

thought about them strategically. They're not happening because we've identified wasteful spending. They're not happening because we've discovered some new technology that makes it cheaper to keep our Nation safe. They're only happening because they are, as he put it, "the collateral damage of political gridlock."

We've already seen the effects of these looming cuts in Washington State. The Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, the largest employer in my district, had to postpone its career fair because of all of this budget uncertainty. This is a no brainer—we have the work and we have the workers, but they can't hire because Congress hasn't done its job. Puget Sound Naval Shipyard needs to be able to actively recruit and hire workers. Our local economy needs it, and our national security depends on it. And yet, here we are.

Later today, we will be focusing on legislation that doesn't solve this problem, isn't going to pass the Senate, and isn't going to become law. And after we finish legislative business tomorrow, we're all being sent home for a week. This leaves us with just 4 legislative days for us to act before these across-the-board cuts go into effect.

We were elected to this body to help people. Stopping these damaging, non-strategic, across-the-board cuts to avoid undermining our economy should be our top priority. We should be working day and night until we have a solution. By doing nothing, we risk putting our fragile economy back into a recession. By doing nothing, we refuse the commitments we've made. We're cutting education, kicking kids off Head Start, hurting small businesses, and gutting research and innovation—the foundations of our long-term economic growth.

By doing nothing, we hurt the men and women who spend their days protecting our Nation and providing essential services to the American people. And by doing nothing, Congress is spending the wrong message to the American people.

Mr. Speaker, we need to get America back to work. And, Mr. Speaker, we need to get Congress working again, too. Doing nothing is not an option. Let's put an end to these gimmicks, and let's stop kicking the can down the road. Let's stop these series of self-imposed crises that fissure the trust and predictability that the private sector needs.

Let's work together to reach a balanced compromise to replace the across-the-board cuts with a smart, balanced approach to addressing our fiscal challenges and getting our economy growing again. Let's maintain our commitment to our Nation's most vulnerable and preserve retirement security for our seniors. And let's get America back to work.

PROTECT FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO VOTE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) for 5 minutes.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, this month the Supreme Court will hear arguments in *Shelby v. Holder*, a case that challenges the constitutionality of section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. It is imperative that the Voting Rights Act be upheld in its entirety, for without it, a fundamental piece of our democracy will be out of reach for millions in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here after two decades, and I'm supposed to be standing here representing a district that has been altered twice. But, Mr. Speaker, I stand here representing a district that has been altered three times—that many times—in this last two decades. As we saw in the recent election, discrimination on the basis of race is a persistent reality throughout many localities in States protected by section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. Without these protections, voters are at risk of losing their fundamental right to vote and to have that vote counted.

The Voting Rights Act provides a remedy to protect voters, either by addressing actual instances of discrimination or by preventing discrimination from happening in the first place.

□ 1040

Section 5 provides localities the opportunity to prove that they are fully committed to ensuring everyone has the right to vote, and sets out clear criteria for doing so. In this way, section 5 of the Voting Rights Act encourages localities to establish fair voting practices, but demands real proof of the progress.

I cannot tell you how many cases that come to the attention of the Justice Department, almost on a monthly basis, of discrimination in this area. The Constitution is unequivocally clear that the Congress has the authority to protect voters. That is why Congress spent so much time in 2006 reviewing all the data and hearing from all sides.

The 2006 reauthorization was recognition that discrimination still exists but that Congress has a responsibility to ensure that every voter must continue to exercise their right.

If every State would prove to the voters that they are willing not to discriminate, there would not be the need; but that has not happened. Even States not covered have had difficulty of allowing minorities to express themselves.

Now, I have been a victim of discrimination through redistricting and cracking and packing and every other technique that can happen in redistricting. Mr. Speaker, until we, in this country, can guarantee that voters will be handled fairly, there is no way that we should be talking about doing away

with section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.

CELEBRATING THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

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

Mr. HUELSKAMP. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the first land-grant college in America. Founded on February 16, 1863, Kansas State University has faithfully served the people of Kansas and this great Nation for 150 years.

K-State was one of the first schools to offer a degree in home economics. K-State has helped feed a hungry world through innovative wheat, beef, and sorghum research; and Kansas State University is preparing for the next generation of animal research with the construction of the National Bio and Agri-Defense Facility Research Laboratory.

Let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to Kansas State University for the last 150 years as we look forward to many more successes in the next 150 years.

REAUTHORIZATION OF SECTION 5 OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

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

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I've always had such great respect for this distinguished body, the holder and interpreter of democracy, the institution that proudly protects the Constitution that was written by those who saw in this land this bright and shining sun from sea to shining sea, enormous opportunity for freedom.

So many people came to this Nation, and they came in many different ways. We don't carry the way we came into the future, as much as the fact that we are grateful of the opportunity that this Nation has given us.

The Nation has been able to turn the tide on embracing democracy in its fullest because of the Constitution and the laws, because we adhere to the three branches of government. So although my ancestors came to this Nation in bondage that lasted for hundreds of years, slavery, that has its remnants continuously as we move throughout society, there are now laws that can ensure, no matter how you came to this country, no matter what language you spoke, you are, in fact, deserving of the protection of the Constitution.

And so out of that protection came the 14th and 15th Amendments. Those amendments provided that no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States, nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law, and not deny any person in the jurisdiction equal protection.

The 15th Amendment provides that the right of citizens to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of its race, color, or previous servitude.

And, finally, each amendment allows this Congress to enforce laws; and that was the basis of the authority of the President that came from Texas, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who joined with a young, brilliant minister of the gospel, a man who ultimately sacrificed his life, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to engage in debates and discussion that resulted in the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

And here we are today with the opportunity for people from all walks of life and all communities to be able to vote and to have, as of September 28, 2011, the upholding of the pre-clearance provision, a very special provision of the Voting Rights Act by a district court, Federal court in the District of Columbia.

Shelby v. The United States now is before the Supreme Court. And my argument, Mr. Speaker, is that this is no time to eliminate pre-clearance. I'm reminded of a letter that I wrote to the U.S. Attorney's Office, Attorney General Eric Holder, just in my city alone, the city of Houston, to report 15 voter abuse cases.

Without the pre-clearance, where would we be?

Or the proposal to eliminate the North Forest Independent School District Board of Trustees over a school district that has worked hard to survive which will be subjected to the pre-clearance to determine whether not only the students will be denied their rights to learn in a school district they love and is fighting for their education, but that elected persons will be denied the right to serve and others denied the right to vote for them.

The Voting Rights Act protects all voters. It gives them all the right to vote—one vote, one person. And Shelby County has raised issue that they should not be subjected to pre-clearance, that they are beyond that. The district court, the Federal court decided, in Washington, D.C., that they were wrong, that pre-clearance is constitutional.

And we know that well because when we had the privilege of reauthorizing section 5 in 2006, building on the leadership of my predecessor, the Honorable Barbara Jordan, who came to the United States Congress only because, along with Andrew Young, the first who came out of the Deep South since Reconstruction, only because America had seen fit to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, because I can assure you, with personal stories from the Honorable Barbara Jordan told to us in her lifetime, that she ran and ran and ran and ran and could not be elected in Houston, Texas.

The Barbara Jordan that was admired by many could not be elected until after the passage of the Voting

Rights Act because there were abuses and prohibitions and intimidation of African Americans being able to vote.

And so today I believe it is extremely important that, as the Supreme Court takes this case up on February 27, that we stand in the midst of the 15,000 sheets of documentation, when I had the privilege of joining with my Judiciary Committee colleagues to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act and, specifically, section 5, and writing amendments to ensure its sanctity and security for a period of years, that we did not do it frivolously. We did it with authority, Mr. Speaker, and I am asking that America stand against the elimination of the Voting Rights Act. Join us on February 27.

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 though it is privilege.

If you are a Constitutional Scholar this is an exciting time because the United States Supreme Court has a very active docket this term, deciding on matters which have great import to every American.

And pursuant to that, in less than two weeks the Supreme Court will hear the case of Shelby County Alabama v. Holder. The issue in this case is whether Congress' decision in 2006 to reauthorize Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act under the pre-existing coverage formula of Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act exceeded its authority under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and thus violated the Tenth Amendment and Article IV of the United States Constitution.

The challenge to the constitutionality of Section 5 in this case was brought by Shelby County, Ala., which is a majority white suburb of Birmingham.

In rejecting the County's arguments, Judge Bates agreed with an earlier unanimous decision, by a three-judge panel of the D.C. District Court, which likewise upheld the constitutionality of Section 5, in a case brought by a local Texas utility district, which is my home state.

That earlier decision, however, was vacated in 2009 when the Supreme Court decided that the utility district could pursue a statutory "bailout" from Section 5 coverage.

Unlike the Texas utility district, Shelby County freely admitted that it has a recent history of voting discrimination that disqualified it from "bailing out."

I am joined by my colleagues here today to call on all Americans to reject and denounce tactics and measures that have absolutely no place in our democracy. I call on African-Americans, Hispanic and Latino Americans, as well as Asian-American voters to band together to fight for their right to vote and to work together to understand their voting rights which are granted to citizens of our nation by our laws and our Constitution.

I call on these citizens to stand against harassment and intimidation, to vote in the face of such adversity. The most effective way to curb tactics of intimidation and harassment is to vote. Is to stand together to fight against any measures that would have the effect of preventing every eligible citizen from being able to vote. Voting ensures active participation in democracy.

As a Member of this body, I firmly believe that we must protect the rights of all eligible citizens to vote. Over the past few decades, minorities in this country have witnessed a pattern of efforts to intimidate and harass minority voters through so-called "Voter Id" requirements. I am sad to report that as we head into the 21st century, these efforts continue.

Never in the history of our nation, has the effect of one person, one vote, been more important. A great Spanish Philosopher, George Santayana once said "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Our history has taught us that denying the right to vote based on race, gender or class is a stain on the democratic principles that we all value. The Voting Rights Act was a reaction to the actions of our passed and a way to pave the road to a new future.

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) was adopted in 1965 and was extended in 1970, 1975, and 1982. This legislation is considered the most successful piece of civil rights legislation ever adopted by the United States Congress. Contrary to the prevailing rumor that the Act is due to expire, leaving minorities with no rights, the Act is actually due for reauthorization in the 2nd session of the 108th Congress—there is no doubt about whether it will continue to protect our rights in the future.

The VRA codifies and effectuates the 15th Amendment's permanent guarantee that, throughout the nation, no person shall be denied the right to vote on account of race or color. Adopted at a time when African Americans were substantially disfranchised in many Southern states, the Act employed measures to restore the right to vote to citizens of all U.S. states.

By 1965, proponents of disenfranchisement made violent attempts to thwart the efforts of civil rights activists. The murder of voting-rights activists in Philadelphia and Mississippi gained national attention, along with numerous other acts of violence and terrorism.

Finally, the unprovoked attack on March 7, 1965, by state troopers on peaceful marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, en route to the state capitol in Montgomery, persuaded the President and Congress to overcome Southern legislators' resistance to effective voting rights legislation. President Johnson issued a call for a strong voting rights law and hearings began soon thereafter on the bill that would become the Voting Rights Act.

Congress adopted this far-reaching statute in response to a rash of instances of interference with attempts by African American citizens to exercise their right to vote—a rash that appears to be manifesting itself again in this nation. Perhaps a legislative measure is needed to respond in a way that the VRA did.

The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the VRA in 1966 in a landmark decision—*South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, 383 U.S. 301, 327–28:

Congress had found that case-by-case litigation was inadequate to combat widespread and persistent discrimination in voting, because of the inordinate amount of time and energy required to overcome the obstructionist tactics invariably encountered in these lawsuits. After enduring nearly a century of systematic resistance to the Fifteenth Amendment, Congress might well decide to shift the advantage of time and inertia from the perpetrators of the evil to its victims.

It seems that the “obstructionist tactics” that threatened the aggrieved parties in Katzenbach have returned. The advantages of “time and inertia” that were shifted from bigoted bureaucrats to minority victims are slowly shifting back against their favor when educators, government leaders, and agencies are allowed to contravene the policy and legal conclusions given by the highest court in the country.

Several factors influenced the initiation of this civil rights legislation. The first was a large shift in the number of African Americans away from the Republican Party. Second, many Democrats felt that it was a mistake of its Southern members to oppose civil rights legislation because they could lose more of the African American and liberal votes.

No right is more fundamental than the right to vote. It is protected by more constitutional amendments—the 1st, 14th, 15th, 19th, 24th and 26th—than any other right we enjoy as Americans. Broad political participation ensures the preservation of all our other rights and freedoms. 3 State laws that impose new restrictions on voting, however, undermine our strong democracy by impeding access to the polls and reducing the number of Americans who vote and whose votes are counted.

VOTER IDENTIFICATION

There have been several restrictive voting bills considered and approved by states in the past several years. The most commonly advanced initiatives are laws that require voters to present photo identification when voting in person. Additionally, states have proposed or passed laws to require proof of citizenship when registering to vote; to eliminate the right to register to vote and to submit a change of address within the same state on Election Day; to shorten the time allowed for early voting; to make it more difficult for third-party organizations to conduct voter registration; and even to eliminate a mandate on poll workers to direct voters who go to the wrong precinct.

These recent changes are on top of the disfranchisement laws in 48 states that deprive an estimated 5.3 million people with criminal convictions—disproportionately African Americans and Latinos—of their political voice.

Voter ID laws are becoming increasingly common across the country. Today, 31 states have laws requiring voters to present some form of identification to vote in federal, state and local elections, although some laws or initiatives passed in 2011 have not yet gone into effect. Some must also be pre-cleared under the Voting Rights Act prior to implementation. In 16 of those 31 States, voters must (or will soon be required to) present a photo ID—that in many states must be government-issued—in order to cast a ballot.

Voter ID laws deny the right to vote to thousands of registered voters who do not have, and, in many instances, cannot obtain the limited identification states accept for voting. Many of these Americans cannot afford to pay for the required documents needed to secure a government issued photo ID. As such, these laws impede access to the polls and are at odds with the fundamental right to vote.

In total, more than 21 million Americans of voting age lack documentation that would satisfy photo ID laws, and a disproportionate number of these Americans are low-income, racial and ethnic minorities, and elderly. As many as 25% of African Americans of voting age lack government-issued photo ID, com-

pared to only 8% of their white counterparts. Eighteen percent of Americans over the age of 65 do not have government-issued photo ID.

Laws requiring photo identification to vote are a “solution” in search of a problem. There is no credible evidence that in-person impersonation voter fraud—the only type of fraud that photo IDs could prevent—is even a minor problem. Multiple studies have found that almost all cases of alleged in-person impersonation voter “fraud” are actually the result of a voter making an inadvertent mistake about their eligibility to vote, and that even these mistakes are extremely infrequent.

It is important, instead, to focus on both expanding the franchise and ending practices which actually threaten the integrity of the elections, such as improper purges of voters, voter harassment, and distribution of false information about when and where to vote. None of these issues, however, are addressed or can be resolved with a photo ID requirement.

Furthermore, requiring voters to pay for an ID, as well as the background documents necessary to obtain an ID in order to vote, is tantamount to a poll tax. Although some states issue IDs for free, the birth certificates, passports, or other documents required to secure a government-issued ID cost money, and many Americans simply cannot afford to pay for them. In addition, obtaining a government-issued photo ID is not an easy task for all members of the electorate. Low-income individuals who lack the funds to pay for documentation, people with disabilities with limited access to transportation, and elderly.

Americans who never had a birth certificate and cannot obtain alternate proof of their birth in the U.S., are among those who face significant or insurmountable obstacles to getting the photo ID needed to exercise their right to vote. For example, because of Texas’ recently passed voter ID law, an estimated 36,000 people in West Texas’s District 19 are 137 miles from the nearest full service Department of Public Safety office, where those without IDs must travel to preserve their right to vote under the state’s new law.

In addition, women who have changed their names due to marriage or divorce often experience difficulties with identity documentation, as did Andrea, who recently moved from Massachusetts to South Carolina and who, in the span of a month, spent more than 17 hours online and in person trying without success to get a South Carolina driver’s license.

Voter ID laws send not-so-subtle messages about who is and is not encouraged to vote. As states approve laws requiring photo ID to vote, each formulates its own list of acceptable forms of documentation. Another common thread emerging from disparate state approaches is a bias against robust student electoral participation.

Henceforth, students at Wisconsin colleges and universities will not be able to vote using their student ID cards, unless those cards have issuance dates, expiration dates, and signatures.

Currently, only a handful of Wisconsin colleges and universities are issuing compliant IDs. Nor will South Carolina, Texas, or Tennessee accept student identification at the polls.

Policies that limit students’ electoral participation are particularly suspect, appearing on the heels of unprecedented youth turnout in the 2008 election.

Four states with new voter identification mandates, including my home state of Texas, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama, are required under the Voting Rights Act to have these voting changes pre-cleared by either the Department of Justice (DOJ) or a panel of federal judges. Before they may be implemented, DOJ must certify that these laws do not have the purpose or effect of restricting voting by racial or language minority groups.

Thus far, South Carolina and Texas both have submitted applications to DOJ that have been formally opposed in written submissions. DOJ has requested further information from both states, and the applications are on hold. Alabama’s ID requirements do not take effect until 2014, so the state has not yet applied to DOJ for preclearance. Mississippi’s voter ID requirement was approved by voters on November 8, 2011, so a preclearance request has not yet been submitted.

In countries scattered across this earth, citizens are denied the right to speak their hearts and minds. In this country, only a few decades ago, the right to vote was limited by race, sex, or the financial ability to own land. When a vote is not cast, it is a referendum on all those who fought so hard and tirelessly for our rights. When a vote is cast, it is cast not only for you and the future but also for all those who never had the chance to pull a lever.

We are still working to make Martin Luther King’s dream a reality, a reality in which our government’s decisions are made out in the open not behind cigar filled closed doors.

The time to take back the country is at hand, and we are the ones with the power to do just that. To do so we must allow all citizens who are eligible to vote, with the right to excise this decision without tricks or tactics to dilute their right to vote.

Instances of voter intimidation are not long ago and far away. Just last year I sent a letter to 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 Latinos. 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 continues 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, regardless 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 the mailing of threatening 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 deter qualified voters from voting. These reprehensible practices continue to plague our Nation's minority voters.

VOTING RIGHTS ACT HISTORY

August 6, 2011, marked the 46th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act.

Most Americans take the right to vote for granted. We assume that we can register and vote if we are over 18 and are citizens. Most of us learned in school that discrimination based on race, creed or national origin has been barred by the Constitution since the end of the Civil War.

Before the 1965 Voting Rights Act, however, the right to vote did not exist in practice for most African Americans. And, until 1975, most American citizens who were not proficient in English faced significant obstacles to voting, because they could not understand the ballot.

Even though the Indian Citizenship Act gave Native Americans the right to vote in 1924, state law determined who could actually vote, which effectively excluded many Native Americans from political participation for decades.

Asian Americans and Asian immigrants also have suffered systematic exclusion from the political process and it has taken a series of reforms, including repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, and passage of amendments strengthening the Voting Rights Act three decades later, to fully extend the franchise to Asian Americans. It was with this history in mind that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was designed to make the right to vote a reality for all Americans.

And the Voting Rights Act has made giant strides toward that goal. Without exaggeration, it has been one of the most effective civil rights laws passed by Congress.

In 1964, there were only approximately 300 African-Americans in public office, including just three in Congress. Few, if any, black elected officials were elected anywhere in the South. Today there are more than 9,100 black elected officials, including 43 members of Congress, the largest number ever. The act has opened the political process for many of the approximately 61,000 Latino public officials that have been elected and appointed nationwide, including 263 at the state or federal level, 27 of whom serve in Congress. And Native Americans, Asians and others who have historically encountered harsh barriers to full political participation also have benefited greatly.

We must not forget the importance of protecting this hard earned right.

VOTER ID

An election with integrity is one that is open to every eligible voter. Restrictive voter ID requirements degrade the integrity of our elections by systematically excluding large numbers of eligible Americans.

I do not argue with the notion that we must prevent individuals from voting who are not allowed to vote. Yet a hidden argument in this bill is that immigrants may "infiltrate" our voting system. Legal immigrants who have successfully navigated the citizenship maze are unlikely to draw the attention of the authorities by attempting to register incorrectly. Similarly, undocumented immigrants are even less likely to risk deportation just to influence an election.

If for no other reason than after a major disaster be it earth quakes, fires, floods or hurricanes, we must all understand how vulnerable our system is. Families fleeing the hurricanes and fires suffered loss of property that included lost documents. Compounding this was the devastation of the region, which virtually shut down civil services in the area. For example, New Orleans residents after Hurricane Katrina were scattered across 44 states. These uprooted citizens had difficulty registering and voting both with absentee ballots and at satellite voting stations. As a result, those elections took place fully 8 months after the disaster, and it required the efforts of nonprofits, such as the NAACP, to ensure that voters had the access they are constitutionally guaranteed.

We need to address the election fraud that we know occurring, such as voting machine integrity and poll volunteer training and competence. After every election that occurs in this country, we have solid documented evidence of voting inconsistencies and errors. In 2004, in New Mexico, malfunctioning machines mysteriously failed to properly register a presidential vote on more than 20,000 ballots. 1 million ballots nationwide were flawed by faulty voting equipment—roughly one for every 100 cast.

Those who face the most significant barriers are not only the poor, minorities, and rural populations. 1.5 million college students, whose addresses change often, and the elderly, will also have difficulty providing documentation.

In fact, newly married individuals face significant barriers to completing a change in surname. For instance, it can take 6–8 weeks to receive the marriage certificate in the mail, another two weeks (and a full day waiting in line) to get the new Social Security card, and finally three-four weeks to get the new driver's license. There is a significant possibility that this bill will also prohibit newlyweds from voting if they are married within three months of Election Day.

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 join me in dismissing 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.

□ 1050

TIME TO GET TO WORK

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

Mr. GARCIA. Mr. Speaker, this afternoon a group of 20 freshman Members of Congress will gather to announce that we are putting aside our partisan differences to do the right thing for the American people. For Democrats, this means that 10 of us are willing to compromise on spending so long as we keep our promise to seniors that they can retire with dignity and have access to affordable, quality health care. My Republican colleagues have said that they are willing to compromise on revenues so long as Democrats meet them halfway.

Like most Americans, to those of us who are new to Washington, "compromise" isn't a dirty word. It's what regular, ordinary people do in their daily lives. The American people get it. If you have a problem that arises in your office, you and your coworkers may disagree on how to address it, but your company does not wait until it gets to the last minute to solve it. You simply meet with your colleagues, put differences aside, and find solutions. Not everyone will get what they want, but we move forward. And this is precisely what the American people have sent us to Washington to do. They have sent us here to solve problems on their behalf and not argue all the time.

Mr. Speaker, the challenges before us are serious, and they deserve serious proposals. While our economy is growing, we still have many families that are looking for work or waiting for our economy to grow more quickly. Many parents are working two and three jobs and yet cannot find a way to save money for retirement or send their kids to school. I see this all the time in my community in places like Kendall, Westchester, and Islamorada.

This status quo is unacceptable to me, just as I know it is unacceptable to my Republican colleagues. Yet it seems that when we gather in this Chamber, rather than finding common-sense solutions to our problems, we engage in ideological debates that are designed for political posturing that lead us to nowhere.

At a minimum, if we can't agree on every issue, we should be working hard to solve problems. The American people may not know this, but the fact is that of the 31 days that we met here last month, Members of Congress only gathered six times. And in those 6 days, the only bill of any real significance was the Hurricane Sandy relief—a bill that should have been approved last year. Maybe this is the way Washington works; but in the rest of America, if you show up to your job less than 20 percent of the time—that's about 1 day a week—you probably won't have a job for too long. And yet some of my colleagues find this acceptable. Well, I don't. And I know the