

On New Year's Day, America will recognize the sesquicentennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, which abolished slavery within the states attempting to secede from the U.S. and marked a step toward fulfilling our founding vision of a nation where all people are created equal.

It is worth pausing to reflect upon how far America has come since that January day in 1863. One hundred and fifty years is, within the long span of human existence, barely the blink of an eye – only two lifespans. In fact, my own grandfather could remember that day (yes, my grandfather). Yet in that time the Civil War has faded into the history books, the descendants of former slaves have risen to fill nearly every rank and role in American life, and the scourge of racism has diminished greatly. It required not only the leadership of a great man, President Lincoln, but also the personal involvement of millions of Americans rededicating themselves to the great unfinished work of the nation.

Indeed, history often reveals a remarkable human capacity to overcome division and hatred. I was born a few years after the United States concluded a horrific war against Germany, Japan, and Italy. Tens of millions had died. One might have imagined that the bitterness arising from such bloodshed could never be overcome – and yet now, only a handful of decades later, we count these former enemies as friends and allies.

Even during my time in Congress, I have seen progress that many thought impossible. In 2004, a president called upon Congress to amend our constitution to deny gay men and women the right to marry. Earlier this year, a different president announced his personal support for gay marriage.

Today, as America stands on the verge of a new year in which our challenges seem as great and our differences as stark as ever, I am encouraged to remember these lessons from our nation's past. If history is any guide, the years ahead will once again bring the healing of deep scars, the bridging of great divisions, and the surmounting of insurmountable obstacles.

An Explanation to My Constituents

Last week, Congress passed a misguided bill authorizing the Defense Department for 2013. The legislation contained some positive provisions, including a (small) pay raise for troops, additional funding for family housing and support services, some provisions for additional research in breast cancer, some protections for women from sexual harassment and rape in the military, and an amendment I authored that [creates a permanent National Language Service Corps](#) within the Defense Department. It is intended to provide for the men and women we ask to defend our country.

Unfortunately, the good measures were far outweighed by the bad. For example, the bill perpetuates a bloated nuclear weapons complex that does not enhance our security and in fact compromises our nonproliferation efforts. The bill continues funding for an exo-atmospheric kill vehicle – a provocative and destabilizing system that will waste millions more on our failed national missile defense effort. Worse, rather than moving toward a realistic scale of American military commitments, the bill commits our soldiers and our dollars to defend countries in Europe and the Pacific that should be capable of defending themselves. It continues to fund our combat operations in Afghanistan instead of restricting the use of those funds to withdrawal-related operations only.

Overall, the bill continues the acquisition programs and policies that have been in place for decades. It does not fundamentally reshape our armed forces for security today. It continues Cold War weapons acquisition programs that have no place in a 21st century, where the threats are much more diffuse and dispersed.

I deeply regret that I inadvertently cast a “yes” vote for this bill last week. There were six votes recorded in a row: a motion to recommit and then to pass of a large across-the-board cut of government programs, as proposed by Budget Chairman Paul Ryan; an honorific naming of a veterans health clinic in Spokane and another in Grand Rapids, naming a mountain peak next to Yosemite in honor of a former Olympic skier; and the Defense Authorization bill. I mistook the Defense bill. I intended to vote “no,” and I have inserted a statement into the Congressional record clarifying my intent. This is a very rare mistake for me. Although the bill passed by a huge margin, with many Republicans and Democrats voting for it, this was an important bill that in good conscience I would not vote for, and I want my constituents to know.

Stay In Touch with FEMA

If you registered for disaster aid in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, it is important that you

keep in touch with FEMA, especially if your contact information changes. Updating contact information with current address and phone numbers will ensure FEMA can reach you with new information or questions.

To update your contact information, call the toll-free FEMA hotline at 1-800-462-7585. If you have not yet registered for disaster assistance, you may do so online by visiting [www.Disaster Assistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov)

. Please note that FEMA has extended the deadline for New Jersey victims of Hurricane Sandy to apply for aid until January 30, 2013.

Sincerely,

Rush Holt
Member of Congress