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Speakers

Speaker(s): Hakeem S. Jeffries; Robin Kelly; Donald M. Payne Jr.; Barbara Lee; Robert C. Scott; Barbara Lee; George Kenneth Butterfield Jr.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker\'s announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. Kelly) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

General Leave

Ms. KELLY of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members be given 5 days in which to revise and extend their remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Illinois?

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There was no objection.

Ms. KELLY of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, tonight is a night of action and reflection for this Congress. This evening, the Congressional Black Caucus will take a look at a number of significant events that have occurred this year and discuss the urgent and pressing concerns of today.

In the waning weeks of 2015, we will have this moment of reflection in order to examine the issues that have caused our community the greatest concern. This conversation must be had, so we have to have an honest and impactful dialogue that will help Congress engage communities and act so we can create a better future today.

It is said that the blood brother of apathy is the inability to prioritize that which is important. Congress cannot afford to be apathetic any longer. We must get serious about the issues that threaten the true potential of our Nation-issues like gun violence that imperil our safety and security, issues like joblessness and wage discrimination that are barriers to our collective economic prosperity, issues like restrictive voting laws that are fundamentally contrary to the democratic right of American citizens and concerns with bad-apple community police.

The Congressional Black Caucus has come to this very floor numerous times to address many of these issues, and, sadly, this body has yet to act on many of these concerns.

Last week, in my home district, Chicago was rocked by a disturbing video that was released showing the police shooting of 17-year old Laquan McDonald. He had been shot 16 times by his arresting officer. Most of the shots were fired when McDonald was no longer standing. Some entered through his back.

I cannot begin to fully express the depth of my outrage at this senseless killing. The video is nothing short of horrific. Tonight, I want to express my condolences to the McDonald family, for whom the pain of losing their loved one has undoubtedly been compounded by having his death on public display.

There is a role that Representatives in Congress can play in putting the issues of violence in our communities in the forefront. We have chosen not to.

As horrifying as the video of Laquan's death is, it needed to be made public because the lingering questions surrounding this case and cases like the death of Walter Scott are equally disturbing.

In reflecting on this tragedy, I want to take a moment to give my thanks to the many activists in Chicago who expressed their outrage in a civil and productive way and, particularly, the young activists.

I remain encouraged by those who have been at the forefront of the call for justice for Laquan and their positive and productive movement for change. It is an example I hope all Americans will follow in helping to create a fairer, more equitable system of justice for us all.

So, in that vein, tonight we will have a conversation about how, in the midst of these tragedies and national adversity, the Congressional Black Caucus is working and achieving positive and productive moments of change.

In this hour, you will hear from my colleagues about efforts the CBC has led to usher in criminal justice reform, about the work of the CBC in increasing diversity in the tech sector through our TECH 2020 initiative, about the CBC Health Braintrust work and addressing the issue of health disparities through the release of the 2015 Kelly Report, about how we are raising awareness and working to bring back kidnapped victims of Boko Haram in Nigeria, and about how the CBC has been a critical broker in numerous legislative efforts before this Congress.

There is much to discuss this evening because there is much worth reflecting on and celebrating.

Mr. Speaker, this is Mr. Payne and my last Special Order hour for the year. I must say that, while this time has flown by, it has been an honor and a privilege to represent this distinguished caucus.

So I yield to the distinguished gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Donald Payne, Jr., my very distinguished partner in crime for this past few months, or year, actually.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my dear friend and colleague, Congresswoman Kelly, for anchoring this final Congressional Black Caucus Special Order hour. In fact, I would like to thank Congresswoman Kelly for coanchoring all the Special Order hours with me throughout 2015. It has been my real honor and pleasure to spend all these Mondays with you bringing forth issues that matter in our community.

I would also like to thank the CBC chair, Congressman G.K. Butterfield, for his outstanding leadership this past year.

I appreciate you choosing me to coanchor these congressional Special Order hours with Congresswoman Kelly. It is a great honor, and we are a body of 40-plus, so to have that honor to be chosen means a great deal to me. And I am certain that 2016's coanchors will proudly serve, as we have.

As Congresswoman Kelly mentioned, we are here to reflect on all the work that the Congressional Black Caucus has done throughout the year, to look at the accomplishments.

In February, we kicked off the CBC Special Order hour by reflecting on the 50th anniversary of the March on Selma, where we are today, and where we are headed for tomorrow. Through this hour, we were able to set the tone for the Congressional Black Caucus agenda with our leader, G.K. Butterfield, at the helm.

We remembered all the strides that were made by African Americans to the place that we are today. We reflected on the work that is being done right now through the caucus in the House of Representatives.

And, most importantly, during that hour, we looked towards the future. We intend to put forward the most effort in order to make sure that African Americans are well-represented and afforded equally in all phases of these United States.

Monday after Monday, we have addressed the many challenges and inequalities that face African American communities. We have contributed to this country with blood, sweat, and tears, hard work and entrepreneurial ideas and inclusiveness. We aren't owed anything. We are a significant thread in the cloth that makes this United States grow.

We have talked about criminal justice reform, economics, unemployment, underemployment, incarceration, voting rights, felon disenfranchisement, and health disparities, and those are just a few of the issues that we have tackled this year.

As we have been known to be called the "conscience of the Congress," we continue to put forth issues that are relevant and prevalent in today's society. I have just been honored to be part of the spokes-team to bring awareness and raise these issues on a week-to-week basis.

Ms. KELLY of Illinois. Thank you, Congressman Payne. Thank you for those kinds words. It has truly been an honor serving with you.

I yield to the esteemed chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, the gentleman from North Carolina, Congressman G.K. Butterfield.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Thank you, Ms. Kelly.

Let me begin this evening by first thanking Congressman Donald Payne, Jr., from the Tenth District of New Jersey for his friendship and for his tireless work on behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus and on behalf of the people that he represents back home in the great State of New Jersey.

Thank you, Mr. Payne, for your work, and thank you for the kind words that you had to say about me this evening.

And to my other colleague, Congresswoman Robin Kelly from the Second District of Illinois, not only do you manage the floor on Monday nights, Ms. Kelly, on behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus, but you also are the chair of our CBC Health Braintrust that does so much for so many.

You also have carved out a niche. You have begun to focus the attention of the Nation on the issue of gun violence in our country.

So I want to begin this presentation this evening by thanking both of you for your work.

Mr. Speaker, many of my colleagues here this evening, especially the newer ones to this body, may not fully understand what the CBC is. The Congressional Black Caucus is an organization.

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It is a caucus of African American Members of Congress.

We were founded in 1971. But, Mr. Speaker, that does not mean that 1971 was the first year that this body had African American Members of Congress. Actually, the first African American was elected to Congress in 1870.

There were some 21 African Americans who served in this body during Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction. The CBC formally organized, Mr. Speaker, in 1971 with 13 Members. Over the years, those 13 members have now grown into 46 members.

I might say that two of the founding members of the CBC continue to belong to this body. They are Congressman John Conyers from Michigan, who is actually the dean of the House, as well as Congressman Charles Rangel from the State of New York. They were two of our founding members.

The CBC, as I said, now consists of 46 members. Of the 46 members, one is from the other body, from the United States Senate, and 45 serve here in the House of Representatives.

I might say that one of our 45 members is a Republican Member of this body, our dear friend from Utah (Mrs. Love). And so it is absolutely correct for us to say that we are bicameral and we are bipartisan.

Collectively, we represent 23 States in addition to the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands. Collectively, Mr. Speaker, we represent more than 30 million people.

I might say, of the 21 standing committees that we have here in this House, 7 of those 21 committees have a CBC member as the top Democrat on the committee. We call that the ranking member. The gentleman who will speak in just a moment, Mr. Scott of Virginia, is one of those ranking members on the Committee on Education and the Workforce.

Mr. Speaker, this past year has been very demanding on CBC members. We have been busy. We have consistently fought back every day and every week against Republican attempts to balance the budget on the backs of hardworking Americans-not just African Americans, but hardworking Americans, Black, White, and Brown.

The struggle continues. We, as the CBC, have been focused on many different things. I will mention just a few. In the interest of time, we have been focusing on criminal justice reform because that is so important to the African American community.

We have been protecting-or trying to protect-the social safety net that many of our vulnerable communities depend on. We have been trying to enhance educational opportunities for African American students and strengthening and preserving HBCUs, that is, Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Mr. Speaker, we have spent considerable energy this year trying to have full enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. As many of my colleagues may know, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in a decision some years ago, 4 years ago-actually, in 2013 it was-that the Voting Rights Act, at least a part of it-that part that deals with preclearance of voting changes-that that section could not be enforced until this Congress redefined the formula for determining which States or which counties should be subject to that part of the Voting Rights Act, and this Congress has not acted.

This Congress continues to not fully enforce the Voting Rights Act. We have exposed that and we continue to fight. We are talking about diversity in corporate America, and we are going to hear more about that in the years to come.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we have talked about investments in underserved communities.

Mr. Speaker, we have attempted to carry out these priorities. This year the CBC launched the CBC TECH 2020. This initiative brings together the best minds in technology in nonprofit education in the public sector to increase African American inclusion at all levels of the technology industry.

In addition to outlining best practices for diversity principles, CBC TECH 2020 has empowered our members to provide resources for African American students and entrepreneurs through the introduction of legislation focused on increasing STEM education.

I would hope that every American would embrace that concept, the concept of STEM education-science, technology, engineering, and mathematics-and workforce development, cybersecurity, and copyright and patent reform.

In August, we traveled to Silicon Valley, talked to the technology giants like Apple, Google, Bloomberg, and Intel about their diversity efforts. We were pleased with their response and their willingness to improve the diversity within their companies.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we revamped the biweekly CBC message to America. We now broadcast across several digital platforms. The messages to America have been highly received. They have been widely watched with some of our most popular messages focusing on criminal justice reform, police violence, poverty, education, the importance of HBCUs, and ending the stigma of racism in America.

Finally, on August 6, the CBC recognized the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. In the 2 years following the Supreme Court's ruling to overturn section 4 in the Shelby County v. Holder case, voting rights have come under assault, Mr. Speaker. They have come under renewed assault.

Since 2010, new voting restrictions have been put in place in 22 States, making it harder for millions of eligible Americans to exercise their right to vote. The CBC has been very vocal on these efforts, including outreach in Wisconsin. We filed an amicus brief in the States of Wisconsin, in North Carolina, and in Alabama.

The CBC has asserted for years that Black Americans are unfairly treated and disproportionately exposed to the criminal justice system. Police bias and excessive use of force are real in the African American community. We see it every day. We must restore the American people's trust in our criminal justice system.

Finally, we have worked to expand the economic opportunities for African Americans. The CBC, in coordination with the Joint Economic Committee Democrats, have held two public forums in Baltimore and Harlem, I might say, entitled "The American Dream on Hold: Economic Challenges in the African American Community," where we discussed with those communities the impact of economic challenges and persistent inequities facing African American communities across the country.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many more things that I could say about the work of the Congressional Black Caucus. We are busy. We are engaged every day not only representing African Americans, but representing every American who is affected by some of the policies that have been enacted by this Congress.

Thank you for the time this evening.

Ms. KELLY of Illinois. Thank you, Congressman Butterfield. That was certainly a great list of our achievements. Like you said, that was just some of the things that we have been able to accomplish, and there is a lot more that you can say. We can go on and on. Thank you for your leadership and making sure that we get some of these things done.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Ms. Kelly, I believe you mentioned to Mr. Payne that he was your partner in crime. I want those who may be watching this on television to know that was really a joke.

Ms. KELLY of Illinois. Of course. At this time, I yield to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Scott).

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Illinois and the gentleman from New Jersey for organizing this Special Order tonight. It takes a lot of work and a lot of time to organize these efforts, and I want to thank them both for the time and effort that they have put into this.

We have heard a lot about what the Congressional Black Caucus has done over the years. There are two areas that I have been personally involved in with the CBC effort in the areas of education and criminal justice reform. On both we have worked hard and achieved bipartisan support.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is a civil rights bill, makes sure that the admonition in *Brown v. Board of Education* becomes a reality. It says that no child shall reasonably be expected to succeed in life if denied the opportunity of an education and such an opportunity must be made available to all on equal terms. That is what the *Brown* decision held.

But we know that we don't have equal education in America because we

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fund it primarily through the real estate tax, guaranteeing that wealthy areas will have more resources for education than low-income areas.

So 50 years ago we passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides funding directed primarily to help the challenges in educating low-income children particularly in concentrated areas of poverty.

No Child Left Behind a few years ago added to that by making sure that we ascertained whether or not there are achievement gaps in certain groups and requires action to be taken to solve those achievement gaps.

This week we should reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to ensure that the needs of all children are addressed. That legislation has just come out of conference. It came out of conference with an overwhelming-almost unanimous-vote, a bipartisan vote. So we look forward to the continuation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Mr. Speaker, the next area that we are going to be working on is the Higher Education Act, also originally passed 50 years ago. When President Johnson signed that bill, he pointed out that every child should be able to go to any college in any State. Back then that was actually a reality because a low-income student with a maximum Pell Grant and a summer job could virtually work his way through college with no debt.

Now, because the buying power of the Pell Grant has eroded, instead of 75 percent of the cost of education, now it is down to about one-third and the rest has to be picked up with devastating student loans. We need to pass a Higher Education Act that makes access to college a reality, not just a dream.

We can do that, and there is bipartisan support for that effort. So in education we are making progress with the Congressional Black Caucus and we have been able to achieve bipartisan support.

It is interesting that we have also been able to achieve bipartisan support in the criminal justice reform efforts. We have a problem in criminal justice now because, for decades, we have been passing all these slogans and sound bites, particularly, mandatory minimums that have run our incarceration rate up to number one in the world by far. We have 5 percent of the world's population and 25 percent are prisoners.

Several recent studies have pointed out that our incarceration rate is so high that it is actually counterproductive; that is, we have got so many children being raised with parents in prison and we have got so many people with felony records that can't find jobs and the prison budget in the Department of Justice is eating up so much of the budget that the other things that can actually reduce crime don't have the funds that they actually need.

One bipartisan effort that we were able to achieve late last year was the Death in Custody Reporting Act, which requires any death in the custody of law enforcement-that is a death in jail, a death in prison, or death in the process of arrest-will be reported to the Justice Department so that the discussion about all of these deaths can be based on facts, not just speculation.

We also are in the process of trying to pass criminal justice reform. The Judiciary Committee, in a subcommittee task force led by Jim Sensenbrenner from Wisconsin and myself, had an overcriminalization task force. The one thing we noticed was that 30 States were able to reduce incarceration and reduce crime at the same time.

One example was Texas. Texas was faced with a \$2 billion request for prison expansion to keep up with the slogans and sound bites that they had been codifying over the years-\$2 billion. Someone suggested, instead of spending \$2 billion, how about trying to spend a couple of hundred million-research-based, evidence-based targeted expenditures-to actually reduce crime, and maybe they wouldn't have to spend all \$2 billion.

Well, that is what they did. They intelligently spent. With a research-based and evidence-based approach to reduce crimes, they made those expenditures and looked up. They didn't have to build any new prisons at all. In fact, they were able to close some of the prisons they had. Over 30 States have reduced crime and saved money just in using the same strategy.

So as a result of the overcriminalization task force, we created a comprehensive criminal justice bill that starts with investments in prevention and early intervention, has diversion to drug courts so that people with drug problems can have their problems solved rather than just spinning through the criminal justice system, a significant reduction in mandatory minimums so they would be reserved for true kingpins, not for people caught up in the conspiracy, like girlfriends and things like that.

Only the true kingpins would get the mandatory minimums. Everyone else would get a sentence that made sense. If you go to jail, then you should be rehabilitated, not just warehoused, and we should have funding for Second Chance programs.

The beauty of the bill is that the savings in prison space by the reduction in mandatory minimums will be redirected to pay for the prevention and early intervention, the drug courts, the prison reform efforts, and the Second Chance programs so all of those programs are paid for.

We also have significant funding for police training. As we go through the trauma of these trials that are going on as we speak in Baltimore and Chicago, when you get to a solution, it will undoubtedly involve police training and probably body cameras, and those are funded in the Safe Justice Act by diverting money from the savings in mandatory minimums to those programs. We have broad bipartisan support, many very conservative, many very liberal organizations, all supporting the Safe Justice Act and other criminal justice reform efforts. The Black Caucus should be proud of the efforts that they have put in to making sure that we have a fair and equitable criminal justice system.

I would like to thank again the gentlewoman from Illinois for all of her hard work and the gentleman from New Jersey for his hard work in pointing out many of the good things that the Congressional Black Caucus has accomplished, many things they have accomplished this year and a lot of things we are working on for next year. So I thank you for your hard work and dedication.

We have a conference committee report that came out with an overwhelming bipartisan vote that will ensure that young people will have their educational needs met. I want to thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. Kline) for his hard work and cooperation on that bill.

Ms. KELLY of Illinois. Thank you for the information on the Safety Justice Act and education. The two really go hand in hand. If our young people have more skills and are educated, then I think that we will see less crime. We always say, in my area, "Nothing stops a bullet like a job," so thank you for that information and for all of your hard work.

At this time, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Lee), a woman of great knowledge and experience, and one of my heroes.

Ms. LEE. First, let me thank Congresswoman Kelly for those very generous remarks, but also for your tremendous leadership and for staying the course and making sure that we are here really speaking truth to power each and every week on behalf of the Black Caucus.

Also, to you, Congressman Don Payne, thank you very much for your leadership and for really rising to the occasion on so many issues. In the very short time that you have been here, you have hit the ground running and really have made a tremendous difference.

I want to just speak for a few minutes as it relates to the review of the Congressional Black Caucus for the last year or 2 years. I have to just say that our leader, Mr. Butterfield, has been a very bold and tremendous leader. We have accomplished quite a bit, and we have a lot more to do. While 2015 has been very challenging, I believe that the Congressional Black Caucus has really stepped up and made a huge difference not only for the African American community and communities of color, but for the entire country.

It has also been an inspiring year. We have seen the birth and growth of the

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vital Black Lives Matter movement. We have also witnessed powerful and moving protests across the country in places like Missouri, New York, and even in my district in Oakland and in Berkeley, California, with people of all backgrounds and ages coming together to demand justice, to petition their government, to exercise their democratic rights.

I am so proud of the young activists who are standing up and demanding an end to racism and injustice in many of our communities. They are truly bringing the civil rights movement into the 21st century. I want them to know that they have allies here in the people's House.

For too long Congress has ignored or brushed aside issues affecting the African American community and other communities of color. It is past time that everyone steps up and does the good work that we were sent to Washington to do, that the Congressional Black Caucus has done for many, many decades.

We need to start by talking about and looking at what has happened with the Voting Rights Act. As you know, this year marks the 50th anniversary of this landmark legislation. The Voting Rights Act was gutted by the Supreme Court in its Shelby v. Holder decision, and, of course, Republican State legislators have fallen all over to restrict voting rights across the country everywhere.

These dangerous restrictions come in the form of voter ID requirements, elimination of same-day voter registration, and really severe reduction in early voting efforts. We must call these efforts for what they are: Republican attempts to take away one of our most fundamental rights. But we will not let this happen.

I am so proud of the Congressional Black Caucus-Congresswoman Terri Sewell and John Lewis and Mr. Clyburn, the entire Congressional Black Caucus. Our bill, H.R. 2867, the Voting Rights Advancement Act, sponsored by Congresswoman Sewell, who represents Selma, Alabama, would restore the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act for any State that has had 15 or more voting rights violations in the last 25 years in the preclearance process.

As Dr. King once said: Give us the ballot, and we will fill our legislative halls with men-and, of course, women-with goodwill.

We can fill this body with those who really want to see democracy fulfilled. So we need our young people to keep up the street heat and demand that Congress act.

It is past time that we get serious about restoring the Voting Rights Act and ensuring that all Americans-and that means all Americans-have free and unobstructed access to the ballot box.

Also, the serious economic disparities that persist in the African American community are very, very evident. According to a report released earlier this year by the Joint Economic Committee, led by ranking member Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, and the Congressional Black Caucus, we learned, and it is very glaring, that more than one in three Black children are born into poverty, and the African American poverty rate is three times that of White Americans.

The cycle of poverty and inequality starts in our school systems, where Black students account for 42 percent of preschool student expulsions, despite accounting for only 18 percent of enrollment. Now, that is preschool expulsion. Every time I remember this and say this, it really makes me very terrified about what is taking place with young Black kids, especially with young Black boys, because there is no way anybody, no kids, should be expelled from preschool. That is ages 1 to 4. That is outrageous.

I am the mother, yes, of two fabulous great Black men, and I am the grandmother of two Black boys, and I find statistics like that very, very troubling. For African Americans, we have allowed our school system to be turned into a pipeline to prison. We must act now to address systemic issues facing our education and our criminal justice systems.

I want to applaud Congressman Bobby Scott and Congressman Conyers because they have worked for decades on criminal justice reform, and we are beginning to see some progress as a result of their very diligent work.

Our criminal justice system is broken. It needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. So alongside of our CBC colleagues, once again we are calling for comprehensive criminal justice reform.

Also, I want to mention our effort, which I co-chair with Chairman Butterfield, our Tech 2020 initiative. Silicon Valley is right next to my district in California. There are great opportunities there for everyone.

However, the tech industry has not been inclusive of hiring and contracting with and working with communities of color, especially the African American community. So I am very pleased that the Tech 2020 of the Congressional Black Caucus has been initiated. We are working with our great leader, Reverend Jesse Jackson, with an inside-outside strategy. Many of the tech companies understand what is taking place and that they need to be an industry that is inclusive of everyone.

So the Black Caucus along with Rainbow PUSH, along with the tech industry are working on a variety of strategies to make sure that this industry which provides good-paying jobs and opportunities is an industry that is inclusive, that does not discriminate, and that includes the diversity of this great country.

So I have to just say to Congresswoman Kelly and Congressman Payne, thank you for giving us a chance to talk about so many of the issues that we have been working on. When you look at the issue of poverty, cutting poverty in half in 10 years, we know how to do it. We have legislation, the Half in Ten Act, H.R. 258, to do that, and the Pathways Out of Poverty Act, H.R. 2721. We know how to provide opportunities. The Congressional Black Caucus once again is leading on all of these fronts. It is a big agenda, but it is an agenda that makes our country stronger.

So thank you, Congresswoman Kelly, and thank you, Congressman Payne, for the chance to be with you tonight.

Ms. KELLY of Illinois. Thank you, Congresswoman Lee. You have brought up so many issues that are so interconnected-again, education, diversity inclusion. When you think about preschoolers getting expelled, that is not a good start. And what message does it send to that young man or that young woman or that little boy or that little girl? But all of the things that you talked about-voting rights-are all interconnected, and we need to accomplish all of those goals for a better America, and not just for African Americans, but for everybody.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much.

I just want to say that I think what is reflective in the Congressional Black Caucus' agenda and all of the work that we have done for so many years is really an effort to show that how, if you ensure that opportunity is there for everyone, including African Americans and communities of color and people who have been shut out and marginalized, our country becomes stronger. This means that everybody benefits-not only for the Congressional Black Caucus, this is for the entire country. So thank you again for your leadership.

Ms. KELLY of Illinois. Well, we want to thank you for your leadership and all of the work that you have done to make Congress stronger, as well as the caucus stronger.

At this time, I yield to the gentleman from Brooklyn, New York (Mr. Jeffries).

Mr. JEFFRIES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished gentlewoman for yielding. And I also thank, of course, my good friend and colleague, Congressman Don Payne, from across the Hudson River, who does such a tremendous job of representing the people of Newark and Essex County.

It has been an honor and a privilege to watch my two colleagues during this year preside over the CBC Special Order hour, giving us, as a caucus, an opportunity to share with the American people some of our thoughts and ideas and the issues that we are working on to improve a lot of those that we represent in the African American community and all across this great, gorgeous mosaic in the United States of America.

I am troubled, of course, by the events of the last few days as relates to the Laquan McDonald case out of

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Robin Kelly's hometown in Chicago. About a year ago, many of us from the Congressional Black Caucus were on this very House floor talking about the failure to indict in the killing of Michael Brown; and in the same week, 3 days later, the failure to indict in the strangulation of Eric Garner, who, of course, was put into an unauthorized choke hold and killed as a result of allegedly selling loose cigarettes.

It, of course, highlighted the problem of African American men being killed at the hands of police officers, which is a decade-old problem that, hopefully, here in America we will find the courage one day to confront.

And now, of course, we are compelled to come to the House floor to deal with the tragedy of the Laquan McDonald case, a 17-year-old shot 16 times in 15 seconds by an officer who had 20 prior civilian complaints filed against him. I am no mathematician, but those numbers simply do not add up. The tape comes out and we see what occurred: an individual, Laquan, who was walking away from the officers, not toward the officers. There is no reasonable circumstance, I believe, that led to that individual being shot down like a dog on the streets of Chicago.

The officer has now been indicted 13 months later, and, hopefully, the justice system will run its course and the officer will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

I am here today to talk briefly about another troubling issue that relates to this problem of the police use of excessive force. That is not just the bad apples who engage in this behavior; it is the fact that, far too often, the police officers in the department, who may not otherwise engage in excessive force but who have grown up in a culture of a blue wall of silence, support these officers either with their inaction or, in some instances, by actively participating in a coverup.

Now, I know that is hard for a lot of Americans to hear because, listen, I also believe that the overwhelming majority of officers are hardworking individuals who are there to protect and serve.

I don't take lightly the fact that I am here concerned on the House floor that far too many officers stand by, tolerate, and enable the excessive use of force, sometimes resulting in American citizens being killed without justification.

This case actually highlights the problem. Laquan gets killed, and if you look at the reports in the immediate aftermath of his death last October-and I just pulled a few-here is what we were told.

"The suspect fled, and officers gave chase, police said. When the officers confronted him near 41st Street and Pulaski Road, he refused their orders to drop the knife and began walking toward the officers, police said.

"Pat Camden, spokesman for the Chicago Fraternal Order of Police, said the teen had a `crazed` look about him as he approached the officers with the knife."

That was reported by CBS.

Let's go to NBC. "Responding officers found a 17-year-old boy `with a strange gaze about him,` who was carrying a knife and wouldn't drop it when police ordered him to do so, Fraternal Order of Police spokesman Pat Camden said.

"Other officers used a squad car to try and box the boy in against a fence near West 41st Street and South Pulaski Road, Camden said. An officer shot him in the chest when the teen didn't drop the knife and continued to walk toward officers, police said."

WGN-TV: "Chicago police officers shot and killed a 17-year-old after a foot chase near 41st Street and Pulaski . . . Officers shot the teen after he waved the knife at them."

In the interest of time, let me just read one more. This is from the Chicago Tribune: "Officers got out of their car and began approaching McDonald, again telling him to drop the knife, Camden said. The boy allegedly lunged at the officers, and one of them opened fire."

" `When police tell you to drop a weapon, all you have to do is drop it.' "

I mean, Shakespeare would be proud at the fiction that was put out there to justify the murder of this 17-year-old.

Here is what is worse. It has now been reported that in the immediate aftermath of the shooting four or five officers went to a nearby Burger King and asked to view the surveillance tape. The manager at Burger King gives them the password to the video. They spend a couple of hours in Burger King-I mean, a couple of hours in Burger King, allegedly-and then they leave.

Then internal affairs officers apparently come in the days afterward, and they pull the tape. Guess what? Eighty-six minutes are missing. It happens to be the 86 minutes that cover the period of time when Laquan McDonald was killed.

When we come to the House floor and people across the country say Black lives matter and they are concerned about the lack of justice in the system, understand that it is not just the excessive use of force; it is the fact that far too many officers, law enforcement folks, participate actively in covering up what has occurred.

Until we deal with that cancer of the blue wall of silence, we are going to continue to have to come to this House floor, and you are going to continue to see individuals be killed as a result of the use of excessive force.

It is an American problem that we should confront, and we should confront it boldly and directly and without hesitation if we really want to uplift the best values of our great democracy.

I thank Congresswoman Kelly, and I thank Congressman Payne for their tremendous leadership.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his profound remarks on this occasion.

I have my own remarks in reference to what happened to this youngster. That is what he was-a youngster, a child. I have 17-year-old triplets. God forbid my children find themselves in that predicament.

I will not even try to match the remarks by the gentleman from New York. I think he stated the case clearly.

Black lives matter. I know there is a segment in this country that gets upset when they hear that, but you need to understand what they are saying. It is: Why is there no worth to African American lives? That is what they are asking. Why is it so easy that we continually find people of color on the wrong end of these weapons?

Then to have it covered up in the manner in which the gentleman from New York stated-86 minutes. Now, my children love Burger King, but you only need 20 minutes if there is a line in Burger King to do what you need to do. But they spent hours there, getting their story right, making sure everybody would corroborate what they were going to say.

That is why "Black Lives Matter" exists. That is why we continue to bring these issues up. That is why we will not let it go quietly into the night.

Everybody has seen that videotape. When did he lunge? When was he shot once in the chest? When did any of those things that were reported occur in that video? He was walking away. He did still have the knife in his hand, but he was walking away. Most of the shots that were put into his body were after he was on the ground. The officer feared for his life.

Black lives matter.

Our next speaker is the gentlewoman from Houston, Texas, the wonderful, dynamic, one of my heroes, the Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I thank the gentleman from New Jersey and the gentlewoman from Illinois but I want to specifically say Chicago. I join my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is, again, an important statement of the value of the Congressional Black Caucus. I am glad our tone is such that we are compassionate, we have emotion, but we are detailed.

With the remaining time, let me try to be concise on the value of the Congressional Black Caucus in American history, its place in this Congress to be the provocative orators and articulators of the conscience of this Nation.

Let me first of all say that I have been privileged but certainly have mourned May 15, when all of us paid attention to fallen law enforcement officers who are honored here in the United States Capitol. Any number of us has gone to the grounds, and we have hugged those from our districts, we have honored families, and we have recognized the pain.

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I think many of you recall that there was an assassination of sorts of a deputy sheriff in Houston, a number of unfortunate assassinations or shootings of police in New York, and I saw the Nation mourn.

I think it is important to say this because, often, when we say "Black lives matter," it seems conflicted. People raise the issues that African Americans or the Nation seem to be hesitant about law enforcement officers, and that is not true.

I want to thank the Congressional Black Caucus and Chairman Butterfield because we started out this year with a criminal justice agenda. I just want to quickly go down memory lane or to reflect very quickly to say that it was the leadership and the combined Members who raised a number of issues that have brought us to the point that we have actually passed in the Senate and in the House Judiciary Committee criminal justice sentencing legislation.

We are not where we need to be, but the Sentencing Reform Act will reduce mass incarceration by 11,500. Of those who are currently incarcerated, it will give retroactive relief, and an additional 4,000 will benefit each year. Combined with that, it will be 50,000 over 10 years.

We are beginning to look at the criminal justice system in a way that speaks to the whole idea of Blacks, minorities, Hispanics, and others being the fodder for the criminal justice system. In my district in Houston, Texas, Black and Hispanic youth make up over 75 percent of the male population age 10 to 24 years, but Black and Hispanic youth account for 85 percent of the youth admitted in our detention centers.

We are working on the reduction of sentencing, and I think with the help of this bipartisan legislation, which has been initiated and brought to the attention of this Congress by members of the Congressional Black Caucus in working with other Members of this body, both Republicans and Democrats, we have legislation that should pass.

As we all know and as we have been mystified and mourning this tape, I know that Congresswoman Kelly in her hometown has been a champion for justice, along with her fellow colleagues of the Congressional Black Caucus, Bobby Rush and Danny Davis, who have been front and center on these issues. So we must continue the journey of dealing with the juvenile justice.

Might I say that I hope we will come around the issues of the RAISE Act, of the Fair Chance for Youth Act, and of Kalief's Law, ending solitary confinement for young people in the juvenile justice system, banning the arrest record, and, of course, giving alternative sentencing to these young people.

I want to quickly get back to this horrific shooting, because what "Black Lives Matter" speaks to is coming together around an improved law enforcement system. That is why I came to the floor today-to be able to say, unless we move forward on legislation that deals with best practices in our police departments, we are going to continue the tension that should not exist.

There is no explanation or no answer to the video that has been shown. I wonder what the sentencing or the reaction or the ultimate result would have been if there were a video of Darren Wilson and Michael Brown. There was not. I still believe that with Michael Brown, an unarmed youth, his actor, who happened to be a law enforcement person, should not have gone unpunished.

In this instance, we see a video that was completely mischaracterized, or, in essence, the story was characterized completely contrary to the video that was shown. So what is the answer?

Law enforcement officers who I work with all the time will indicate that there are bad apples, and they are right. Then work with us to pass the Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity Act, which provides the roadmap and the incentive for all of these departments to be accredited and to have officers go through the specific training that documents how you address the question of the street.

It includes video cameras. It includes community-oriented policing. It includes grants to incentivize better training and better training practices.

We must find an answer in this term of Congress. We should not end this Congress without a complete and reformed criminal justice system, including dealing with law enforcement, which is clearly what the Congressional Black Caucus has been working on.

So I am hoping that we can find this common ground because there is no explanation that is reasonable or rational of the actions of the officer in Chicago.

There is no reasonable explanation to the officer in the Sandra Bland case. Ladies and gentlemen, you remember this young woman dying in a jail. They have yet to come up with an indictment or a response. They have yet to have an answer of the jail that standards were an embarrassment in Waller County.

The District Attorney has yet to come forward in the Sandra Bland case. The family has not been notified. The lawyer doesn't know what is going on. We met with those individuals not to direct them, but to ensure that they were going to respect this death. Nothing has happened about the stop that we saw in the video. Nothing has happened about the jail incarceration.

I simply have come to the floor to indicate to my colleagues, Republicans and Democrats, to work with us on a number of issues that those in the Congressional Black Caucus reach out in the spirit of bipartisanship, dealing with the Voting Rights Reauthorization in section 5, providing opportunities for Historically Black Colleges which we have been at the leadership realm of, making sure that the criminal justice system addresses the overincarceration of our youth, dealing with the question of policing, which the Black Lives Matters speaks to it eloquently.

We should not be condemned for the massive protests of 10,000 people down this wonderful Michigan Avenue as: There they go again. We have got to find a place at the table to be able to reorient, if you will, how we do policing in America. I would ask my colleagues that we move swiftly in this term in this Congress to be able to address this.

Let me finish on this one last point. The violence of guns is outrageous. I want to speak very quietly about the Planned Parenthood incident because I don't want to provoke, but I believe it is important to note we always say for those who don't want to hear us about gun safety closing the gun show loophole, banning assault weapons which the individual had.

However it plays out, the individual may be determined to have a mental health concern or condition, but he had an automatic rifle of some sort. And, unfortunately, we lost several persons in the course of the incident, although the investigation is still ongoing.

It also happens in Black-on-Black crime. My friends, our community doesn't ignore that. But what we say is that guns are involved in most of these deaths. Not only are guns involved, but we must understand that, when a gun is used by an officer, it is distinct from Black-on-Black crime because it is under color of law.

The Congressional Black Caucus comes to the table to ensure that these very sensitive issues are handled with the greatest delicacy, but with the greatest commitment and passion that we want to stop the killing, stop the deaths, and have the decency to reflect on a parent like Mr. Payne, a parent like Ms. Kelly, a parent like myself.

Black lives matter. Our children matter. The Congressional Black Caucus wants to work to ensure that we have the answers that the American people have asked us for and that they deserve.

As a senior member of the House Committee on Homeland Security as well as the Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Investigations, I am pleased to join my colleagues of the Congressional Black Caucus for this Special Order to speak to the issues that members of the 114th Congress must address.

No other country imprisons a larger percentage of its population than the United States or spends anywhere near the \$6.5 billion that we spend annually on prison administration.

We now know that the cost of imprisoning so many non-violent offenders is fiscally unsustainable and morally unjustifiable and it

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will take the combined efforts of policy makers, reform advocates, legal professionals, and private citizens to solve the problem.

Congress took a giant step forward on the road to reform with a law I co-sponsored, the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, which eliminated the crack versus powder disparity. Earlier this month, the House took another big step when its Judiciary Committee favorably reported another bill I sponsored, the Sentence Reform Act of 2015 (H.R. 3713), which will help reform a criminal justice system that often seems less effective at reforming criminals and more effecting in inflicting collateral damage on families and communities.

Specifically, the Sentence Reform Act will reduce mass incarceration by making over 11,500 individuals, who are currently incarcerated, eligible for retroactive relief and an additional 4,000 will benefit each year. Combined, this is over 50,000 in ten years. These estimates are conservative, as not all the positive reforms can be quantified.

Today, we know also that more and more young children are being arrested, incarcerated, and detained in lengthy out-of-home placements.

Our youth easily encounter law enforcement through the mass transit on the way to school, the school resource officer at school, and patrol officers on the way home.

A youth experience behavior issues when encountered should not be arrested but assessed for underlying issues that can nearly always be handled without ever having contact with the justice system.

At least 75 percent of children within the juvenile justice system have experienced traumatic victimization, making them vulnerable to mental health disorders and perceived behavioral non-compliance and misconduct.

Numerous studies have also shown that as many as 70-80 percent of youth involved in the justice system meet the criteria for a disability.

In my district in Houston, Texas, Black and Hispanic Youth make up over 75% of the male population aged 10-24 years.

Yet, Black and Hispanic Youth account for 85% of youth admitted in our detention centers.

A majority of these admissions into detention are for minor and misdemeanor offenses-behavior that should not require locking youth up.

Especially when the rate of detention continues to reflect disproportionate minority contact and criminalization of minority youth.

As we look to reform our juvenile and criminal justice system, and be what President Obama has called upon us be: "My Brother's and Sister's Keeper"-we must move away from the engrained culture of criminalization as the answer to our problems.

These include:

I have introduced 13 additional pieces of legislation this Congress pertaining to Criminal Justice Reform.

The RAISE Act (H.R. 3158) which helps young people in the federal system by providing judges more flexible sentencing options, encourages diversion, increases home confinement opportunities, ends mandatory life without parole, mandates housing and programming specific to the needs of youth, and creates youth-specific diversion and pilot programs.

The Fair Chance for Youth Act (H.R. 3156) better enables young people to reenter and contribute to our communities by creating a mechanism for sealing or expungement of certain youth criminal records. If we are ever to stop the cycle of recidivism, we must give our young people a real chance to succeed after they have paid their debt to society.

Kaliefs Law (H.R. 3155). named in memory of Kalief Browder, to establish more humane rules for incarcerated youth by banning the use of solitary confinement, mandating certain minimum standards and procedural protections for pretrial detention and speedy trial rights, and ending the shackling of youth at federal court

appearances.

I am also a co-sponsor of the Fair Chance Act that aims to prohibit Federal agencies and Federal contractors from requesting that an applicant for employment disclose criminal history record information before the applicant has received a conditional offer, and for other purposes.

There now exists a broad and bipartisan consensus that our criminal justice system is broken and a historic opportunity to pass meaningful legislation reform the system so that it works for everyone-the general public, law enforcement personnel, taxpayers, crime victims, and offenders who have served their time, paid their debt to society, and anxious to redeem the second chance so they can "pay it forward."

It is past time for us to Ban the Box!

Missouri has lately taken center stage when it comes to racial tensions: the unrest in Ferguson and the protests at the University of Missouri.

Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot and killed on Aug. 9, 2014, by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, in Ferguson, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis.

The shooting prompted violent protests and helped form the Black Lives Matter Movement.

The unrest in Ferguson likely comes from Missouri's acute levels of racial segregation.

The African-American population is heavily concentrated in the segregated cities of St. Louis and Kansas City.

St. Louis is the fifth-most racially segregated city in the United States.

The state poverty is located mostly within predominantly black areas.

The racial segregation that is rampant in the "Show Me State" stems from white hostility towards African Americans and that hostility magnifies itself on college campuses, including the University of Missouri.

Protests have been on-going in Columbia, MO since October in response to racist incidents that further the rampant racism in the state.

For example, in 2010, two white students were arrested for dropping cotton balls in front of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center and in 2011 a student was given probation for racially charged graffiti in a student dormitory.

On September 12, 2015, a Facebook post by the student government president Payton Head complained of bigotry and anti-gay sentiment around the college campus, which gained widespread attention.

The Mizzou football team announced on November 8th that they would boycott playing until the administration took drastic steps.

The University President Tim Wolfe and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin both stepped down on November 9th but the protests are ongoing.

October 20, 2014 is an unforgettable day because a young man named Laquan McDonald was fatally shot 16 times in the middle of the street by Chicago Police officer Jason Van Dyke.

Sadly, October 20, will serve as a yearly reminder of the unambiguous slaying of a young man who will never have the chance to grow old.

More than 500 protesters marched through Chicago for nearly 9 hours after officials released the chilling dash-cam video showing the fatal shooting of Laquan McDonald.

Protesters marched along Chicago's famous Michigan Avenue the day after Thanksgiving, demanding the resignations of the city's top leaders.

The Protesters stood in harmony with locked arms outside the doors of major retailers chanting "Stop the cover-up" and "16 shots! 16 shots" which was the number of times the officer fired upon Laquan McDonald.

Other Police killings include:

The death of 43-year-old Eric Garner resulting from the application of a NYPD police chokehold occurred in the Northeast and the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown and the resulting events in Ferguson occurred in the border state of Missouri.

The killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice by a Cleveland police officer occurred in the Midwest and death of unarmed 26-year-old Jordan Baker by an off-duty Houston police officer occurred in Texas.

In Phoenix, Arizona, Romain Brisbon, an unarmed black father of four, was shot to death in when a police officer allegedly mistook his bottle of pills for a gun.

In Pasadena, California, 19-year-old Kendrec McDade was chased and shot seven times by two police officers after a 911 caller falsely reported he had been robbed at gunpoint by two black men, neither of whom in fact was armed.

And, of course, on April 4, the conscience of the nation was shocked by the horrifying killing of 50-year-old Walter Scott by a North Charleston police officer in the southern state of South Carolina.

Nearly 1,000 people in Minneapolis, Minnesota marched to City Hall less than a day after five protesters were shot near a Black Lives Matter demonstration.

This shooting which is seen to be a racially motivated attack has pushed Minneapolis into the national spotlight.

The events in Minneapolis reminded us that we cannot and we must not allow tensions, which are present in so many neighborhoods across America, to go unresolved.

Beyond Broke: Why Closing the Racial Wealth Gap is a Priority for National Economic Security uses the most recently available data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) along with the National Asset Scorecard in Communities of Color (NASCC) to highlight the current state of America's racial wealth gap.

The report findings include:

Between 2005 and 2011, the median net worth of households of color remained near their 2009 levels, reflecting a drop of 58 percent for Latinos, 48 percent for Asians, 45 percent for African Americans but only 21 percent for whites.

Hispanic households experienced the largest drop in net worth following the recession.

More than half of whites own four or more tangible assets, compared to 49 percent of Asians and only one in five of African Americans and Latinos.

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African Americans (38 percent) and Latinos (35 percent) are over twice as likely as whites (13 percent) to hold no financial assets at all and to have no or negative net worth.

At no point in our nation's history has a single human been more capable of inflicting massive death and misery, and our society is producing more individuals who seek to employ such means to carry out their ill intentions.

While it is certainly true that violent crime and homicide rates in this country have been declining in recent years, they are still far above those in other industrialized nations.

Most recently, the horrible attack on a Planned Parenthood in Colorado Springs that took the lives of 3 Americans, including a mother and an Iraqi war Veteran.

That is just one horrific example of why we must act now to stop gun violence, protect citizens, and end the urban warfare.

And we have a plan of action.

1. Require universal background checks to keep guns out of dangerous hands; an estimated 40% of gun transfers-6.6 million transfers-are conducted without a background check. 1/3 of "want-to-buy" ads online are posted by people with a criminal record. More than 4 times the rate at which prohibited gun buyers try to buy guns in stores. That would equate to 25,000 guns in illegal hands.

2. Ban military-style assault weapons;

3. Closing of the gun-show loophole; and

4. Increase access to mental health services. We must work to reduce access to firearms for people with suicidal tendencies. 90% of suicide victims should have been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Firearms are the most common method of suicide-51%. We need to ensure that mental health professionals know their options for reporting threats of violence-even as we acknowledge that someone with a mental illness is far more likely to be the victim of a violent crime than the perpetrator.

Every day, 48 children and teens are shot in murders, assaults, suicides & suicide attempts, unintentional shootings, and police intervention. Every day, 7 children and teens die from gun violence.

Over 17,000 (17,499) American children and teens are shot in murders, assaults, suicides & suicide attempts, unintentional shootings, or by police intervention each year. 2,677 kids die from gun violence each year. Every day, 297 people in America are shot in murders, assaults, suicides & suicide attempts, unintentional shootings, and police intervention. Every day, 89 people die from gun violence.

Over 108,000 (108,476) people in America are shot in murders, assaults, suicides & suicide attempts, unintentional shootings, or by police intervention. 32,514 people die from gun violence each year.

The senseless killings in Bamako, Mali, Beirut, and the Bataclan Theater in Paris are the most current examples of global terrorism.

The terror attacks that unfolded across Paris continue to tear at the hearts of all Americans.

Those who think that they can terrorize the people of France or the values that they stand for are wrong. The American people draw strength from the French people's commitment to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness.

In response to these disgusting attacks, I call on my colleagues to pass my bill H.R. 48 the No Fly for Foreign Fighters Act.

This would require the Director of the Terrorist Screening Center to review the completeness of the Terrorist Screening Database and the terrorist watch list utilized by the Transportation Security Administration.

Despite the recent terrorist attacks around the world, ISIS is not the most deadly terrorist organization.

The 2015 Global Terrorism Index found that Boko Haram in Nieria killed 6,644 people in 2014. 77% of deaths were private citizens.

This compared to 6,073 at the hands of ISIS.

Boko Haram was formed in 2002 and became armed in 2009.

In the last six years, Boko Haram has carried out more than 500 violent attacks against a broad array of targets: Christian and Muslim communities, government installations, schools, hospitals and medical facilities, aid workers, and journalists.

Their latest attack on Yola, Nigeria, left more than 30 people dead.

Boko Haram became well-known on a global stage when they kidnapped 200 school girls.

During my visit to Nigeria over the summer I met with government officials, including President Muhammadu Buhari, and others to discuss what is currently being done to bring these girls back to their families as soon as possible.

Children's rights are human rights, and these types of attacks, specifically targeting of schools, are strictly prohibited under international law and cannot be justified under any circumstances.

Girls and young women around the world absolutely must be allowed to go to school peacefully and free from intimidation, persecution and all other forms of discrimination.

I have introduced H. Res. 528, Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding to the Victims of the Terror Protection fund, which expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that: Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations be declared an existential threat to the human rights and security of the Nigerian people and their regional neighbors; the global strategy for ending the suffering and creating solutions for displaced persons in Africa includes a Victims of Terror Protection Fund, which should provide humanitarian

assistance to Boko Haram victims; military technical assistance be provided to Nigeria and its neighbors; and the Victims of Terror Support Fund should be modeled after the cases of Kazakhstan and Equatorial Guinea where prior kleptocracy initiatives have been created to benefit communities and victims in need of support.

I also wear red every Wednesday to stand in solidarity with Representative Wilson in our combined effort to #BringBackOurGirls.

A terrible blow was dealt to the Voting Rights Act on June 25, 2013, when the Supreme Court handed down the decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, 537 U.S. 193 (2013), which invalidated Section 4(b), the provision of the law determining which jurisdictions would be subject to Section 5 "pre-clearance." The reason the Court gave for its ruling "times have changed."

Times have changed, but what the Court did not fully appreciate is that the positive changes it cited were due almost entirely to the existence and vigorous enforcement of the Voting Rights Act.

In the 50 years since its passage in 1965, the Voting Rights Act has safeguarded the right of Americans to vote and stood as an obstacle to many of the more egregious attempts by certain states and local jurisdictions to game the system by passing discriminatory changes to their election laws and administrative policies.

I am a sponsor of the H.R. 2867, the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015, a bill that restores and advances the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by providing a modern day coverage test that will extend federal oversight to jurisdictions which have a history of voter suppression and protects vulnerable communities from discriminatory voting practices.

I am also a sponsor of H.R. 12, the Voter Empower Act of 2015, which protects voters from suppression, deception, and other forms of disenfranchisement by modernizing voter registration, promoting access to voting for individuals with disabilities, and protecting the ability of individuals to exercise the right to vote in elections for federal office.

This year I had the honor to present the Barbara Jordan Gold Medallion for Public-Private Leadership to a pioneer in her own right Hillary Rodham Clinton.

This prestigious award is presented annually to a woman of demonstrated excellence in the public or private sector whose achievements are an example and inspiration to people everywhere, but especially to women and girls.

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

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