

HONORING AND CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF CIVIL RIGHTS ICON, REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. MFUME) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MFUME. Mr. Speaker, I may not use the entire 60 minutes, but I appreciate the opportunity. I would encourage other Members of the House, who are still in town, to certainly come over and to seek recognition on this as I try to talk a bit about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and why it is so very important that we, at least here in the House, take a moment or two or, in this case an hour or less, to reflect on the life, the legacy, and even some of the myths that have circulated over the years.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored today to rise to really celebrate the birth of civil rights icon and leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who, had he lived, would have been 96 years of age yesterday, and to talk a bit about the dream that he tried to put forward in his short 39 years of life, a dream that he felt would be the North Star and the beacon for our country with respect to human rights and human dignity.

As I thought about that and I thought about his dream, I am reminded of a passage in Scripture, Mr. Speaker, in the book of Genesis, chapter 37 and verse 18, where it says, "And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another: Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say some evil beast hath devoured him and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Well, that dream, despite the bullet of a lone assassin on April 4, 1968, did very much grow, thrive, and replicate itself as a dream not just for a race of people or group of people but as a dream for an entire Nation.

I remember in 1980, as a young member of the Baltimore City Council, petitioning the council to join with other local governments around the Nation to push for the establishment of a Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday in our respective towns, cities, and hamlets.

For years, every January 15, I, along with so many others, would drive from Baltimore to Washington to join civil rights leaders and recording artists like Gil Scott-Heron, The Last Poets, Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Jesse Jackson, Congressman John Conyers, and thousands of others, and we would rally right here on the steps of this Capitol, in the cold, in January, on the 15th of each year, again, to petition for the establishment of a Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday.

□ 1245

I, like many others, recognize that that in and of itself was a beginning.

The real beginning, however, has to go back to the Federal legislation that recognizes Martin Luther King Jr. Day as the bill introduced first by Congressman John Conyers of Michigan just days after the assassination of Dr. King.

Unfortunately, it would take 15 years of those protests, perseverance, attempts, tenacity, and pure resolve by civil rights leaders and others across this Nation for the holiday to become recognized, and then finally signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1983. Then, unfortunately, it would take an additional 17 years for it to be recognized in all 50 States across the country.

Fittingly, Martin Luther King Jr. Day was designed to intentionally inspire all Americans to volunteer and to give back to their communities. In fact, it is the only Federal holiday classified as a national day of service.

Like so many others, I feel personally driven out of my respect for the life and legacy of Dr. King to find a way to celebrate this observance through acts of service, for it is only through reflecting the values and the morals and the principles of Dr. King into our lives that we will enact the dream that he has so often been associated with, where justice is the supreme ruler, freedom is the dominant creed, and equity the common practice.

I would urge us to take a moment in this discussion or any other discussion, a moment of remembrance to really talk about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the man, the myth, and the legacy.

I think it is important to point out that Dr. King was born, as I said before, on January 15, 1929, in the segregated south in Atlanta, Georgia, where his grandfather began the family's tenure many, many years ago in another State as the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church.

After graduating from Morehouse College and Crozer Theological Seminary, Dr. King then enrolled in graduate studies at Boston University. It was in Boston where Dr. King would meet Coretta Scott, who was also a student at the nearby New England Conservatory. As we all know and as history has taught us, the two would ultimately marry, and Coretta Scott would become Coretta Scott King, and together they would be a formidable force in their own right, in their own time, and in joint pursuit of equality and justice for all.

This remarkable partnership between Dr. King and Coretta Scott King also brought forth four children who grew up to embrace, uphold, and protect the values that their parents had devoted their lives to. I would be remiss if I did not uplift the names of Martin Luther King III, Bernice Albertine King, Yolanda Denise King, and Dexter Scott King, who we unfortunately lost last January.

In 1954, as I indicated, their father became the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery,

Alabama. Dr. King, by this time, was a member of the Executive Committee of the NAACP and would join also the Montgomery Improvement Association. He would also help to create the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization that was formed to provide leadership for a growing and sustaining civil rights movement.

Dr. King rose to prominence as a revered leader of that movement in 1955, when a young woman, a seamstress by the name of Rosa Parks, refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery because of the color of her skin. Inspired by one woman's act of moral courage, in the face of an immoral systemic system of law, Dr. King led the Montgomery Bus Boycott that lasted 381 days and is heralded as the catalyst, that one act that began the modern civil rights movement.

Now, in order to understand it, you have to keep it in its proper context. Citizens of Montgomery were so outraged that they could pay and were forced like everyone else to pay their taxes, that they could contribute to the economy, that they could find a way to sustain families, and that they could find a way, as all citizens did, to support the government there, only to be told that they could not ride a bus to get to work unless they sat in the back of the bus because of the color of their skin.

It might be difficult to understand, but it is important to point out that those men and women who wanted to maintain and hold onto their dignity decided that they would walk to work, walk to the store, walk to church as opposed to sitting in the back of that bus any longer. Mr. Speaker, 381 days is a lot of days, and it takes a lot of resolve to get through something like that.

It is one thing to see it in a history book. It is another thing if you are living it and you are walking all those miles every day, through summer, winter, fall, and spring, back and forth, to do the things that you had to do, like get to your job, the things you needed to do, to shop for groceries, and to be able to do anything else, but they did it for 381 days. They did it because of the inspiration that they got from Rosa Parks, and they did it also because of the inspiration that they got from this young preacher by the name of Martin Luther King, Jr.

During that boycott, Dr. King was arrested. His home was bombed, and he was subjected to personal abuse over and over again. Now, he was arrested. No one else that did anything else to stop him was arrested, but he was arrested simply for articulating the problem, supporting the efforts of Ms. Parks, and encouraging a community to stand up and to speak for itself.

As I said, his home was bombed. He was subjected to all kinds of insults and personal abuse. By the way, Dr. King was locked up in jail 29 times for standing up for fairness and fair play.

Yet, he never matched the violence he got with violence of his own.

On June 5, 1956, a Federal District Court ruled that the State of Alabama's segregation policy on public buses was, in fact, unconstitutional. When the United States Supreme Court upheld that ruling, it was affirmed that the Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by Dr. King as a result of the efforts of Rosa Parks, was a true story of triumph, and it was, in fact, for many, year after year, a focal point on what civil disobedience can look like and what success can be born of it.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would go on to travel for over 6 million miles, speaking over 2,500 times to launch his nonviolent protest movement that spanned the Nation. It began to grow, and it began to unfurl, and it found its way, reaching and touching the hearts of a lot of people who never even gave a thought about civil rights, but when they thought about their own selves, their own families, and their own desire to live and grow up in a country that many of whom had fought for overseas and defended with their lives, people then realized that this was not just about Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks, but it was, in fact, about the moral consciousness of our Nation.

After that successful boycott, Dr. King was arrested again, this time in Birmingham. It was in Birmingham when he wrote and declared from a cell a number of things that America must, in fact, consider. He wrote on scraps of paper because they wouldn't even give him writing pads, but he wrote them nonetheless, and those letters are often referred to today as the "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in which he fiercely declared: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

We hear that repeated over and over and over again. We should know that those words in that letter from that Birmingham jail cell brought national and international attention to the civil rights movement as we know it.

Some of you will recall the grainy film and the black and white footage of the great March on Washington that occurred on August 28, 1963, where the eyes and the ears of the entire world would be fixated on the magnificent power and oratory of Dr. King.

I know, as a 14-year-old kid, remembering it, watching on a very small black and white TV set the delayed broadcast because live TV was not what it is today, and I couldn't believe as I sat there the number of people who appeared to be a sea of witnesses that had assembled.

Dr. King that day was introduced as the moral leader of our Nation, and he delivered a message which empowered a quarter of a million people in attendance. His words that day brought my mother to tears as I sat in a row house in west Baltimore with my three younger sisters, all motionless from the eloquent force in which he delivered a message of love over hate in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

At that historic March on Washington, more now than a half century ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stood before a quarter of a million people, as I said, assembled at the memorial of one of our Nation's greatest leaders, and on that famous day Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., heir to Abraham Lincoln, addressed the crowd in these words:

We have come to our Nation's Capital to cash a check.

When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence that they, in fact, were signing a promissory note to which all Americans would one day fall heir. This note was a promise that all men and women would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Yet, even before the Republic was born, it had already compromised the moral principles articulated in that Declaration of Independence and in that preamble to the Constitution and in all the other pronouncements that it used to justify its revolution against the king's tyranny by having subjected human beings, my own ancestors, to bondage of the flesh as well as bondage of the spirit.

□ 1300

The enslavement of the Negro, the annexation of the Hispanic, and the termination of the American Indian made our Nation's beginning an iniquitous conception because it was born in hypocrisy and dedicated to a false and twisted concept that White men were superior to non-White men and, therefore, somehow entitled to enslave them, oppress them, and, if necessary, destroy them.

In the 200 years since the writing of that preamble to the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and all the other pronouncements that America issued to justify, again, its revolution against tyranny, we have surpassed the wildest expectations and aspirations of our Founders.

We have gone beyond human measure and created a nation of unparalleled power and unparalleled influence. We have grown from a small band of 13 impoverished Colonies to become the strongest, the most powerful nation on the face of the Earth.

Our wealth as a nation is unmatched. America's military forces, perhaps and despite all other propaganda, really have no equal.

Our industry and our technology remain superior, Europe, China, and Japan notwithstanding.

Because of our ideals and our principles, we wield a mighty and forceful hand in world affairs. There can be no doubt that the American flag is still respected by billions of the world's people as a symbol of freedom from tyranny.

Every morning at the start of school, millions of kids still around the country pause to utter the words: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic

for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Yet, if Dr. King were here today, he might call into question the fact that that does not always still ring true because, in many ways, we are still not one nation. That is the challenge.

Far too many of our citizens do not see their existence as having been due to or under the direction of God. We are not yet indivisible, and nowhere in our own lifetime can it be said that we have practiced liberty and justice for all of our people.

The genius that our Founding Fathers bequeathed to us was to have been, if realized, a form of government based on opportunity but measured against the promise of America. In many respects, we have still fallen short in ways that continue to haunt us, plague us, and, unfortunately, divide us.

Have things changed for the better? Yes. Has there been real and measurable progress? Yes. But it is not just a matter of having come a long, long way. It is, in fact, a matter of having still yet a long, long way to go.

As we begin the celebration of Dr. King's 96th birthday, let it serve, I hope, as a reminder of a union that he forged in the Halls of Congress that ensured the signing and passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act into law in 1965.

Dr. King's spirit should and really must renew our resolve, particularly as Members of Congress and as Americans of all walks of life, to stand for justice, fairness, and equal opportunity whenever and wherever possible.

Across his life, Dr. King was awarded five honorary degrees, named Man of the Year by Time magazine, and, at the age of 35, became the youngest man to have received the Nobel Peace Prize, but all of that didn't matter to him.

All the accolades and the other things that had been heaped upon him during his life—and, I am sure, since his death—really would not stack up to mean very much in the heart, soul, and mind of Martin Luther King, Jr.

At 39 years of age, the person who led the nonviolent movement was taken from us in a cruel manner by the single bullet of a lone assassin. It really didn't matter, as he said, as he preached his own eulogy, what people said. What mattered is that he tried to live his life to exemplify the dream that he had and that still burns.

I can remember the numbness I felt on that evening of April 4, 1968. Like so many others, I felt my heart race when I heard the words come over the radio that said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is dead.

When I reflect back on his life, as I am doing and I appreciate so many of you who are watching are also doing today, I am still reminded of a man who was unawed by opinion, unswayed by flattery, and undismayed by disaster.

He confronted his life with the courage of his convictions and then confronted his death with the courage of his faith.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, I began by referencing that Scripture in the Book of Genesis, because Dr. Martin Luther King really was, and in the hearts of many of us remains, a dreamer. I will close by going back to that passage, Genesis 37: “And when they saw him from afar, even before he had come near to them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, behold the dreamer cometh. Come now therefore and let us slay him, and we will cast him into some old pit, and we will say that some evil beast has devoured him, and we shall see what becomes of his dreams.”

Just like that passage in Genesis, that dream has lived on. It lives in the hearts and the minds of so many of us. It is a dream that young people look at and try to fashion themselves after. It is a dream that many of us who are much older will smile and go to our grave knowing that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was, in the truest sense, a true American that gave all he could, not just for his dream, but for his country.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

REINING IN CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HARRIGAN). Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 3, 2025, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. KILEY) for 30 minutes.

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, this week, I announced legislation to rein in the California Coastal Commission, to strip the California Coastal Commission of the powers that it has been granted by Federal law.

The undeniable reality is that the commission is completely out of control and has veered far from its purpose of protecting the coast.

Mike Stoker, the former Southwest administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said this: “The California Coastal Commission was created in 1972. For over 50 years, it has been one of if not the most overzealous, overreaching, and self-important regulatory agency I have ever dealt with at the local, State, or Federal level.”

This legislation has become all the more necessary in light of the tragedy that continues to unfold in Los Angeles. The task of rebuilding those communities, the imperative of recovery, is going to be difficult enough as it is, but it will be impossible as long as the California Coastal Commission continues to exercise its powers in such irresponsible ways.

My bill, specifically, will amend the Coastal Zone Management Act to remove the commission’s authority to block national security-related activities, critical infrastructure projects,

and activities with high economic impact, including post-disaster recovery and rebuilding.

We all got a very clear window into the manifest irrationality of this agency just a couple of months ago when there was a proposal by SpaceX, together with the Air Force, to increase the launch cadence out of Vandenberg Space Force Base to allow for more launches that are launching satellites for important national security purposes and launching other payloads, such as Starlink satellites.

I will note, by the way, that Starlink is right now, as we speak, being used by first responders in the L.A. area who have lost connectivity and would otherwise not be able to have the necessary communications for emergency response.

This was all known, by the way, at the time that this sort of use case for Starlink was part of its potential. I wrote a letter, at the time, supporting the request for more launches, and we specifically cited the use in fighting wildfires as one reason why this is important.

Nevertheless, at the time, just a couple of months ago, with this very clear bipartisan proposal supported by the military to allow SpaceX to do more launches, the California Coastal Commission rejected it and tried to stop SpaceX from increasing its launches, increasing its capacity to support our national security, to improve connectivity.

The reason that they gave was this—this is not just me sort of speculating about their reasons—this is literally what the commissioners said in a public meeting. They said that they do not like Elon Musk’s political posts on X on completely unrelated topics, and so to punish him, they were going to reject the proposal that wasn’t just from SpaceX but from the U.S. military itself in order to do more launches.

That told us everything about what the California Coastal Commission is all about. That was very recent, but this agency has a long history of decisions that defy all rationality, defy all measures of public interest, and that don’t actually serve the purpose of protecting the environment and protecting the coast.

Indeed, when you look at the specific most problematic causes of the catastrophe in L.A., forest management and the water supply, the California Coastal Commission has been a major hindrance in both areas.

In 2019, for example, there was an ongoing project by the L.A. Department of Water and Power, where, through Topanga State Park, they were replacing these aging wooden power line poles that were almost 100 years old. They were in an area that had been identified as having an elevated fire risk. As a very important project, these wooden poles, 100 years old in a high-risk area, they were replacing them with steel and with more fire-resistant materials.

As the New York Post explained, the goal of the project was to improve fire safety for the Pacific Palisades area by replacing those wooden poles with steel. Also, they were installing wind- and fire-resistant power lines. Again, this is all in a high fire-risk area.

The California Coastal Commission caught wind of this, and they learned that there was a particular rare plant, a few of the Brauton’s milkvetch, in the area, so they rushed in and said to stop. They brought the project to an immediate halt. It didn’t get done, and then, in the process, they, in fact, collected \$2 million in fines.

This is the sort of action that the California Coastal Commission has taken.

Consider just a decision from just 2 years ago, when the commission blocked a desalination plant in Huntington Beach that would have increased L.A.’s water supply. The commission denied a permit for Poseidon Water’s proposed \$1.4 billion desalination plant in Huntington Beach.

Of course, we have all seen how the lack of a sufficient water supply is one of the things that allowed the fires in L.A. to grow unchecked. We had an empty reservoir, for example. Here, just 2 years ago, you had the California Coastal Commission rejecting a major augmentation in the region’s supply.

□ 1315

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the issue related to SpaceX also undermined our national security, in addition to our ability to innovate and the ability to launch Starlink satellites.

The CCC, the California Coastal Commission, has also on several occasions rejected proposals from the U.S. Navy. For example, it rejected the U.S. Navy’s proposal to increase sonar and underwater explosives training off of southern California.

In another instance, it filed a lawsuit against the Navy for proceeding with 14 major training exercises off of southern California, again harming U.S. national security.

Then, finally, there is the issue of housing because it is going to be a major undertaking in order to rebuild these beautiful communities. The California Coastal Commission is most assuredly going to stand in the way of that process. It has a long history of denying project after project. California has a massive housing shortage.

Yet, even when we have projects that have gotten all the necessary approvals, which have met all the very stringent requirements set out by the State, the California Coastal Commission will come in and spike the project.

They have done this so much that a group called Circulate San Diego issued a report recently highlighting how the California Coastal Commission has consistently taken actions that worsen California’s housing crisis.

They highlighted examples of how even these very, what some would call, left-leaning set of requirements for