

## Civil and Constitutional Rights

### Federal Hate Crimes Legislation

At a historic time for our nation when we should celebrate our increasing diversity, hate crimes are disturbingly prevalent and pose a significant threat to the full participation of all Americans in our democratic society. Current law limits federal jurisdiction over hate crimes to incidents directed against individuals on the basis of race, religion, color or national origin – but only when the victim is targeted because he/she is engaged in a federally protected activity, such as voting. This legislation will extend to crimes motivated by bias against the victim's perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability.

I was proud to vote for the landmark Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 to reinforce many of our basic American values: tolerance, respect for differences, and accountability for hate driven violence. [HR 1913](#) will provide assistance to state and local law enforcement agencies and amend 40 year old federal hate crimes laws to facilitate the investigation and prosecution of violent, hate-motivated crimes. As state and local authorities currently prosecute the overwhelming majority of hate crimes, this legislation will allow the federal government, in appropriate circumstances, to provide support for local prosecutions via an intergovernmental grant program and make grants to state and local law enforcement agencies that have incurred extraordinary expenses associated with the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes.

The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 passed the House with wonderful bipartisan support and endorsements from over 300 civil rights, education, religious, and civic organizations and virtually every major law enforcement organization in the country. With a strong statement of Presidential support, the time has finally come for the enactment of this important legislation.

### Ensuring Equality for LGBTs

### Repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell

For over 60 years, it has been the U.S. military's official policy to exclude lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identification. Reflecting one of our country's last officially sanctioned forms of bigotry, this policy stigmatizes patriotic Americans by excluding them from military service. This policy is not only unfair to LGBT individuals, it also hinders our military's ability to perform its mission.

Despite our need for language specialists, almost 800 mission-critical troops and at least 59 Arabic and nine Farsi linguists have been discharged under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in the last five years solely based on their sexual orientation. Today there are over one million gay and lesbian veterans and over 65,000 LGBT members of the military serving in fear of being discharged for simply being themselves.

Repealing "Don't Ask Don't Tell" has been long overdue. On May 28, 2010, I voted for an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2011 Defense Authorization Bill, which calls for a repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell" pending a study from the Pentagon on its impact. On this issue, the military courts have spoken, military leaders have spoken, service members have spoken, and our President has spoken. In December of 2010, Congress finally spoke, passing a standalone repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell".

### **Immigration Benefits for Same-Sex Permanent Partners**

I introduced the [Reuniting Families Act \(H.R. 2709\)](#) to reduce family immigration visa backlogs and promote humane and timely reunification of immigrant families -- all immigrant families. To

that end, I was proud to incorporate Congressman Nadler's

[Uniting American Families Act \(H.R. 1024\)](#)

to eliminate discrimination in federal immigration law against same-sex, permanent partners and their families who are seeking to reunite. This bill marks the first time same-sex permanent partners have been included in larger family immigration legislation. To read more about the Reuniting Families Act,

[please click here.](#)

## Protecting the Right to Vote for All Americans

Our right to vote is the cornerstone of our democratic government. I am committed to protecting the right to vote for all eligible citizens. As citizens of this great nation, no matter how we look, how we sound, no matter where we come from, or where our travels make take us, we all have the right to vote.

### Military and Overseas Voters

As a member of the Congressional Americans Abroad Caucus, I am committed to protecting the right to vote for our six million military and overseas voters.

Through my travels abroad and throughout the U.S., I have learned of horrendous statistics about the franchise of military and overseas Americans. Those fighting for our freedoms abroad should be guaranteed the right to exercise their own freedom to vote. The last survey from the Elections Assistance Commission found that voter turnout was only 20% for the military population. Only about one quarter of absentee ballots requested by military personnel were cast. Furthermore, over 70% of ballots sent to military and overseas voters were returned to local elections offices undelivered, and only 5.5% of those eligible to vote were actually able to cast a ballot.

After serving in the Peace Corps, I've seen firsthand how difficult it is to vote from overseas. I have also heard many personal stories about how children born abroad may be denied the right to vote due to residency requirements.

To protect the voting rights of military and overseas voters, Representative Carolyn Maloney and I introduced the [Overseas Voting Practical Amendments Act of 2009 , H.R. 1739](#) .

As an educator, I know that voter education is an important part of the solution. We need to educate voters about how to register to vote and cast a meaningful ballot. Outreach helps voters avoid running against deadlines. This is all the more important as we have yet to develop secure technologies we can use to vote.

My legislation would prohibit states from refusing to accept balloting materials because they are generated by a computer program, are not printed on a specific type of paper, or do not otherwise meet similar extraneous requirements that aren't necessary to prevent election fraud . It establishes a competitive grant program to encourage our nonpartisan, nonprofit sector, our experts and organizers on the ground, to find innovative methods to get timely information to voters overseas. The bill also expands the use of federal write-in absentee ballots, and extends permanent registration to overseas voters. Finally, my legislation would ensure the right to vote of second generation Americans abroad, irrespective of state residency requirements that disenfranchise young voters.

Our right to vote is a precious one, one that we have fought long and hard to protect. I will continue to fight to protect the rights of all eligible voters to cast a meaningful ballot and make their voices heard in our democracy.

### **Language Minorities**

Voting is one of the most treasured civil rights in our country, and we must protect the right to vote of all citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity, or English proficiency. In this spirit, various provisions of the [Voting Rights Act](#) , including Sections 2, 203, 4(e), 4(f), and 208, guarantee minority voters and voters with limited English proficiency (LEP) access to the same information and opportunities to exercise their right to vote as all other voters.

As Chair Emeritus of the [Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus](#) (CAPAC), and a leader of the Congressional Tri-Caucus, I have and will continue to work to ensure that the voting rights of minority voters are enforced with the vigor that all of our citizens deserve.

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