

sponsor of this bipartisan legislation, which ensures every American citizen has the right to vote.

If the Constitution is the embodiment of America's ideal of equality, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a historic milestone in our pursuit of that ideal. The namesakes of this legislation are among the tens of thousands of common heroes who fought, sacrificed and even perished to abolish the institutional barriers to voting that cast a shadow on American freedom for nearly 200 years. It is the responsibility of our generation to honor their legacy of vision and commitment through our diligent stewardship of their hard-won victories. Today, as America's elected representatives, we in Congress must renew our dedication to advance the cause of freedom by reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act.

Enacted in 1965 and renewed in 1982, the Voting Rights Act (VRA) prohibits the use of any voting practice or procedure that discriminates based on race and requires certain jurisdictions to provide language assistance to minority citizens. The Act bars literacy tests, poll taxes, intimidation, threats, violence and other transparent assaults on liberty. It also protects against insidious procedural barriers such as restrictive voter registration requirements, districting plans that dilute minority voting strength, discriminatory annexations and the siting of polling places at inaccessible locations.

The Department of Justice has called the Voting Rights Act "the most successful piece of civil rights legislation ever adopted." As a result of the Act in Mississippi, African American registration went from less than 10 percent in 1964 to almost 60 percent in 1968. In Alabama, registration rose from 24 percent to 57 percent. These immediate gains in access to the polls sowed seeds of equal representation that future generations would reap.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, there were approximately 300 African Americans serving in public office across the country in 1964, including only three in Congress. Today, more than 9,100 African Americans hold elected office at the local and state level, including 43 in Congress. The guarantees of full political participation codified in the VRA have greatly benefited all minority groups including Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans—the last group to win the right to vote. This impressive record of progress argues strongly for reauthorization of the Act.

While most provisions of the VRA are permanent, several key provisions of the law are set to expire in 2007. These provisions include Section 5, which requires covered jurisdictions to obtain approval or "pre-clearance" from the U.S. Department of Justice before they can change voting practices or procedures. Section 203 of the Act requires election officials to provide written and oral assistance to certain citizens with limited English proficiency. Also due for reauthorization are Sections 6–9, which empower the U.S. Attorney General to appoint examiners and send Federal observers to monitor elections when evidence exists of voter intimidation at the polls.

This bipartisan reauthorization bill restores the original intent of the VRA by making it clear that any voting rule changes motivated by intentional and purposeful discrimination cannot be "precleared" by a Federal court or the Department of Justice. And H.R. 9 mod-

ernizes the VRA by requiring the use of the most updated census data and by directing the GAO to determine ways to better administer election assistance to non-English speakers.

Despite broad bipartisan support within the Congress for reauthorization, some Members question whether the VRA's protections are still necessary in today's America. Regrettably, almost 40 years after enactment of the VRA, voting discrimination is not only a painful memory of our past but also a persistent challenge for the present and future. Since the VRA was last reauthorized in 1982, the Department of Justice and disfranchised voters have brought hundreds of intentional voter discrimination cases before the courts, many within the last 5 years.

In 2001, the mayor and all-white Board of Aldermen of Kilmichael, Mississippi canceled local elections when it appeared several African-American candidates might win seats. Elections were finally held in 2003, after the Department of Justice used the VRA to intervene. In the election that followed, the town elected three African-American board members and their first African-American mayor.

South Dakota enacted a redistricting plan in 2001 that "packed," or over-concentrated Native Americans into a district, preventing them from creating a majority voting bloc in an additional, neighboring district. Three years later, a Federal court invalidated the state's plan, finding "substantial evidence" that state officials excluded Native Americans from voting and holding office.

Local officials in Bexar County, Texas attempted to undermine Latino voting strength in a 2003 special election by neglecting to site polling places near those communities. Using the special provisions of the VRA, Latino advocates were able to prevent Latino voters from being silenced in the election by obtaining expedited assistance from the local district court.

And not all voting irregularities are local. The mere mention of "Florida" or "Ohio" evoke the voting controversies of the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections, which called the legitimacy of the outcomes into question and shook Americans' confidence in our elections process. The effort to reestablish confidence in the elections process has produced new controversies over electronic voting machines that leave no paper record for verification and recounts.

Clearly, the voting discrimination and irregularities that inspired the Voting Rights Act persist and serve to remind us that the right to vote cannot be taken for granted, but it must be actively protected and defended. By passing H.R. 9 and reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act, Congress reinforces the foundations of American democracy and keeps faith with generations of Americans past and future. I urge my colleagues to reject all attempts to weaken the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act (H.R. 9) and to support the bipartisan compromise before us today.

SUPPORT THE STEM CELL RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT ACT, H.R. 810

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 24, 2006

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I support moving stem cell research forward and believe H.R. 810 will accomplish it in an ethical and responsible manner.

It is almost 2 years since my daughter-in-law, Naomi, underwent a kidney transplant. I marvel at the combined results of the many people and years of science and research that came before her which gave her that opportunity.

Naomi was lucky and found an eligible donor in her brother. The transplant operation was a success. In fact, just a month ago, our family cheered on Naomi at the Transplant Olympics.

It seems like a happy ending, but the story does not end here.

My daughter-in-law takes a number of drugs to keep her body from rejecting her new kidney. I hope her body will be able to support her transplant for many years.

Hopefully, Naomi will not need to face another transplant for many, many years. Clearly, she may not be able to go to a sibling again.

Will new research bring her new hope in the future?

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, I have a personal reason for seeing an expansion of the existing stem cell lines.

New stem cell lines hold the promise of advancing medical research and providing cures to a number of diseases.

After years of work, both the House and Senate passed bipartisan stem cell legislation. Unfortunately, President Bush vetoed this critical bill. Despite a valiant effort in the House, we could not override this veto.

We need to think about tomorrow—what kind of future do we want to provide for the millions of individuals who live with life-threatening illnesses and their families?

If we don't move forward, we will not have the chance to develop innovative treatments, including the potential of growing kidneys.

I hope I can give Naomi and other families like ours that chance.

REGARDING THE GATES FOUNDATION'S WORK TO DEVELOP AN HIV VACCINE

HON. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, July 24, 2006

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, AIDS is a disease that knows no national borders. Approximately 40 million people across the globe are infected with this virus. There is no cure, and for many people, no hope.

Between 1995 and 2005, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS has doubled, despite efforts to prevent transmission of the disease. New infections among women outpace those among men as a result of gender inequalities and violence toward women. Ninety-