

busy work and school schedules as the primary reason for failing to vote in the past 2000 presidential election. The creation of a federal election holiday would help address this problem by providing many hardworking Americans with the necessary time off from work so they can vote. Furthermore, the bill would have the added benefit of: Increasing the number of available election day judges, poll workers and suitable polling places; decreasing long lines and the overcrowding that occurs during peak times on election day; and reinforcing the notion that voting is an important civic duty.

This Congress must ensure that every American has an equal opportunity to participate in the voting process. Enacting the "Democracy Day Act of 2005" would be a crucial first step towards achieving that objective.

The legislation is strongly supported by a wide array of voting rights and labor organizations.

INTRODUCTION OF THE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT AND PROFESSIONALS ACT OF 2005

**HON. TOM LANTOS**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 4, 2005*

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, it is well documented that many states, including my home state of California, are currently suffering from a nursing shortage that, if left unchecked, will quickly reach epidemic proportions. More than 126,000 nursing positions in hospitals around the country are unfilled, according to the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. In addition, the workforce is shrinking, because it's aging (and retiring) at twice the rate of other occupations. While the problem of nursing shortages will require a multifaceted solution, I was shocked to learn recently that entry into the United States by many qualified nurses was being delayed entry because of an easily correctable bureaucratic regulation. We cannot simply stand by and allow the nursing shortage to ensnarl the quality of American health care, and that is why I am introducing the Health Improvement and Professionals Act (HIPA) of 2005.

Due to a change in procedures by the Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) of the Department of Homeland Security, the federal agency responsible for processing citizenship and immigration applications, it became necessary to impose a cut-off date in order to process a backlog of work-related immigration applications. As a result, CIS recently announced that it would no longer consider employment-based visa applications from the Philippines, India or China that were filed after January 1, 2002. Due to the unfortunate shortage of American nurses, many of our nation's hospitals are dependent on filling their nursing ranks with new workers from these countries. My legislation, the Health Improvement and Professionals Act of 2005, would provide a common-sense, short-term solution to the problems caused by the CIS policy change, while still allowing the agency to do the necessary and important work of processing its backlog.

Mr. Speaker, my legislation simply allows CIS to recapture unused work-based immigration quota numbers from countries that have undersubscribed their own allowable visa numbers. By reassigning unused quota allotments from previous years, we would allow more qualified nurses to come to this country, bringing their crucially needed skills with them. Let me be clear, the HIPA Act of 2005 does not increase the number of immigrants allowed into our country. Instead, my legislation ensures that we are putting to full use the number of workers' visas currently allowed by law, in order to fulfill a crucial and exponentially increasing worker shortage.

The HIPA Act is modeled directly on the American Competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century Act, which Congress passed, and President Clinton signed into law nearly five years ago, in response to the shortage of highly skilled computer programmers and information technology workers needed to fuel the Internet boom of the late 1990's. Like the HIPA Act of 2005, that law allowed for the recapture of unused employment-based visas to fill a necessary labor shortage.

The growth of the nursing shortage is easily traceable—one only has to look to the fact that in 2002, 30 states were reportedly experiencing some level of nursing shortages. This number is expected to rise to 45 states by 2012. The scope of this problem is compounded by the fact that many of today's nurses are nearing retirement, and so our country is facing the compounded problem of increased retirements coupled with increased demand. This problem is well known to the federal government, as the Department of Labor has noted that one million new nurses will be needed by 2012 to meet the growing health needs of our country.

Some may criticize my legislation for bringing nurses into the country instead of training American men and women to do the job. Unfortunately, enrollments in baccalaureate nursing programs at colleges and universities across the United States have declined for five consecutive years. Even in states where the programs are full, as in my state of California, nearly 70 percent of all nurses are trained by community colleges. Many of the programs at these schools in California are full, and some even have substantial waiting lists of eager students ready to learn about the exciting and rewarding profession of nursing. I will continue to work to expand the capacity of nurse training programs in our country to help relieve this shortage. However, the shortage in California is so severe that even if all of the nursing programs in the state were to double their enrollments, California would still not be able to meet her nursing needs in the year 2010.

Mr. Speaker, the lack of nurses in our hospitals has a direct effect on the quality of the health care these facilities can provide. The shortages currently experienced in 30 states affects all patients, from those in operating rooms and intensive care units to those who treat children and cancer patients. In fact, according to a study conducted by the Harvard School of Health and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, over 50 percent of physicians surveyed believed that the nursing shortage is a leading cause of medical error. Additional studies and surveys published in the

New England Journal of Medicine, Journal of the American Medical Association, and by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations all confirm that the shortage of RNs is influencing the delivery of health care in the United States and negatively affecting patient outcomes. It is completely unacceptable in 21st century America that these preventable deaths are occurring. I hope my colleagues are as appalled about this as I am and that they will join me in supporting this common sense and critically important legislation. While we search for a longer-term solution to the problems as well as the causes of this nursing shortage crisis, the Health Improvement and Professionals Act of 2005 will provide a desperately needed injection of health care professionals into this country.

HONORING THE LIFE OF BRAD ROWSE

**HON. MIKE THOMPSON**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 4, 2005*

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Speaker, Mr. HAYES, Mr. BOSWELL, Mr. KIND, Mr. PUTNAM and all the Members of the Congressional Sportsman's Caucus received tragic news that Brad Rowse, Manager of Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation's (CSF) State Caucus program and the new National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses died of an aneurysm on Monday, December 27, 2004. He was 26 years old.

Brad was a dedicated and highly respected member of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation joining the organization two years ago to help lead the early efforts to expand the sportsmen's caucus model to state legislatures. A native of upstate New York, Brad grew up hunting and fishing on his family's farm where he grew a passionate fondness for the outdoors. He used his undergraduate work at Cornell University and his Masters from SUNY Syracuse to focus on natural resource policy with the goal of adapting, improving and creating programs and policies to improve our fish and wildlife resources. Before coming to the CSF, he interned with The Wildlife Society and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in Washington, DC.

The unique combination of skills that Brad had acquired served him well during his time with the CSF. As the CSF State Caucus Manager, he built the program from its early beginnings to the national network of state caucuses that was launched on December 5, 2004. Brad took primary responsibility for monitoring sportsmen's issues at the state level and for building relations with state legislators and sportsmen's groups to create a unified voice for sportsmen. Through Brad's leadership and dedication there are now 21 state sportsmen's caucuses and a new National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses to support their growth and success.

America's sportsmen and women will miss his leadership and commitment to protecting our natural resources and hunting and fishing heritage.

EMBRACING THE CONSTITUTION  
FLAG

**HON. ANTHONY D. WEINER**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 4, 2005*

Mr. WEINER. Mr. Speaker, since September 11th, 2001, this nation has engaged in a debate over how best to balance national security with civil liberties. "They who would give up an essential liberty for temporary security, deserve neither liberty or security." Those words are as true today as they were when Ben Franklin said them at the dawn of American democracy.

It was in that spirit that a patriotic New Yorker named Bob Pergament designed the "Constitution Flag." The new symbol, an American Flag with the Constitution superimposed in the outline of the United States, reminds us never to undercut the freedoms guaranteed to each individual in the Constitution.

While nothing can ever replace our beloved "Old Glory," this new emblem is currently flying in homes, city and town halls, and law classrooms across the country. It is on display at the American Library Association's Chicago headquarters and the city of Mount Vernon, NY has officially adopted the flag as the city's symbol.

As we in Congress continue to struggle with ways to keep Americans safe, we should honor those who are working to highlight the civil liberties at the foundation of our democracy. I urge my colleagues to join me in embracing the Constitution Flag as an invaluable reminder of what keeps American strong.

FORMER MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
ENDORSES FREEDOM FOR KHALISTAN—SOVEREIGNTY  
WILL END OPPRESSION

**HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 4, 2005*

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, on December 8, the Tribune newspaper out of Chandigarh, Punjab reported that a former Member of Parliament, Simranjit Singh Mann, had endorsed sovereignty for the Sikh homeland, Khalistan. His endorsement is part of a rising tide that includes the Punjab government declaring its sovereignty when it ended its water agreements with the other states in India.

I note that Mr. Mann said that the Sikhs are a separate nation and promised to lead a movement to liberate Khalistan. I hope that he keeps his promise. My friend Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan and an invaluable resource for information about South Asian affairs, has been saying the same things for several years. It seems that India's oppression that killed a quarter of a million Sikhs and keeps more than 52,000 of them as political prisoners has failed to dampen the desire and enthusiasm of the Sikhs for their own sovereign, independent country. I salute Mr. Mann's position. It is important for leaders in Punjab to speak out

strongly for Khalistan. We can help from here, but the effort must be won in Punjab, Khalistan itself.

Mr. Speaker, all peoples are entitled to live in freedom. The Sikhs of Punjab, Khalistan made their choice on October 7, 1987 when they declared their independence from India, calling their new country Khalistan. India, which proudly claims to be democratic, refuses even to hold a free and fair vote on the question, just as India has never kept its promise of 1948 to hold a plebiscite on the future of Kashmir. How can a country do these things and claim to be democratic? Self-determination is the essence of democracy.

A new Congress gives us a new opportunity to take a stand for freedom in South Asia and around the world. We should stop all U.S. aid to India until it allows full democratic rights and full human rights to all people living within its borders and we should strongly support a free and fair plebiscite in Punjab, Khalistan, in Nagaland, in Kashmir, and wherever people seek their freedom on the question of independence. By promoting such a plebiscite, we promote democracy and human rights for all people in that troubled region.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert the Council of Khalistan's press release on Mr. Mann's remarks into the RECORD at this time.

MANN REVERTS TO SUPPORTING KHALISTAN

WASHINGTON, DC, DECEMBER 10, 2004—Once again, former MP Simranjit Singh Mann, leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar), has staked out a position in support of a sovereign, independent Khalistan. Speaking in Ludhiana on December 7 at a meeting of his party, Mann said that the SAD (Amritsar) would launch a peaceful movement to achieve a separate and sovereign Sikh state, according to the December 8 issue of The Tribune (Chandigarh.) Mann claimed that his party had never given up this position.

Mann reminded his party that Sikhs are a separate nationality. He said that the foundation for an independent Khalistan was laid by Guru Gobind Singh and furthered by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and that this dream "will be materialized one day." Guru Gobind Singh gave sovereignty to the Sikh Nation ("In grieb Sikhin ko deon patshahi.") Sikhs are a separate nation. Sikhs ruled Punjab up to 1849 when the British conquered the subcontinent. Mann noted that it is in the interests of all the people in the region to have a buffer state between India and Pakistan to help ensure lasting peace in South Asia, given the deep hostility between "Hindu civilization and Muslim civilization."

Mann's remarks show that the desire for Khalistan remains strong in the Sikhs of Punjab, said Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, which leads the Sikh struggle for independence. Dr. Aulakh also cited the actions taken by Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, such as declaring Punjab's sovereignty in stopping all water agreements between Punjab and other states, as moving toward this goal. On October 7, 1987, the Sikh Nation declared its independence from India, naming its new country Khalistan. The Council of Khalistan was established at that time to lead the peaceful, democratic, nonviolent movement to liberate Khalistan from Indian oppression.

History shows that multinational states such as India are doomed to failure. Countries like Austria-Hungary, India's longtime friend the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czecho-

slovakia, and others prove this point. India is not one country; it is a polyglot like those countries, thrown together for the convenience of the British colonialists. It is doomed to break up as they did. Recently, the Punjab Legislative Assembly passed a bill annulling all water agreements with the Indian government, preventing the government's daylight robbery of Punjab river water. Punjab needs its river water for its crops. In the bill, the Assembly explicitly stated the sovereignty of Punjab.

The Indian government has murdered over 250,000 Sikhs since 1984, more than 300,000 Christians since 1948, over 89,000 Muslims in Kashmir since 1988, and tens of thousands of Tamils, Assamese, Manipuris, Dalits, and others. The Indian Supreme Court called the Indian government's murders of Sikhs "worse than a genocide."

Indian police arrested human-rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra after he exposed their policy of mass cremation of Sikhs, in which over 50,000 Sikhs have been arrested, tortured, and murdered, then their bodies were declared unidentified and secretly cremated. He was murdered in police custody. His body was not given to his family.

The police never released the body of former Jathedar of the Akal Takht Gurdev Singh Kaunke after SSP Swaran Singh Ghotna murdered him. Ghotna has never been brought to trial for the Jathedar Kaunke murder. No one has been brought to justice for the kidnapping and murder of Jaswant Singh Khalra.

According to a report by the Movement Against State Repression (MASR), 52,268 Slikhs are being held as political prisoners in India without charge or trial. Some have been in illegal custody since 1984! Tens of thousands of other minorities are also being held as political prisoners, according to Amnesty International. We demand the immediate release of all these political prisoners.

"It is encouraging that Mr. Mann has comeback to demanding Khalistan," said Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan. "This is another step forward for the movement to liberate our homeland from Indian oppression."

"As Professor Darshan Singh, a former Jathedar of the Akal Takht, said, 'If a Sikh is not for Khalistan, he is not a Sikh.'" Dr. Aulakh noted. "We must continue to press for our God-given birthright of freedom," he said. "Without political power, religions cannot flourish and nations perish. A sovereign Khalistan is essential for the survival of the Sikh religion."

HONORING COMMAND SERGEANT  
MAJOR MARVIN L. HILL

**HON. HAROLD E. FORD, JR.**

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 4, 2005*

Mr. FORD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Command Sergeant Major Marvin L. Hill of Memphis Tennessee, and the dedication and courage with which he has served our Nation.

A warrior and exemplary combat veteran, Command Sergeant Major Hill will be moving onto the 1st Army, under Lieutenant General Russel Honore, overseeing training and mobilization readiness for Army National Guard