

change. By cutting this funding, we are increasing our greenhouse gas emissions and only ensuring that we will need exponentially more disaster relief in the future.

The United States needs high-speed rail—it is vital to the mobility of our people and to our economic competitiveness. Creating a nationwide high-speed rail system would be a major economic catalyst that would create thousands of jobs, save billions in congestion reduction, curb our reliance on fossil fuels, reduce harmful pollution, and literally, save lives. Recognizing its enormous benefits, nations across the world are investing billions in high-speed rail and are creating systems that surpass existing U.S. rail service in speed, convenience, reliability, level of service, and comfort.

My Democratic colleagues and I understand the importance of high-speed rail and are fighting for vital funding. President Obama also understands the importance of investing in passenger rail and has set the ambitious goal of providing 80 percent of Americans with convenient access to a passenger rail system within 25 years. To reach this goal, the President has proposed \$53 billion over six years to fund the development of high-speed rail and other passenger rail programs as part of an integrated national strategy. I support the President's goal, an important goal that will never come to fruition if the Majority continues to cut high-speed rail funding.

Building a nationwide high-speed rail system is the 21st century equivalent of constructing the national interstate highway system, a project that has transformed the Nation. To create a nationwide rail system, the government is going to need to dramatically increase its rail sector spending. The discrepancy in historical Federal investment between highways, aviation, and intercity passenger rail is staggering. Between 1958 and 2008, we invested nearly \$1.3 trillion in our Nation's highways and over \$473 billion in aviation. Federal investment in passenger rail pales in comparison: we invested only \$53 billion in passenger rail from 1971 to 2008.

The American people recognize the absence of high-speed rail in the American transportation sector and are clamoring for it. Not a day goes by that I am not asked by a constituent about the prospects of bringing high-speed rail to Memphis. And Memphis is now closer than ever to joining the high-speed rail network, since a study I fought to authorize that is examining the feasibility of connecting Memphis to the South Central Corridor is nearing completion. But this important rail line will only be built if the Majority recognizes the obvious value of high-speed rail and transitions from eliminating all funding for high-speed rail development to fighting for additional funding.

Having suffered through historic floods in Memphis this spring, I understand as well as any other member of this body how critical one billion dollars in disaster relief is. But I implore the Majority not to offset disaster relief with high-speed rail funding. We should not be forced to choose between leveraging our Nation's prosperity and paying for essential disaster relief.

VOTER SUPPRESSION

HON. DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 14, 2011

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of our vibrant, participatory democracy and to speak out against voter suppression. I thank my friend and colleague from Ohio, Congresswoman MARCIA FUDGE, for organizing this Special Order to raise the warning flag on efforts now under way in many States to erode hard fought voter protections.

In the past generation, public officials of both parties have sought to make it easier for Americans to participate in the political process. With the expansion of Early Voting, absentee balloting, and Election Day Registration, the fundamental right to vote has become more accessible for millions of Americans—all while the integrity and administration of our electoral system has been improved.

That progress and our American tradition of “expanding the franchise” are now under attack. In state houses across the country, legislatures have enacted unnecessary and politically-motivated restrictions on the right to vote.

In my home State of Florida, Governor Rick Scott signed a law that imposes such high burdens on voter registration drives that the non-partisan League of Women Voters has been forced to end its registration efforts. The same law arbitrarily makes it more difficult for voters who moved, to change their addresses at the polls, a process that has proven effective in Florida for decades.

As part of a disturbing national trend, the Florida law also cuts the required hours for Early Voting by nearly half, reducing the Early Vote period from 14 days down to just 8 days. I know firsthand the value of early voting for Florida's large senior population, many of whom have difficulty in getting to the polls. Reducing the number of early voting days will have a major impact on their ability to participate in our democratic process.

Even though Early Voting allows busy working voters more opportunities to reach the polls, legislatures in Ohio, Wisconsin, and Georgia have also passed significant cuts to their Early Voting time periods.

An Early Vote reduction was also proposed in North Carolina, but—for now—has stalled because it would actually cost taxpayers more dollars to restrict Early Voting than to maintain the current system.

Strict photo identification laws, in which voters would have to show a specific type of government-issued photo ID before casting a ballot at the polls, were proposed in 36 States. Wisconsin, Texas, Kansas and other States passed these unnecessary laws even though 11 percent of eligible American voters—approximately 23 million people nationwide—lack the photo ID these laws demand. Moreover, the Brennan Center for Justice has demonstrated that the elderly, racial minorities, and young voters all disproportionately lack access to government-issued photo ID and will therefore face the highest burdens under newly enacted photo ID laws.

In Maine, the governor signed a bill ending Election Day Registration even though 60,000 Mainers registered to vote in 2008 alone. In New Hampshire, the legislature actually

pushed a bill that would redefine “domicile” in order to prevent students from voting.

Is this the kind of message to send to young people who want to participate in our democracy?

Restrictions on the right to vote burden all Americans, but they especially affect communities of color and other citizens who have historically experienced discrimination at the ballot box.

The nonpartisan group Project Vote has found that African-Americans and Latinos are more likely than white voters to register through a voter registration drive, meaning that fewer minority Americans will have the chance to register and vote in Florida because of these biased actions.

Despite these inequities, State legislatures around the country have never justified any rationale for these unnecessary changes except for the broadly debunked myth of voter fraud. These efforts to prevent eligible Americans from voting will do nothing to improve our electoral system, but they will reverse years of bipartisan progress in making the right to vote more accessible for every qualified citizen.

In the face of this assault on the right to vote, I am heartened by the commitment of my colleagues and our partners in the civil rights community to preserve the right to vote, knock down unnecessary barriers to the franchise, and continue to work for the inclusions of all eligible Americans in our political process.

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

SPEECH OF

HON. MIKE MCINTYRE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 8, 2011

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2354) making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes:

Mr. MCINTYRE. Mr. Chair, I rise today in opposition of the Broun amendment to the fiscal year 2012 Energy and Water Appropriations bill that would transfer \$250,000 from the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission to the Budget Reduction Account. At a time of high unemployment and slow growth, the last thing Congress should be doing is killing engines for job creation.

Commissions similar to the Southeast Crescent Regional are a proven tool to help bring vital economic development to some of the poorest and most underserved parts of the country. Even before the financial crisis, many regions in the Southeast Crescent were suffering from job loss, generational problems of poverty and low economic development. Many of the counties in the Southeast Crescent, including those in states like Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida suffer from a high rate of poverty, below average income, and chronic unemployment. Since the economic recession, these rates have only gotten worse.

The Southeastern Crescent Regional Commission is based on the successful models of