

Most of all, Congressman Oxley was a wonderful colleague working hard with both parties to represent his constituents in the best way possible. He will be greatly missed.

On a personal note, Mike and Pat and Bob and I were personal friends. We got to know each other “back in the day” when members of Congress saw each other socially.

Even though we came from different parties, it didn’t make a difference when it came to friendship. At that time I was a Congressional spouse, so Pat and I got to know each other well and participated actively in Congressional spouse activities. Our sons also got to know each other when we took bipartisan trips to places like New York.

In fact, I remember one funny incident when the two families were together on a Congressional Arts Caucus trip to New York City. As we were riding around, touring on a bus, our sons Brian and Elvis, 10 years old at the time and dressed in their blue blazers, hopped off the bus and started walking down the street. Bob and Mike, alarmed, jumped off the bus and ran after them. They finally caught up with them and asked them what they were doing. The boys calmly replied and said that “they were all dressed up and ready to see the town!” We had such a laugh recalling those days in subsequent conversations.

When I think of Mike Oxley, I think of family and the joy he had with Pat and Elvis. We will all miss him.

VOTING RIGHTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from New Jersey (Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

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

There was no objection.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, before I start, let me extend my condolences to those who are mourning the death of our former Congressman. That was 60 minutes’ worth of very, very nice tribute.

As I am sure all of my colleagues are aware, we are now in primary election season. This year the American people will elect a new President of the United States. Unfortunately, there is a great possibility that hundreds of thousands of Americans will be barred from casting their vote because of this body’s failure to act.

In 2012, I watched, horrified, as voters were forced to stand in outrageous lines at their polling places. Meanwhile, States across the country have set up new barriers to voting, cutting back on early voting hours, and adding difficult new identification hurdles that limit young people and communities of color more than anyone else—and this as we call ourselves the model

of democracy for the whole world to follow.

Instead of embracing every possible opportunity to improve and facilitate one of the cornerstones of our democracy, we are allowing it to crumble. There is quite a bit to fix, yet Congress isn’t willing to do anything about it.

Mr. Speaker, our States have wildly different voting systems. Early voting is allowed some places but not others, same-day registration is offered in one State but not in the next. I can think of few better tasks for Congress to take on than to set standards for Federal elections, at a minimum, and to provide the biggest possible opportunity for our constituents to pick the people that represent them.

We have Americans that have made mistakes in their pasts but have completed their sentences for nonviolent convictions. They have put in their effort to change and have come back to society as tax-paying, law-abiding citizens. Unfortunately, we ban millions of these Americans from the ballot box despite their rehabilitation. It seems to me that Congress should get involved in offering individuals like those one of the most fundamental rights that we have as Americans—but we are not.

Mr. Speaker, there is also a conversation for this body to have about technology. Smartphones and other mobile devices have fingerprint sensors. I can wave a key fob over a terminal and pay for lunch without swiping a credit card or even signing my name. I acknowledge that there are very real challenges we face in bringing technology to the ballot box, but we should be talking about how we can use digital advances to expand access instead of trying to manufacture excuses to limit access.

Right there alone, there are three steps we could take on voting rights in our Nation.

Unfortunately, we can’t even begin these discussions because we seem to have traveled back to a dark place in our Nation’s history when it was both legal and common to limit access to polling places. Despite so many opportunities to move forward, we are rolling backward.

Since 2010, 22 States have passed laws that make it more difficult for Americans to vote, most commonly in the form of voter ID laws that disproportionately impact communities of color, women, seniors, students, and low-income individuals.

Unfortunately, the Voting Rights Act, which had previously curtailed these dangerous restrictions, was gutted in 2013 by the Supreme Court. In the so-called first-in-the-nation primary held this week in New Hampshire, voters encountered new ID laws for the first time, a law that allowed poll workers to vouch for voters without approved IDs and gives them the leeway to discriminate against some voters while validating others. Laws like the one in New Hampshire were passed to protect elections from voting

fraud—a specter that Republicans have used time and again to scare Americans into thinking that some dark figure is hijacking their election, a notion that has been discredited and disproved time and again.

Between 2002 and 2005, the Department of Justice made prosecuting voter fraud a top priority. In that timeframe, hundreds of millions of votes were cast; yet only 38 cases were brought to trial, and then only one involved impersonation fraud, which is what photo ID laws protect against.

More recently, a professor at the Loyola University Law School has tracked every allegation of voter fraud since 2000 and has found just 31 cases—just 31 cases—of impersonation. That is 31 ballots out of more than 1 billion that have been cast. The fact of the matter is the kind of intentional shady voter fraud these laws were based on simply did not exist.

Mr. Speaker, of the many tasks this body has, protecting the right to vote, the foundation that built our democracy, the right for which countless Americans have fought over the course of a more than 200-year history, protecting, expanding, and strengthening that right seems like it should be one of our greatest priorities.

I hope that my colleagues can begin to see that also and to join me and many of my colleagues on the Democratic Caucus in taking action that will facilitate, expand, and provide opportunities for every eligible person who can vote to be able to vote.

I yield back the balance of my time.

VOTING RIGHTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) is recognized for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I am delighted to follow the gentlewoman from New Jersey, focusing on the Congressional Progressive Caucus’ commitment to ensuring every American can vote.

Might I add that we have worked together with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, we have worked together with the Congressional Black Caucus, and we have worked together with the Democratic Caucus.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to encourage the entire House to be committed to the very values of this Nation. This should not be a Republican or Democratic issue, of which it has become. We stand here as Democrats arguing for the empowerment of voters all over the Nation, yet legislative initiatives have been introduced by members of the Judiciary Committee and others. I have joined a number of those legislative initiatives, and these initiatives cannot be heard and cannot be voted on.

The American people need to know that. There is no other reason than the Republican majority does not want to have empowered voters.