Government and then extrapolate that out to taxing authorities at the local and municipal level, your school board, your water authority, energy taxes, utility taxes, and car taxes.

Mr. Speaker, think about all of the taxes that a single individual is responsible for paying; yet we have no tax ombudsman that represents the taxpayer before all of these taxing authorities.

We have no collective assessment of what is the total tax burden of a single individual, not just from Washington, but from your marginal income taxes to your mandatory contribution to entitlement programs to your State taxes to your sales taxes to your water taxes, utility taxes, school taxes, and car taxes. What is that total tax burden?

On the eve of April 15, I think it is appropriate to have a conversation about what is the total tax burden that any one individual should be subjected to, not the marginal income tax at the Federal level, not whether it should be progressive or flat, not whether it should be simpler, fairer, or flatter—which, certainly, I think every Member of this body would agree to—but what is the total tax obligation that any one individual should be subjected to?

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, taxes, fiscal issues, tax issues, are freedom issues. How much do we as government collectively, of all forms, ask for an individual to resign over to government to make decisions for them? That payment of taxes, that resignation of resources by the individual to a governing authority, those taxing issues are actually freedom issues. How much does it leave for the individual to have discretion as to the decisions they get to make for themselves?

I have actually introduced legislation, H.R. 144, called the Alternative Maximum Tax. It is a very simple proposition. It says that no one individual should have to give to government collectively more than they get to keep for themselves.

Think about it. What is the moral justification for why in the United States, this great land of liberty, this country that was founded on the notion that freedom is granted not to government to be disbursed to individuals, but freedom is granted by our Creator to our individuals, and as individuals, we get to decide how much liberty we resign over to government?

If that is the case, if our Nation was founded on this remarkable notion that freedom is first granted to the people, how can anybody, how could we ever argue that an individual should then have to resign over more than half of their income, more than half of their resources, to government collectively?

Now, understand, this isn't simply a conversation about the marginal tax rate at the Federal level. This is saying from State to local to Federal to water district to utility district, what is the total taxation of any one individual? That ultimately is a freedom issue.

The legislation I introduced actually does exactly that. It says an individual is able to add up every single one of these taxes, and, if they hit a threshold of 50 percent, they hit a maximum tax. We have an alternative minimum tax in the country.

It says if you fully comply with our Tax Code and you qualify for tax deductions and tax credits, but Washington decides you didn't quite contribute enough, then we are going to hit you with an alternative minimum tax and say: Too bad, we don't like your math; we need more money from you.

Well, why don't we have an alternative maximum tax to protect the taxpayer? I will be honest with you. Marginal tax rates, as I mentioned, are something for political debate. I think 50 percent is way too high. I would like to see that number come down because I do believe it is a matter of freedom.

This legislation, H.R. 144, I will tell you the political strategy behind it and the absolute transparency, it is to beg the question, to ask the question, the very simple question: Should any one individual have to give to government more than they keep for themselves? It is a moral question, I believe, in 2015.

We also this week, in looking for solutions on behalf of the American people, will consider other commonsense proposals. One of them would make permanent the sales tax deduction. One in five Americans live in States that do not have an income tax but do have a sales tax. The State of Florida is one of them.

For that one in five Americans, a sales tax deduction is very important. Think about it. Income taxes at the State level are deductible on your Federal tax return; but, if you live in a State that, instead of having income taxes has sales taxes, shouldn't that be deducted just the same?

The principle behind a State income tax deduction on your Federal return is it is recognizing, as I discussed in the max tax, that if an individual is already paying and contributing a certain amount to their State for government operations, then it would not be appropriate to tax those dollars. We allow the deduction of State income taxes from your Federal tax return. We should likewise allow the sales tax.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is something that, unfortunately, does not have a permanent place in the Tax Code. Later this week, we will consider—and I believe the House will approve—H.R. 622, to make permanent the State and local sales tax deduction.

We also will vote on H.R. 1105, which would ensure the elimination of the death tax—the death tax. Think about this. A nation that says you may have already paid money on your income, but the day you die and leave it for your family, your family has to pay another tax on that, it is as outrageous as it is insulting, and it is a very simple measure that we will consider this week to repeal that.

We do have, across the country tonight, a lot of concerned and, frankly, angry constituents probably in every single congressional district. Tax policy and budget policies, we have seen, can be very divisive.

As a Congress and as a nation, it is appropriate that we begin to have a national dialogue about how we can do better, how we can do better on behalf of the individual taxpayer because the current system doesn't work. We know that.

There is a reason that everybody has different ideas about tax reform. Well, just as we should be doing on so many other matters in this Congress, let's bring a package to the House floor.

Let the House work its will on behalf of the American people that we are elected to represent. Let's give voice to the American people that we represent and have an honest and constructive dialogue about the future of tax policy. We owe it to the American people to do our job.

Mr. Speaker, on the night of April 14, when so many people are working tirelessly simply to comply with complex regulations and laws that have been enacted by this body through multiple administrations and multiple parties—no one party bears all responsibility—but we know we have burdened the American people tonight, so let us, as we consider these bills later this week, do our job on behalf of the American people and recognize this burden that has created such resentment.

Moving forward, let's bring a tax package to the floor. Let's have an honest debate between the two sides of the aisle and do what is right on behalf of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity this evening.

I yield back the balance of my time.

OPENING OUR EYES TO THE EPIDEMIC OF POLICE VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from New York (Mr. JEFFRIES) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. JEFFRIES. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members be given 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Mr. Speaker, once again, we are moved and compelled to come to the House floor to deal with the seemingly unending problem of police violence in America. Over the last year, we have seen a parade of horribles, examples of police violence caught on video for all of America to see.

We are compelled to ask the question: What more does Congress need to see in order to understand that we have got a problem that requires Democrats

and Republicans, people in the House and the Senate, working in partnership with the President to address?

I certainly am of the view that the overwhelming majority of law enforcement officers are hard-working individuals who are there to protect and serve their community; but how can we continue to turn a blind eye to the fact that police violence all across America essentially has presented an epidemic of injustice that we have got to deal with in a free and democratic society?

What more does the Congress need to see? We have seen 12-year-old Tamir Rice gunned down by a police officer in what many view as a driveby shooting. Tamir Rice didn't present any danger to the officer who simply pulled up and really, without warning, shot him dead to the ground, based on a call that had been made that someone seemed to have a toy gun.

Of course, in New York City, Eric Garner was strangled to death with the use of a choke hold employed by a police officer, despite the fact that, for the previous 20 years, choke holds had been unauthorized as part of the policy of the NYPD.

Eleven different times, Eric Garner, a father of six, said that he couldn't breathe, and on 11 different occasions, the officers who were there failed to respond to Mr. Garner's pleas for help. As a result, he was killed on a New York City street for all the world to see; then a grand jury fails to indict even on simple assault.

Now, of course, we have got the tragedy of Walter Scott, someone who was killed running away from a police officer after having been tased. It is not clear to me that, if a courageous bystander hadn't captured that incident on video, the officer responsible for killing Walter Scott may be patrolling the streets of South Carolina today. What more does Congress need to see to realize that we have got a problem that needs to be addressed?

Mr. Speaker, I am thankful that several of my colleagues in government are here, including the assistant Democratic leader, who has got a tremendous history of combating injustice before he got to Congress and his two decades-plus in serving the people of South Carolina in Congress.

Let me yield to the distinguished gentleman from the great State of South Carolina, the assistant Democratic leader, JAMES CLYBURN.

(Mr. CLYBURN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend Mr. JEFFRIES.

I visited with the family of Walter Scott. I attended his funeral; and, not long after the services were over, I was approached by two women who identified themselves as mothers of two young men who had suffered unusual and unnecessary brutality at the hands of the officer who perpetrated the unnecessary shooting of Walter Scott.

□ 1845

Both these women said to me that, throughout the North Charleston community, there is significant apprehension as to whether or not they could accept or expect any kind of relief for the pain that they are suffering.

I remained in Charleston over the weekend. On Sunday evening, I saw that the mayor of North Charleston, Mayor Summey; the chief of police of North Charleston, Chief Driggers; along with the sheriff of Charleston County, attended the healing services that took place at Calvary Baptist Church there in Charleston.

I applaud them—the mayor, the chief, and the sheriff—for responding to these three families, and there may be others, but in a way that makes us all proud.

I am hopeful that, after this weekend and some subsequent occurrences, that Congress would take a long, hard look at whether or not there is a role for us to play in responding to what seems to be an epidemic. I applaud those in the South Carolina Legislature, most especially Senator Marlon Kimpson, for his authorship of body camera legislation.

I thank the various newspapers, most recently this morning, The State newspaper, for endorsing this concept, saying that it is something that the legislature in South Carolina should authorize and fund.

Now, there are a lot of police departments that are too small to raise the necessary funds, and a lot of them are so big that the cost might be prohibitive. To that, I want to say, Mr. JEFFRIES, as I thank you, Congressman SCOTT, and Congressman RICHMOND, as well as Congressmen GOWDY and LABRADOR, for all the work you are doing trying to pull together a piece of comprehensive legislation that will reform our judicial criminal system in a way that would make things much better going forward.

Please, I ask, take a look at whether or not it is time for us here in the Congress to make the funds available so that all local police departments can afford to do something that I think will address a national problem.

I also believe that the time has come for us to maybe mandate from this level the body cameras I think Congresswoman CORINNE BROWN and Congressman EMANUEL CLEAVER have both proposed legislation in this area. Let's take a look at their legislation. Hopefully, your task force will take a look at their legislation and see whether or not we can incorporate that legislation authorization, as well as the funding going forward.

Now, I want to thank the Attorney General and the FBI Director for proposing that we deal with this issue of data collection. That is going to be very important as we take a look at these issues and these incidents and to see whether or not it is time for us to do something at the national level to deal with data collection.

That, too, is an expense. In fact, that is something these departments would have a problem with in terms of size, where they are so big they can't afford it or too small to raise the funds, and maybe we can find a way to help fund the storage of this data so that we can create a better climate.

Now, before I close, I want to say something that I get beaten up a lot for raising this issue, but I feel strongly about it. I am not easily intimidated, and I refuse to be bullied.

Therefore, I want to say once again, whoever is funding the activities of the American Legislative Exchange Council, they are funding the kind of legislation, stand your ground, that creates vigilante activity in this country. It is clear that is what is formed from that legislation.

They are also funding legislation that is suppressing voters; and when you suppress voters, you are, in fact, ruining activity at the community level that I think is very, very important.

They are also funding the bleaching and stacking of legislative and congressional districts, all of which I believe add to the creation of a venomous climate throughout our country.

I started my professional career as a public school teacher teaching history. I have studied the history of our great country, and I have taught it. I can say that it is clear to me that a lot of the legislation that is being proposed today, a lot of the activities that we are experiencing today, we went through this before.

I would ask anybody who may be interested in the subject to just take a look at what occurred in this great country between 1872 and those new constitutions that went in place throughout the South in 1895. You will see that, through that 23-year period, the same kind of vigilante activity, all done under the heading of Jim Crow laws, the same activity with a different label is what we are beginning to see today.

I would hope that all the people here in this Congress and around the country will really take stock of who we are, where we are, and let us do what is necessary to move our country to common ground for all of its great citizenry.

Thank you so much.

Mr. JEFFRIES. I thank the assistant leader, Mr. CLYBURN, for his eloquent articulation, both of the history of police violence and oppressive laws and statutes done on the color of State law designed to undermine the constitutional principle of equal protection under the law, as well as for suggesting some of the things that we can consider doing to improve this situation, one of which will be to make sure that we capture police encounters on video in a manner that benefits all involved so we can have a real understanding of what took place during the encounter.

New York City has begun an experimental program placing body cameras in a few of the precincts throughout

New York City, including the 75th precinct in the east New York community that I represent.

In talking to the commander of the precinct, the officers, while many were initially skeptical, eventually embraced the presence of body cameras for a variety of reasons, one of which is that it often defuses an aggressive encounter because the officers, upon approaching a situation when they are wearing a body camera, are now required to say to the individual citizens they are confronting: This confrontation or this exchange is going to be recorded.

What the officers have found is that, in many instances, that will defuse a situation that otherwise might go in the other direction.

Body cameras are something that should be considered. In fact, many law enforcement officers in departments across the country who have gone down this road have embraced it as technology that benefits the law enforcement community, in addition, of course, to making sure justice takes place when a police officer crosses the line.

It is now my distinct privilege to yield to a new member of the Congressional Black Caucus, as well as the House of Representatives, who has already distinguished herself in terms of being a passionate advocate for justice and for progressive change in this country.

That is the gentlewoman from the Garden State right next door to New York, Congresswoman BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you very much to my esteemed colleague from New York.

I am new to Congress, and I have had quite a few occasions to come to the floor and talk about issues that are very pressing to my community and to me. I stand here as an African American woman who represents the State of New Jersey, but I stand here as a wife, a mother, a sister, an aunt, and a cousin to African American men.

In that capacity, each and every day that one of them leaves our presence and leaves their home, I wonder if they will come back safely. I know they mean no one any harm, but I don't know that the police that they might encounter would see that in them as I do.

My community has cried out for a long period of time that there has been injustice and there has been harm and danger and needless deaths facing our young men and even some of our young women.

As a matter of fact, Mr. CLYBURN mentioned the issue of data collection as being such an important element here in helping us to find our way. I noted that The Washington Post said that, out of thousands of fatal interactions between the police and citizens, only 54 officers have been charged, and of those, most were cleared and acquitted.

We need better data collection; we need greater accountability, and we, obviously, need greater justice because, in those instances, the majority of these officers are going back into the streets, patrolling these communities, and those people who are in charge of them are still in charge of them and are still performing what should be a public service.

□ 1900

I understand that not every case that we are encountering is as clear-cut as the one we just encountered with Officer Slager. I understand that there are other cases that have resulted in other findings. I do not understand how some of these findings could have occurred given the things that we have actually seen.

I stand here recognizing that this Congress can, indeed, help these local police departments with things such as body cameras. In the cost-benefit analysis, is a life worth enough to invest in them for the police departments? I say ''yes,'' but there are other things that, I think, Congress should be considering and on which, I think, we should be leading the way in the discussion.

One of those is that there are consequences that should not only be felt by the officer who was actively engaged in the misfortune, such as in the Slager case or even in the Brown case in Ferguson; but what about those individuals who knowingly participated in the policies that ended up creating this disparity in our society, this injustice in our society? They are given the opportunity to walk away. They are given the opportunity to retire. They are given the opportunity to resign. They are given the opportunity to move on with their lives and to benefit from the pensions and other benefits that have been accrued by the number of years they have been working as public servants, even though it is clearly demonstrated that their service was not to the public. There need to be consequences that need to be addressed with regard to that also.

There is a lot that needs to be done. We can see it, but we can no longer be silent on it. Congress does have a role here. Congress has a responsibility to ensure that the laws of this country are protecting all of our citizens. We need to do things like invest in body cameras, not just to catch those who are doing these things which are harmful to our community but to protect the good policemen who are sometimes the subject of complaints that aren't verified. I honestly believe that those who don the blue uniform do so with the expectation and the desire to protect, preserve, and to serve, but those who do not and those who allow those who do not to continue to do what they are doing need to be accountable.

I look forward to working with my esteemed colleague who is in charge of this Special Order hour and with all of those who are working to ensure that there is justice, safety, and security and that, as a mother, I don't have to worry, that, as a wife, I don't have to worry, that, as a sister, as an aunt, as a cousin, and as a friend, I don't have to worry every time a Black man who is associated with me leaves my home.

Mr. JEFFRIES. I thank the distinguished gentlewoman from New Jersey for her very eloquent and passionate remarks.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we clearly have to grapple with in this country is the fact that the criminal justice system is broken, and there are many components to that. We have got a situation in which far too often a police officer crosses the line, engages in unlawful conduct, and is not held accountable for that conduct. What kind of incentive does that create for good conduct to take place moving forward if, in the overwhelming majority of instances when police officers cross the line, such as in the Eric Garner case, a grand jury or a local prosecutor will often fail to hold them accountable?

The other problem that we have got to address is of overcriminalization in America, of mass incarceration. If you look at some of these encounters that have taken place and that have gone wrong and that have resulted in tragedy, they often have begun with what was, really, overly aggressive, unnecessary policing strategy being deployed to tackle, at best, nuisance-like activity.

Eric Garner is dead today because he was selling loose cigarettes, and someone at One Police Plaza gave the order to aggressively police this activity. Crime is down in New York, but there are still a couple hundred homicides committed every year. There is still some gang activity. There are still some assaults taking place. But we want to use police resources to aggressively go after someone who is selling loose, untaxed cigarettes?

That is an overcriminalization problem connected to broken windows policing. Walter Scott is dead today because he had a broken taillight. Four children are without a father because Walter Scott had a broken taillight. We have got to evaluate this overly aggressive policing strategy connected to the phenomenon of mass incarceration.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity in this Congress to have worked closely with someone who is one of the leaders in the House of Representatives and in the Capitol in dealing with our broken criminal justice system and who works closely with colleagues on the other side of the aisle, like TREY GOWDY and JASON CHAFFETZ and others, who are interested in trying to figure out, collectively, how we can make America a fairer, more efficient place in terms of our criminal justice system.

Let me now yield to the distinguished gentleman from the great State of Louisiana, who represents the wonderful city of New Orleans. We refer to him, of course, as the ''franchise'' because of his prolific baseball

abilities, but he is also one of the most talented legislators here in the Capitol. I yield to my good friend, the Honorable CEDRIC RICHMOND.

Mr. RICHMOND. Thank you, Representative JEFFRIES, for allowing us to address this most important issue.

Mr. Speaker, as we talk about it today and as members of the Congressional Black Caucus address this country and address this Chamber, let me just start with: this is not a Black problem; it is not an African American problem; it is not a Hispanic problem; and it is not a minority problem. This is an American problem that is eroding the fabric and the core of who we are and what makes us exceptional. As we talk about police violence and as we assess it, we try to figure out if we have a few bad apples or whether this is a systematic problem that needs to be addressed. I prefer to believe that it is the former—a few bad apples who need attention. With that, I will use an example.

Representative JEFFRIES, I am sure you know that we had a police shooting in the New Orleans airport a couple of weeks ago when a man who was otherwise peaceful lacked medical attention and was paranoid and went to the airport and intended to do harm. In fact, he did do harm, but in the process, Lieutenant Heather Sylve had no choice in this situation but to fire, to discharge her firearm, and she killed Richard White. She had no choice, and she saved many lives. I would like to believe that there are more Heather Sylves out there than what we are seeing on the news every day. Yet the preponderance of what we are seeing every day is of shootings that are not justified.

When we talk about what we can do, body cameras won't stop the event from happening; but like red light cameras and these automated traffic tickets, what they do is change behavior because, hopefully, officers will realize that there is nothing done under the cloud of darkness anymore, that whether it is body cameras or civilians standing up and recording the interaction, whatever you do will be recorded to show an independent version of what is going on. Maybe—just maybe—that will change behavior and make officers just take notice that today is not yesterday and that you can't do the things that you used to do.

As we address it, one of the things we can also look at is the diversity of these police departments and at the diversity of the FBI, the DEA, and the ATF. Those departments and those police forces and those law enforcement organizations should reflect in their makeup the great diversity in this country. U.S. attorneys in this country should stand and fight for civil rights violations just as they do the headline-grabbing public corruption and all of the other things that they focus on.

We have the new cases, but I have old cases in New Orleans. After Katrina, I had Henry Glover. An officer on a second-floor balcony shot him dead with a sniper rifle, saying that he posed an imminent threat to that officer on the second floor. Not only was he shot and killed but the police took the body, in an abandoned car, to a levee and burned it. If we get past Henry Glover, we can go to the Danziger Bridge, where officers engaged in a firefight with six civilians. Today, we learned all of them were unarmed, and none of them fired on the police. Two of those civilians were killed.

This is a very hard conversation to have. It is a conversation that we have to have because the longer we ignore it the longer it will fester. The urban communities have been singing this song and have been reporting this for years and years and years, and it is not until new technology that we see that this was not a fabrication but a concerned community that was watching their sons and their fathers be killed at the hands of law enforcement.

We are part of the greatest body on Earth, which is the United States Congress, and we can solve problems when we have the will because, as my grandmother always said, Where there is a will, there is a way. It is time for Congress to dig up that will to make this country a more perfect Union. We all know that it is not perfect—it was not perfect when it was created, and it is not perfect today—but with the courage of legislators like Representative JEFFRIES from New York, Representative JOHNSON from Georgia, who will speak next, and with the will of strong legislators who are not afraid to have an ugly conversation, we can wrap our hands around this, and we can make our streets safe for everyone because all lives do matter.

I think that it is time that both Republicans and Democrats and Whites and Blacks sit down and say that this is unacceptable, because the hate and the disgust and the hurt that is growing in African American and urban communities around this country is playing out to be justified.

The only thing that I can hope and pray for, Representative JEFFRIES, is that we are bigger and that we are better than that as a country. I look forward to working with you, and I look forward to working with this Congress to find solutions to these problems so that we do not have to bury another father or another son whose life was snatched from him by the hands of either an inexperienced officer or, worse than that, by an officer who just had ill intentions.

Every day, good people put on that uniform and go out and risk their lives to make sure that our communities are safe, that our children get to and from school, that our husbands and wives get to work and get home. They do that every day, risking their lives, and they sacrifice much so that we can be safe. We need to make sure that we root out those bad apples to make sure that it doesn't happen to any more families.

Mr. JEFFRIES. I thank the distinguished gentleman from New Orleans for his thoughtful and eloquent exposition of the situation and for pointing out that, while this is not an easy conversation for us to have around the police's use of excessive force, often resulting in the deaths of unarmed individuals such as Walter Scott and Eric Garner, it is a necessary one if we are going to continue our march toward a more perfect Union.

I now yield to another distinguished member of the Judiciary Committee, who has taken an active role within the Congressional Black Caucus and beyond to introduce progressive pieces of legislation that are designed to address this problem. He is the distinguished gentleman from Georgia, Representative HANK JOHNSON.

□ 1915

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. I thank my colleague, Congressman JEFFRIES from New York, for organizing this very important Special Order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for hosting this.

We are here to talk about a very important subject, the extrajudicial killing of Black males in America. It seems to be an epidemic, but it is really not. It is just simply the fact that we are hearing more about it. We are hearing more about the deaths that are occurring. We are seeing with our very eyes, looking at video, we are seeing that some of these killings appear to be unjustified. When we understand that we are seeing what has been going on for a long time but which has not been addressed, we understand that if we don't do something to address the problem, then these killings will continue.

Now, why is it that we have what appear to be unjustified homicides of African American males at the hands of law enforcement repeated daily? In the 108 days or so since the Michael Brown killing in Ferguson, we have heard of so many African American males losing their lives. It is very disturbing.

Why is it that it continues to happen? Well, I would submit, Congressman JEFFRIES, that one of the reasons is because there seems to be two systems of justice involved: one for police officers and the other for civilians. It seems that there has been a reluctance to prosecute police officers when their actions go across the line.

Now, you, as well as I, know that most of the law enforcement people, law enforcement officers out there, male and female, top to bottom, from the East to the West, are good people honestly trying to do a good job, and their job is to protect and serve us. A lot of times we make it very dangerous and we make it very hard for them to do their job; but that is their job, to protect us and to serve us.

When one of us goes astray, when one of us runs away, that doesn't give a license to a police officer to pull out a gun and stop the individual, shooting them in the back. It has happened

more than once. It has happened more than twice. It has happened frequently. Sometimes we don't hear about it because the person is injured and there is no video. Other times there is video, and the person is killed, and we find out about that and we see it. But I would submit to you that it happens far too regularly, and it happens without any penalty for misconduct.

Now, I have said that most of our law enforcement officers are seeking to do the best job that they can be, but nobody is perfect and they err sometimes; and when you err and you do it and you violate the criminal law, then you should be prosecuted yourself.

So I want to take this opportunity to commend the officials in North Charleston who immediately, when they saw the video, they saw the evidence, they didn't waste any time, they didn't try to cover up or hide, they went and did the right thing. They charged the officer just as they would have charged a civilian had a civilian shot someone and it appeared to be unjustified.

I will give you an example in my State of Georgia where, on New Year's morning, 3 a.m. in the morning, one of our local police chiefs was asleep in the bed next to his companion, who happened to be his ex-wife, and due to some problems that he heard, he went and grabbed his service revolver. He went downstairs to check on some noise but didn't find any disturbance. He came back upstairs, put the gun, according to his testimony or his statement, on the bed, and then went to sleep with his wife beside him, his ex-wife. He was awakened to a gun firing, and his wife, his ex-wife ended up being shot in the back. He called the police to report that ''I have shot my wife.'' He was not arrested. He has not been arrested to this day, although about a month ago the solicitor who handles misdemeanor cases—excuse me. The prosecutor, the district attorney who handles felony cases said that he intended to take the case to a grand jury to ask for a misdemeanor indictment against the officer.

But there are two different systems of treatment, two systems of justice: one for the police, because if he had not been a police officer under those circumstances he would have been arrested right there that same night, charged with a felony, and he would have been forced—after being arrested, he would have had to get a lawyer to have to break the case down into something like a misdemeanor, if he was fortunate to have a good lawyer, if he could afford one.

So, when these kind of things happen and people don't get charged, then it is a license for other officers to be reckless themselves; and so what we have had is a cascade of reckless behavior which has resulted in people being killed and there being no penalty, and so it just continues. That is why it is important for Congress to take action.

There are things that we can do here on the Federal level, and Congressman JEFFRIES, I know that you have been working on some of these measures. I have been working on some, too. I will tell you, body cameras is a step in the right direction.

Mr. JEFFRIES. The gentleman raised a very important point that I want to make sure is not lost, and then I certainly look forward to you articulating some of the things you have been working on in terms of legislative proposals.

But most of us, most folks in America do believe that police officers generally are entitled to the benefit of the doubt in the context of a police encounter because of the inherent dangerousness of what law enforcement officers do. Certainly the former mayor of the city of New York famously said—this is Rudolph Giuliani:

> In every case, I am going to give police officers the benefit of the doubt.

But there is peril in the misapplication of that standard because if it goes too far, as the gentleman points out, there are some who believe that even if I cross the line, there will be no accountability. And in this particular case what was so chilling about the video, after Walter Scott is gunned down, is that this officer, not knowing that this entire encounter was covered on video, felt that he could drop something next to the body of Walter Scott and presumably, in his mind, that would be part of the narrative that he would use to get himself exonerated because he understood that he would be entitled to the benefit of the doubt. In the absence of video, in this particular case he could potentially have gotten away with murder.

So I thank the gentleman for raising that point. We have got to have a real conversation. In America, yes, the overwhelming majority of law enforcement officers are hard-working individuals dedicated to protecting and serving; but there is a problem with the misapplication of the benefit of the doubt standard in every instance because, in the absence of video, you may allow some officers who have crossed the line to get away with being held unaccountable. That is a terrible thing for justice and for encouraging proper behavior moving forward. I thank the distinguished gentleman.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Thank you for yielding again.

I will also note, Congressman JEFFRIES, that in watching that video of the shooting in the back of the gentleman a week ago, what I saw was another police officer who arrived at the scene as the subject officer walked back, or actually ran or trotted back to the body. And as the video was slowed down in slow motion, you could see something coming out of his hand landing next to the victim, and it is thought that the item that he picked up, that the video shows that he picked up, was a taser; and it appears that it was the taser that was then dropped beside the body of the victim with the other officer looking at the scene as it unfolded.

So I would think it is reasonable to assume that that officer, the first one to arrive at the scene, who happened to be an African American it looked to me, apparently, I would think that it is reasonable to assume that he saw the officer deposit that item, which I believe to be the taser, beside the victim.

So what does that tell us? It tells us that there is a thin blue line over which law enforcement officers do not step. They protect each other. When they see wrongdoing, they do not call it out; they do not expose it. So when that happens, Congressman, it impugns the character of all law enforcement. If law enforcement is operating under that mentality, that we see no evil, hear no evil, and certainly will not speak of it if we do hear or see it, that reinforces the systemic problems that we obviously have in law enforcement insofar as it relates to African American males.

Our lives do matter. It is important that if law enforcement officers as a group are to uphold the standards of their profession, they must step across that blue line when they see something that another law enforcement officer does which is illegal or that is not within the bounds of propriety. They must police themselves.

Mr. JEFFRIES. I thank Representative JOHNSON for raising a very important point. This is a difficult conversation. I understand it. It is not easy to have a conversation about law enforcement conduct that crosses the line into illegality, but we have got to ask the question: Is there a blue wall of silence that exists such that good officers who observe inappropriate conduct engaged in by bad officers are afraid to speak the truth about encounters that take place that cross the line?

If, in fact, there is this blue wall of silence, I ask the question: How can that be good for our democracy when it means that a victim of police violence in most instances will never get equal protection under the law consistent with the 14th Amendment because of this almost impenetrable blue wall of silence?

□ 1930

As we have this conversation about what we are going to do about police violence, it should be a Democratic conversation and a Republican conversation, a Black, a White, a Latino, and an Asian conversation, a blue State conversation—it happened in New York—a red State conversation—it happened in South Carolina. This is an American problem.

I thank the distinguished gentleman for raising this issue. It is a difficult one, but we weren't sent here to the United States Congress to run away from difficult issues when it is impacting the people we represent. We have got to run toward difficult issues and try to confront them.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. That thin blue line or that blue wall of silence is not a good thing for a democracy; it is

not a good thing for freedom. The truth is that, when one's freedom is taken away, it affects potentially all of us in having our freedoms taken away.

The truth is that all Americans are at risk when bad actors in law enforcement are allowed to act badly and with impunity. All Americans are at risk.

I know that, Congressman JEFFRIES, you represent New York, and I know that when the two officers lost their lives at the hand of a bad guy who ambushed and killed two innocent police officers in New York, thousands of police officers came to the funeral to see off their fallen brothers, as they should do. Many other Americans watched on TV.

I was, quite frankly, greatly disturbed when the police officers—some of the New York officers—turned their backs on the civilian head of the city of New York. They turned their backs to the mayor as he was speaking at the funeral, a sign of disrespect for civilian authority.

That attitude contributes to the thinking of some law enforcement officers that it is okay and that whatever they do is acceptable. The police organizations must come to grips with the fact that they have a responsibility to do the right thing when one of their own does the wrong thing. They have a responsibility to do so.

I know that many, many police departments don't pay their officers very well. Civil servants, in general, are not paid commensurate with the value of their services to the people that they are serving, and police are no different than that.

Police officers have the same concerns that we have, that civilians have. Sometimes, they have problems at home with their wives. They have problems with their children. They have bills to pay. They might be a little bit behind. They have a lot of pressure.

I think we should do a little more in the area of mental health evaluation and counseling and help for our officers. We should encourage them to come forward if they are hurting. It should be a part of the culture of law enforcement that you are not too big and not too powerful to be able to ask for the help that you need. Our society should be willing to give them that help, and we should be willing to pay for it as well.

This issue of Black males being killed by police officers, there are no simple solutions. There are a number of solutions that can help make this situation better. That is why we in Congress and others in State legislatures and city councils and county commissions should be discussing this issue.

We should be trying to do what is necessary to break down the systemic problems that have led to this result and to do something about those problems, to get those problems alleviated and eventually eliminated.

I am so happy that you have seen, Congressman JEFFRIES, the need for this to be a topic of discussion, and I deeply appreciate the opportunity to come here and to participate in this discussion with you. I will let you know that I am looking forward to continuing to work with you as we do what we know that we need to do in order for Congress to address this issue.

Mr. JEFFRIES. I thank the gentleman from Georgia for his continued leadership and involvement in this issue in trying to bring about resolution.

As we prepare to close, let me, again, make clear that, in my view and the view of, I believe, many throughout this body and across this country, we know that the police officers—the overwhelming majority of law enforcement officials—go to work every day trying to do the right thing.

It is a difficult job; but, because you have the capacity to take a life, we have got to make sure that, when you exercise deadly force, that it is deployed only in circumstances where it is absolutely necessary, not a choke hold resulting in the strangulation of someone who is selling untaxed cigarettes, who pleads for his life 11 times and is killed on video for all of his six children to see.

We don't want to see deadly force used when someone who has been tased is running away. The Supreme Court said in 1985 that you can't use deadly force to stop a fleeing felon. Walter Scott wasn't even a felon. He stopped him because he had a broken taillight.

We just want to make sure that, in America, there is a balance between effective law enforcement on the one hand and a healthy respect for the Constitution and for civil rights and for equal protection under the law for everyone on the other. That is our objective.

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

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, on April 4, 2015 in North Charleston, South Carolina, following a traffic stop in broad daylight, Walter Scott was fatally shot by police officer Michael Slager. This tragedy once again brings to the forefront an issue that continues to plague communities nationwide—the alarming rate of African American deaths at the hands of law enforcement officers. Particularly troubling about this tragedy, is the video footage showing the officer firing eight times as Walter Scott is running away.

Walter Scott was a human whose life had value. He was a father, a brother, a son and a friend. His status as an American citizen gave him the right to due process. He should not have been killed by a police officer who acted, without authority, as judge, jury and executioner.

Time and again, African American families have grieved over their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, who have been taken too soon by officers deputized with the power to protect them. The frequency of these tragedies continues to play into the deeply painful narrative that black life is not valued in this country. When I think of Walter Scott, I think of Edward Garner, Anthony Baez, Amadou Diallo, Anthony Lee, and Oscar Grant. I think of their grieving families and their lost futures. I am deeply saddened that the list of unarmed black men killed by police continues to grow.

Where do we go from here?

I would echo the words of Albert Einstein: "the world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything." We must all act to protect the lives of our friends and neighbors. As a country, we must commit to recognizing the humanity in others. Before we identify with any race, religion, gender, or sexual preference, we are all human.

It is not likely that, in the absence of Mr. Feidin Santana's cell phone video, Michael Slager would ever face criminal charges. It is not likely that the investigators who investigate the police would have concluded that the officer's account of the shooting was fabricated. It is likely that, in the absence of one bystander's courage, Walter Scott would have been villainized and the police officer who gunned him down would have gotten away with murder. From this point forward, we must all have the courage to speak up and confront injustice.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina (at the request of Mr. MCCARTHY) for today and the balance of the week on account of a family emergency.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. JEFFRIES. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 7 o'clock and 39 minutes p.m.), under its previous order, the House adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, April 15, 2015, at 10 a.m. for morning-hour debate.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 2 of rule XIV, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

1073. A letter from the Under Secretary, Personnel and Readiness, Department of Defense, transmitting a letter on the approved retirement of General Janet C. Wolfenbarger, United States Air Force, and her advancement to the grade of general on the retired list; to the Committee on Armed Services.

1074. A letter from the Under Secretary, Personnel and Readiness, Department of Defense, transmitting a letter on the approved retirement of Lieutenant General Thomas W. Travis, United States Air Force, and his advancement to the grade of lieutenant general on the retired list; to the Committee on Armed Services.

1075. A letter from the Under Secretary, Personnel and Readiness, Department of Defense, transmitting a letter on the approved retirement of Lieutenant General Salvatore A. Angelella, United States Air Force, and his advancement to the grade of lieutenant General on the retired list; to the Committee on Armed Services.

1076. A letter from the Under Secretary, Personnel and Readiness, Department of Defense, transmitting a letter on the approved