as a barrier to voting. We recognize the history of what the Voting Rights Act attempted to do ago and far away. Just last year I sent a letter to the U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to draw his attention to several disturbing instances of voter intimidation that had taken place in Houston. In a single week there were at least 15 reports of abuse of voter rights throughout the city of Houston.

As a Senior Member of the House Judiciary Committee, I called for an immediate investigation of these instances. Many of these incidents of voter intimidation were occurring in predominately minority neighborhoods and have been directed at African-Americans and Latinas. It is unconscionable to think that anyone would deliberately employ the use of such forceful and intimidating tactics to undermine the fundamental, Constitutional right to vote.
However, such conduct has regrettably occurred in Houston, and I urge you to take appropriate action to ensure that it does not recur.

I am here today in the name of freedom, patriotism, and democracy. I am here to demand that the long hard-fought right to vote continue to be protected.

A long, bitter, and bloody struggle was fought for the Voting Rights Act of 1965 so that all Americans could enjoy the right to vote, without discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, or national origin. Americans died in that fight so that others could achieve what they had been forcefully deprived of for centuries—the ability to walk freely and without fear into the polling place and cast a voting ballot.

Efforts to keep minorities from fully exercising that franchise, however, continue. Indeed, in the past thirty years, we have witnessed a pattern of efforts to intimidate and harass minority voters including efforts that were deemed “Ballot Security” programs that include pre-clearing of the voting notices to African-American voters, the carrying of video cameras to monitor polls, the systematic challenging of minority voters at the polls on unlawful grounds, and the hiring of guards and off-duty police officers to intimidate and frighten voters at the polls.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle have a particularly poor track record when it comes to documented acts of voter intimidation. In 1982, a Federal Court in New Jersey provided a consent order that forbids the Republican National Committee from undertaking any ballot security activities in a polling place or election district where race or ethnic composition is a factor in the decision to conduct such activities and where a purpose or significant effect is to prevent or discourage the voting of African-Americans.

My colleagues have also referred to non-English language voter education as voter fraud.

The right to vote, enshrined in our Constitution, is one of the most effective civil rights tools designed to make the right to vote a reality for all Americans.

The right to vote is a critical and sacred constitutionally protected civil right. To challenge this is to erode our democracy, challenge justice, and mock our moral standing. I urge my colleagues to dismiss this crippling legislation, and pursue effective solutions to the real problems of election fraud and error. We cannot let the rhetoric of an election year destroy a fundamental right upon which we have established liberty and freedom.

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