

By Congressman David Price in Durham, NC -

Our great holidays are occasions of remembrance, but they also remind us of our obligations in the present and set our sights toward the future:

- On July 4th we remember our nation's founding heroes, but we also recognize that their democracy had grave flaws, requiring two hundred years of struggle to overcome—and that democracy remains a work in progress, an ideal that challenges each generation anew.
- On Veteran's Day we remember the service and sacrifice of those who have defended our country, but we also renew our commitment to go beyond lip service and attend to the health and education and other needs of returning troops and their families.
- On Thanksgiving we express gratitude for past blessings, but we also resolve to lead more grateful lives and to be a blessing to others.

Nowhere do the past and present confront each other more forcefully than on the King holiday: the very act of remembering and honoring Dr. King is bound to bring us face-to-face with the present and what we are doing to further the causes of peace and justice for which he lived and died.

This year is especially replete with such challenges. The desperation of our brothers and sisters in Haiti reminds us of Dr. King's teaching that our compassion and our obligation to minister to those deprived of life's basic necessities know no national boundaries. We received one bit of good news yesterday, of special interest to our House Democracy Partnership, which has worked with the Haitian parliament for four years to increase its ability to govern effectively. We received notice that our government would turn over our former embassy – which stands near the collapsed parliament buildings - to the Haitian government so that it could get up and running quickly, sending an important sign of confidence and stability amid all the chaos.

Here at home we also have a daunting agenda as millions of our people seek jobs and seek to tide themselves and their families over until they find those jobs. Tens of millions do not have the basic protection that health insurance provides, and tens of millions more have insurance that is likely to go away if they develop a serious illness or lose their job. I am grateful, as your representative, for the encouragement and support that have come from this community as we struggle in Washington to address these challenges. But make no mistake: the forces of reaction have been mobilized, and the confusion and misunderstanding and doubt they sow can be just as damaging as outright opposition.

Last year at this time we celebrated a potentially transforming election, inspired for many by Dr. King's legacy. This year we perhaps understand better than we did that change will not come easily or without resistance from those wedded to the status quo. It is not enough to win a single election; we must stay in the fight, and push back against forces of reaction, if the promise of the political awakening we saw across the country is to be realized.

We have come too far to turn back or falter now. We are on the threshold of changes that can make our community, our country, and our world more peaceful, more secure, and more just. But we are not there yet, and our remembrance of Martin Luther King could not be more relevant or timely. May we understand in our time what he called "the fierce urgency of now," and may we resolve in whatever ways are open to us to see the battle through.