

Republican majority and I was a minority member.

Democrats have long been outspoken in their commitment to D.C. voting rights, and I appreciate their unwavering support. The bill we introduce today reflects the political history of our country that inalterably demonstrates that additional representation has been granted only on the basis of exact political equivalence, assuring neither benefit nor disadvantage to either party. This bill meets the necessary standard. Party, of course, should not matter when it comes to a democratic right as basic as representation in the legislature that taxes citizens and sends them to war. However, it is the undeniable reality that party equivalence in one form or another has driven decisions for adding voting representation. Many remember the most recent additions of Alaska and Hawaii, when these States entered the union because their voting records eliminated party advantage. However, this pattern was set throughout the nineteenth century as each State entered the union, most dramatically, of course, when no slave State could be admitted unless a free State came in at the same time.

Preserving all their rights as American citizens to voting rights in each house, the people of the District of Columbia and our civil rights and civic allies have nevertheless concluded that there can be no serious attempt to achieve the vote for our citizens that ignores precedents woven so tightly into our history. The linchpin of this legislation is its bipartisan balance, and we are grateful for the rare opportunity we believe will not come again soon, but that the Utah-D.C. bill offers District citizens now, to follow the unerring path to the vote laid out by American history.

A similar bill approved by the Committee on Government Reform last May called for the additional seat in Utah to be at-large until the 2010 census, but when the bill was referred to the Judiciary Committee, then-chairman JAMES F. SENSENBRENNER, Jr. (R-WI) insisted that Utah adopt a redistricting plan that allowed for four seats before he would approve the bill. The Utah's legislature met in early December and quickly adopted a four-seat plan, which is provided for in today's bill. However, House leadership declined to address the issue in the closing days of the 109th Congress. We now seek our seat to vote in the 110th Congress.

Although we came close to securing passage in the 109th Congress, the District's vote was already long past due. We're in overtime in the 110th. We will proceed based on the same win-win approach that carried us through last Congress. In the spirit of the partnership promised by the new Democratic House majority, I am optimistic that Democrats will see the bill as a historic opportunity to make good on promises for voting rights and equality for the people of the District of Columbia.

Finally, I ask to be forgiven a personal allusion. Throughout this process, I have never referred to the District's vote as my vote or to what the vote would mean to me personally because the vote will not belong to me. I have never mentioned the special reason I person-

ally wanted to be the first to cast the vote because the Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act is for D.C. residents now and in the future, not for me. However, my 16 years in Congress has been defined by the search for a way to achieve full representation for the city where my family has lived since before the Civil War. That search has included the two-day debate followed by a vote on statehood more than 10 years ago that Speaker Tom Foley afforded me, and the vote I subsequently won in the Committee of the Whole because of the long commitment of the Democratic majority to D.C. voting rights and the commitment of my party to maximize the rights of the citizens who live in the Nation's capital until voting rights could be achieved. The struggle has been driven by its own terms, by the here and now, by the residents of the District of Columbia for over 200 years. Yet, I cannot deny the personal side of this quest, epitomized by my family of native Washingtonians, my father Coleman Holmes, my grandfather, Richard Holmes, who entered the D.C. Fire Department in 1902 and whose picture hangs in my office, a gift from the D.C. Fire Department, and especially my great-grandfather, Richard Holmes, a slave who walked off a Virginia plantation in the 1850s, made it to Washington, and began our family here. I cannot help but think today of this man I never knew, a slave in the District until Lincoln freed the slaves here 9 months before the Emancipation Proclamation. I am mindful of my great grandfather, who came here in a furtive search for freedom itself, not the vote in Congress. I wonder what a man who lived as a slave in the District, and others like him would think if he could know that his great-granddaughter might be the first to cast the first full vote for the District of Columbia in the House of Representatives. I hope to have the special honor of casting the vote I have sought for 16 years. I want to cast that vote for the citizens of this city, whom I have had the great privilege of representing, who have fought with me every step of the way, and who have waited interminably for justice. Yes, and I want to cast that vote in memory of my great-grandfather, Richard Holmes.

THE MILITARY FAMILIES
FINANCIAL SECURITY ACT

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 9, 2007

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Madam Speaker, With the support of my colleague, Rep. JIM McDERMOTT, I rise today to introduce the Military Families Financial Security Act. This bill will ensure the brave men and women who serve our country will not have to worry about losing critical services their dependent children need.

The men and women who serve in our Armed Forces are everyday heroes. I know about the valor of military families from my own experience as a military wife when my

husband was stationed in Japan during the Vietnam War. As a wife and mother in a foreign country with two young children, I observed that many servicemembers were also mothers and fathers and were making the same sacrifices I was. Just as these brave men and women are working to protect our Nation, we must likewise protect them and their loved ones through the laws and policies we enact.

In San Diego and around the country, some military families rely on the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI) for means-tested financial assistance. This safety net program is designed to protect qualifying families from poverty and provides access to valuable social services such as Medicaid. Without SSI, some special-needs families would not be able to cover their medical expenses.

Current regulations threaten some military families' eligibility. They face a unique risk of losing benefits due to the way military pay is treated under SSI rules. The Social Security Administration (SSA) considers anything outside basic pay as "unearned income." This method hurts servicemembers and their families since there are more than 30 types of military pay in addition to basic pay. These different pays, considered unearned income, result in higher countable income and affect eligibility. Just a few dollars can make all the difference in the world to these military families.

My legislation would change how the SSA calculates income for SSI eligibility by treating most military compensation as earned income. This simple change will keep families eligible for SSI benefits and simplify the administration of this program.

In testimony before the Human Resources Subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee, Social Security Commissioner JoAnne Barnhart has indicated her support for such a proposal.

The provision would treat cash military compensation and civilian wages alike, and thus eliminate the present unfair and disadvantageous treatment of cash military compensation other than basic pay under SSI. The proposal would increase SSI benefits for most military families with disabled children, which are currently about 3,000 families. It would be a significant program simplification in these cases and would have a relatively small program cost of only \$2 million over 10 years.

She also mentioned how "determining the difference in the types of military pay is time consuming and error prone, and the guidelines for making such determinations covers 14 pages in SSA's operating instructions."

As a proud member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am committed to improving the quality of life of the men and women who serve our country. This legislation is fair, overdue and demonstrates our Nation's appreciation. This legislation will give servicemembers peace of mind from knowing that their duties will not jeopardize their families' eligibility for SSI benefits and related services.

I urge you, Madam Speaker, and all of my colleagues to pass this critical legislation into law.