

bridges, schools, etc.—to include more abstract benefits like tax revenue. If a local bureaucrat decides that your house, local church, or business would be more productive if it were torn down to make room for a shopping center, the Court now says this is ok.

The 5th Amendment guarantees that private property shall not be taken by the government for public use without just compensation. These safeguards have been under assault for decades and until this decision, the typical victims were family farmers and ranchers in the West. Now we know no one is safe. In the past year, more than 5,700 properties have been threatened or taken by eminent domain, not to build roads or schools, but for private development. This is unconscionable and goes against everything our Nation stands for.

This terrible ruling did have a silver lining—it brought great public attention and outrage to an issue some of us in Congress have been fighting for our entire careers. In the wake of the decision, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4128, the Private Property Rights Protection Act. Using Congress' power of the purse, we made a strong, bipartisan statement to State and local governments that the abuse of eminent domain for private purposes would not be tolerated. Any use of eminent domain for private benefit would result in a two-year loss of federal economic development funds. Similar restrictions were placed on funds in the FY06 Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

The fight has also been taken up at the local level, with 25 states passing legislation aimed at curbing eminent domain abuse. This was a heartening response, but there is much more to be done. The Senate must act on similar legislation. And, we can further what we have started by introducing more legislation to protect private property. While the initial public outcry over this decision has died down, these abuses are still occurring every day, and we must keep up the fight.

Mr. Speaker, property rights are the heart of individual freedom and the foundation for all other civil rights guaranteed to Americans by the Constitution. Without the freedom to acquire, possess and defend property, all other guaranteed rights are merely words on a page. As we look back on one year of life under Kelo, we must never forget the simple truth. We must be steadfast in our defense of the rights of property owners.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2007

SPEECH OF

HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 20, 2006

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 5631) making appropriations for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2007, and for other purposes:

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Chairman, on Tuesday night, the House passed H.R. 5631, the Defense Appropriations Act for FY2007. I commend Chairman YOUNG and Ranking Member MURTHA for crafting an important piece of leg-

islation that will provide our men and women in uniform with the resources they need to continue their excellent record of service to the Nation. I was proud to vote for that measure, which passed by an overwhelming vote of 407-19.

However, I am disappointed that the House did not pass a very important amendment offered by Congressman SCHIFF to block funding for any surveillance program that does not comply with the safeguards in the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. I have been deeply disturbed by the President's decision to expand domestic surveillance of U.S. citizens beyond what is permitted under existing law. As a member of the House Armed Services and Homeland Security Committees, I am fully aware of the dangers posed by those who wish to harm Americans, and I have strongly supported efforts to make our Nation safer. However, President Bush has not yet explained to my satisfaction why powers available to him under existing law cannot meet the needs of the war on terrorism. For example, the Foreign Intelligence Service Act (FISA) already permits the warrantless surveillance of communications by U.S. citizens under certain limited circumstances. Nevertheless, the Bush Administration did not use those emergency powers and instead chose to expand the authority of the National Security Agency (NSA).

As I have said before, if President Bush believes that FISA needs to be altered or updated to address new threats, he should make his case to Congress and propose legislative changes. The President's decision to expand domestic surveillance while notifying only a handful of legislators does not constitute Congressional consent and is a danger to our established Constitutional system of checks and balances. While Americans may disagree about the merits of broadening the government's authority to combat terrorism, it is in all of our interests that such important decisions should be made publicly, as they affect the very values of freedom and liberty on which the Nation was founded.

Opponents of the Schiff amendment argued that we shouldn't be considering such a significant change in a spending bill. Under normal circumstances, I would agree with that assessment. However, because the House has neglected to consider any legislation to address the serious issue of domestic surveillance, we are left with no other choice.

We cannot continue to shirk our Constitutional responsibility to conduct oversight of the executive branch and its activities. We must hold hearings and consider legislation to ensure that our efforts to protect our nation are done consistent with the civil liberties that we hold dear and comply with the Constitution—the supreme law of the land.

LOWER THE THRESHOLD FOR
BILINGUAL ELECTION ASSISTANCE

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 22, 2006

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the House on the Voting Rights Reauthorization and Amendment Act of 2006, proposed by the esteemed gentleman from

Wisconsin. The bill calls for renewal of certain expiring provisions from the Voting Rights Act of 1965, including Section 203—the bilingual election assistance.

As a representative of one of the many multi-ethnic districts in New York, I fully realize the necessity of providing bilingual assistance to increase voting among language minorities and allow these Americans the chance to participate in the democratic process. According to the existing provisions of Section 203, the bilingual assistance is made available when the population of a language minority group in an electoral district is 10,000. This has facilitated voting for over 200,000 Asian Americans nationwide, and caused a 50 percent increase in the Hispanic electorate in the first decade of the adoption of this provision.

Mr. Speaker, the House has agreed to a bipartisan support of this vitally important reauthorization bill to ensure a clean passage. Had the opportunity allowed, I would have liked to propose an amendment to Section 203, lowering the current threshold to 7,500. The effect of lowering the numerical trigger to 7,500 would remove language barriers for at least 77,955 limited English proficient Asian American citizens to vote, including a significant increase in the electorate of New York City. In the last election, New York only offered bilingual election assistance in Spanish, Chinese and Korean. Keeping in mind the diversity and multiethnic communities in New York, it is vital that we ensure all our constituents have an easier access to the electoral process. I have been a firm supporter of integration and accepting immigrants into American society. What better way to make them comfortable in their American identity and assist in seamless assimilation?

On another note, under the current law, U.S. Census Bureau determines the Section 203 coverage every 10 years. Considering the rapid growth of immigrant communities, particularly in cities like New York, San Francisco (CA), Los Angeles (CA), Philadelphia (PA), Essex County (NJ), Cook County (IL), King County (WA), I believe we should make census determinations every 5 years to decide Section 203 coverage.

According to the 1990 census, the Korean American population in New York was short of 250 persons to gain coverage under Section 203. Although the community reached the numeric trigger by early 1990s, it did not gain coverage until after the 2000 census. More recently, the Vietnamese community in San Diego fell 85 persons short of the numeric trigger following the 2000 census. Surely, by now the community has already surpassed the trigger but will not receive bilingual election assistance until after the 2010 census report is completed.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 with all its subsequent amendment has been immensely successful in expanding access and assistance to racial and ethnic minorities during election. It remains one of the most important civil rights laws in our country. Mr. Speaker, while coming to debate the reauthorization of the expiring provisions in this 109th Congress, we must keep in mind the limitations of the Voting Rights Reauthorization and Amendment Act of 2006, and how to make it more effective and allow our citizens access to one of their fundamental rights as guaranteed by the ideals of our nation.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I must commend the bipartisan effort to renew this legislation and