



The 47th Flyer

News for California's 47th Congressional District
from Congressman Alan Lowenthal



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July 9, 2013

July 4th: Celebrations and Remembrance

Two-hundred and thirty-seven years ago, Thomas Jefferson sat down one of the guiding principles of our nation: that all men are created equal. It was for Jefferson, and many of our other Founding Fathers, a universal truth so obvious, that the Declaration calls it "self-evident."

Abraham Lincoln returned to Jefferson's words 83 years later, invoking them to honor those who died at Gettysburg in a struggle to end the hypocrisy of slavery and to ensure that all men were indeed treated equal.

Fifty-six years later, Congress' passage of the 19th Amendment giving women the vote ended a journey to expand the Declaration's great statement of equality to include women and men.

In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr.--standing in the shadow of a marble Lincoln--called on the nation to live up to the true meaning of Jefferson's words that all men are created equal. It was a call answered just one year later with the Civil Rights Act.

It is clear that 1776 was just the start of our nation's journey toward equality for all.

Jefferson's words were much more than simply a message of defiance to Britain: at their core they remain a universal message of equality. And, if history has taught us anything, it is that no power--be it philosophical, legislative, or even force of arms--will hold back the right and just freedoms of people.

Each July 4, as we celebrate the approval of the Declaration of Independence by the Continental Congress in 1776, let us also never forget all of the successes we have shared as a nation in our journey to live up to the ideal that all people are created equal.

Alan Lowenthal

One Step Forward...

On Thursday, June 29, the Supreme Court ruled that the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was unconstitutional and that supporters of California's Proposition 8 had no standing to appeal the overthrow of Prop 8, essentially restoring marriage to LGBT couples in California.

The Supreme Court's decision to uphold equality for all Americans, especially my constituents and friends in California, starts to close a dark chapter in our nation's journey to ensure equal protection under the law. This is the kind of protection and judicial action all Americans deserve.

The

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Most Republicans in Congress want to dramatically expand offshore oil drilling along the Pacific coast of the continental United States. Under what conditions do you think offshore drilling should be expanded along the California coast?

- Allow all drilling
- Only allow limited expansion
- Only allow limited expansion with greater government oversight
- Offshore drilling should not be expanded

[Click here to open the survey in a new browser window](#)



I was fortunate to be able to be on the steps of the Supreme Court to hear the DOMA and Prop 8 rulings

unconstitutionality of DOMA and Prop 8 is consistent with the shifting attitudes of the American people. I applaud the Supreme Court for their decisions, and I wish to congratulate all of our LGBT citizens and equal rights advocates for standing strong for so long in the face of discrimination.

Despite these successes, I am committed to working with the Administration to strengthen federal protections for couples living in states that do not recognize their marriages; the federal government must ensure that these couples receive the federal recognition and respect that they deserve. Although this was a huge win, the fight for true equality for all Americans still pushes on.

As many of you know, I am a proud member of the House LGBT Equality Caucus, and recently organized the NOH8 Campaign's "NOH8 on The Hill" photo shoot. This year, my office managed to bring together a record-setting 67 Congressional "NOH8 On The Hill" participants from the House and two members of the Senate, all taking a stand for marriage equality. This year's event brought the total number of "NOH8 On The Hill" Congressional participants over the past three years to 100.

Earlier this year, according to the House Historian, I also became the first member of Congress to publicly display the Pride Flag outside of my Washington, D.C. and Long Beach offices.

One Step Back...

Regrettably, two days before the landmark victories in the Supreme Court for LGBT Americans, that same court took us a step backwards in ensuring everyone has access to the voting booth, ruling that Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) is unconstitutional. Section 4 contained a series of criteria and formula for determining which states and local jurisdictions required federal government pre-approval to change their state or local voting laws.



President Lyndon Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965

In a 5-4 vote written by Chief Justice John Roberts, the majority opinion said that only Section 4 of the VRA was unconstitutional. However, as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg pointed out in her dissenting opinion, without Section 4, the enforcement detailed in Section 5 cannot operate.

I agree with Justice Ginsberg, who said in her dissent that the Voting Rights Act is one of the "most consequential, efficacious, and amply justified exercises of federal legislative power in our Nation's history."

The decision by the court majority eviscerates the VRA and opens the door for voter discrimination and suppression on an unprecedented level. This is a sizable step in the wrong direction in our collective national journey toward social justice and civil rights.

Congress must move quickly now, in a decisive bipartisan way, to update the VRA and continue vital protections for minority voters. Government should never restrict voting rights. I will fight to defend unencumbered voting rights to all Americans..

Human Rights In Vietnam

I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of H.R. 1897--the bi-partisan Vietnam Human Rights Act of 2013--an act to promote freedom and democracy in Vietnam.

Introduced by Republican Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey, the Vietnam Human Rights Act could not have come at a more critical time for U.S.-Vietnam relations. As we all know, Vietnam has benefited substantially since normalizing relations with the United States in 1995.

Through its partnership with the United States, the Vietnamese government has gained access to the World Trade Organization, received permanent normal trade status with our country, and, expanded into the \$25 billion-a-year American market.



A townhall in the 47th District with U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam David Shear

Now the Vietnamese government wants to be a part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a major U.S. trade agreement with 12 Asian Pacific Rim countries, without any commitment toward respecting human rights, religious freedom, or the political rights of its people. Despite the fact that Congress has passed numerous resolutions in the past calling on the U.S. government to pressure Vietnam into improving its human rights record, we seem to be getting nowhere on this front.

On the contrary, the government of Vietnam has stepped up its crackdown on activists, dissidents, and opposition voices on an unprecedented scale. This is due to the fact that increasingly, intellectuals, former officials, and those who have worked for the ruling authorities are speaking out against the authoritarian regime and voicing their opinions for justice and rights.

In addition to this latest wave of crackdowns on dissidents by the Vietnamese government, we should not forget that many prisoners of conscience are still serving their long and unjust sentences from years ago. Amnesty International estimates that at least 27 prisoners of conscience who were detained before 2012 remain jailed today.

Due to this background of human rights abuses, my colleagues and I support the Vietnam Human Rights Act of 2013--sending a strong signal to Hanoi that enough is enough. We must act to defend human rights and to support the people of Vietnam in standing up for justice and human dignity.

In addition, last month, I hosted a Community Town Hall for U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, David Shear, in the 47th Congressional District. The overwhelming number of Vietnamese Americans and local elected officials attending the event presented a clear message that Congress needs to pass the Vietnam Human Rights Act.

The bill has already received bipartisan approval in two subcommittees and I am hopeful that it will be brought to the House floor in the near future.

I firmly believe that freedom, democracy and human rights must be a part of any future trade partnership with Vietnam.

Protecting California's Coast

As many of you know, I sit on the House Natural Resources Committee. The Republican majority on the committee recently moved forward with a piece of legislation--the Offshore Energy and Jobs Act--that would have led to a massive expansion of offshore oil drilling, including the entire coast of California.

This misguided bill, which would have mainly benefitted the largest of the oil conglomerates, would have mandated the federal government to sell offshore leases; forced the Interior Department and the States to accept these sales, regardless of their opposition or the potential impacts; and, bar citizens from properly participating in the process.



The four zones off the West Coast where offshore oil drilling was being proposed under the Offshore Energy and Jobs Act.

I have spent more than two decades fighting to protect California's environment, especially our coastline and oceans. I will oppose any expansion of offshore drilling in federal offshore areas along the California coast, just as I will oppose legislation that seeks to take away the rights of California citizens to have their voice heard in such matters. In the end, the House passed the Offshore Energy and Jobs Act, with a vote largely along party lines. However, I'm encouraged that the Democratic majority in the Senate is highly unlikely to take up the bill.

Instead of putting the coastline of California at risk with partisan legislation, the House should be setting the roadmap for our nation's energy future

In committee, I introduced an amendment to the bill that would have prevented the sale of these leases specifically along the California coast, but the Republican majority on the committee refused to support this amendment.

When the bill finally reached the House floor for a full vote last week, I re-introduced the amendment—with Reps. Lois Capps and Rep. Julia Brownley—to prevent these lease sales along the California coast, but unfortunately, the amendment was defeated.

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