

mine who worked for AIPAC for years. More troubling, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not offer one word about his failure to produce a peaceful, two-state solution. Now, I would have welcomed even a word about the pending humanitarian crisis in Gaza. I am not talking about war with the militants. I am talking about 1.7 million people in a land where 95 percent of the water is already unfit to drink, and by next year it will be the case with all domestic water. If no action is taken, by 2020, that damage will be irreversible.

But I was encouraged by the AIPAC conference. While I don't necessarily agree with all of their policy prescriptions dealing with Iran, I was heartened to see that they had two well-attended panel discussions featuring Gidon Bromberg, an Israeli expert, that highlighted why it was in both the interest of Israel and Gaza to solve the pending water and sanitation crisis and that solution is easily within the power of Israel, the United States, and other donor nations.

I saw that as a bright spot in a troubling day. If we concentrate on simple, commonsense steps where we can work together to save lives and improve the future, I think there is a lot more on the horizon that we can accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, I stand with Israel. That is why I chose not to undercut our diplomats in the midst of negotiating by attending that joint session. Netanyahu offers one perspective—certainly not mine. But challenging his ideas is not anti-Israeli any more than challenging the ideas of President Obama is anti-American.

I will welcome a feasible alternative to a bad deal, but I have yet to hear one, especially from the Prime Minister. Until then, I will stand with Israel by empowering our negotiators and not undercutting them.

SELMA AND THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. TAKAI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAKAI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the 50th anniversary of the Selma voting rights movement and of the Selma to Montgomery marches that led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Nothing so far has moved me more as a freshman Member of this august body than to sit down and talk with our colleague, JOHN LEWIS, who years ago was the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

I have had many occasions since the beginning of this Congress to speak with Congressman JOHN LEWIS about the events of 50 years ago. He is the only living "Big Six" leader of the American civil rights movement still with us. It will forever be my honor to have sat next to Mr. LEWIS when President Obama gave his State of the Union Address earlier this year. It was

not lost on me that I was sitting and listening to President Obama while sitting next to a man whose actions 50 years ago helped pave the way for Barack Obama, a Black kid from Hawaii, to become President of the United States.

Mr. Speaker, the freedom marches mark a significant turning point in America's history. As an ethnic minority myself, I am thankful for those that paved the way for the freedoms and the liberties that all of us as Americans enjoy. They suffered insults and physical harm, yet their spirit remained unbroken.

The right of our citizens to vote is one that runs through the foundation of our country. To prevent or inhibit the vote of a citizen is an action that I feel contradicts the very principles on which this country was established. Even in our current society, there are efforts being undertaken to limit citizens of our country from casting their vote. This is a despicable practice and highlights to me the importance of the Voting Rights Act and the need to remain vigilant against those who seek to reverse the great strides made by this country towards equal rights for all.

The brave actions taken by the civil rights marchers 50 years ago still resonate with our society today. That is why I am proud to join the 50th anniversary of the freedom march.

Looking through the photos of the original Selma protest, I was struck by photos of Dr. Martin Luther King, Congressman JOHN LEWIS, and others leading the 54-mile third march, arms linked together in solidarity, wearing what looked like white double carnation Hawaiian lei. Looking into the matter further, I learned, in fact, that they were wearing lei. Why were they wearing lei? I found an answer that drove home for me the importance of standing together for civil rights for all.

Mr. Speaker, many of you may not know this, but Dr. Martin Luther King actually came to speak at the University of Hawaii in 1964. He came for a civil rights symposium being held at the university. It was during this time in Hawaii that he began a deep friendship with the Reverend Abraham Kahikina Akaka, former pastor of Kawaiahaeo Church in Oahu and the first chairman of the Hawaii Advisory Committee of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. In the spirit of aloha, which means compassion, peace, and love, the reverend sent to Selma lei for the leaders of the protests to wear.

I will be marching this weekend, Mr. Speaker; and to honor the tradition and the bond established many years ago between Hawaii and the Alabama civil rights leaders, Senator MAZIE HIRONO and I will be presenting lei to Congressman JOHN LEWIS and all of our congressional colleagues. These lei are a tribute to the Selma marchers 50 years ago and the knowledge that their efforts reverberated through our Na-

tion and to Hawaii, a State that was only 6 years old.

As we travel across the 54-mile historic trail and cross the famous Edmund Pettus Bridge on Saturday, we will remember those whose lives were lost fighting for our civil rights, remember those who paved the way, celebrate the hard fought victories, and remind ourselves that the fight is not yet over.

I look forward to participating in this historic weekend, and I thank the Faith & Politics Institute for coordinating our congressional pilgrimage to Alabama.

WHY PUERTO RICO STATEHOOD IS IN THE U.S. NATIONAL INTEREST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, this is the fifth time this year that I have addressed this Chamber about Puerto Rico's political destiny. I recently introduced a bill that would provide for Puerto Rico's admission as a State once a majority of Puerto Rico's electorate affirms their desire for statehood in a federally sponsored vote. The bill already has 70 cosponsors—56 Democrats and 14 Republicans.

In contrast to Puerto Rico's current territory status, statehood would deliver to my constituents what all free people deserve: full voting rights, full self-government, and full equality under the law. And unlike separate nationhood, which is the only other non-territory option available to Puerto Rico, statehood would help rebuild the island's shattered economy and improve its quality of life. Indeed, the fact that statehood would be in the best interest of Puerto Rico is beyond reasonable dispute. There will always be politicians in Puerto Rico who claim otherwise for ideological reasons, but their arguments are detached from reality.

Today I want to outline why statehood would also be in the national interest of the United States as a whole. There are three main reasons—one moral, one economic, and one political. First, the moral reason.

In 2012, my constituents held a free and fair vote in which they rejected territory status and expressed a preference for statehood. At a subsequent Senate committee hearing, then-chairman RON WYDEN said that the current relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico "undermines the United States' moral standing in the world." Senator WYDEN posed this question:

"For a nation founded on the principles of democracy and the consent of the governed, how much longer can America allow a condition to persist in which nearly 4 million U.S. citizens do not have a vote in the government that makes the national laws which affect their daily lives?"