

This week's eGenda comes to you from Montgomery, Alabama, where I am participating again in the annual Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage. The Pilgrimage, sponsored by the Faith and Politics Institute, is led by Rep. John Lewis, includes Rep. Steny Hoyer and 15 or so Members of Congress from both parties and a number of figures from the civil rights movement, and has two days of seminars at key sites in Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma from the movement of the 1950s and '60s -- from the Rev. Dr. King's church, to the Rosa Parks bus stop, to Kelly Ingram Park, to the Edmund Pettus Bridge. It provides a valuable reminder of how this country has gotten to where we are and of what we can be.

Long before John Lewis was a member of Congress, he was a central figure in the struggle for equality and civil rights -- at the lunch counter sit-ins, on the Greyhound bus Freedom Rides, at the "I Have a Dream" March on Washington, in the lobbying effort for the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and in the voting rights march in Selma. Displaying enormous non-violent courage, he was threatened, beaten, scorned, and jailed again and again. Ultimately he was vindicated and revered as the embodiment of hope and accomplishment that is the very character of America.

America was born in compromise and contradiction. The country that was conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all are created equal lived with a deliberate blindness to slavery for scores of years and for even longer has turned a deaf ear to the cries for justice and equality of opportunity in our society. Long after slavery was abolished legally, we have shown a great willingness to tolerate a society that, amid wealth, allows many people to live in the disgrace of shabby housing, to live with the risks of inadequate healthcare, and to carry the debilitating curse of inferior education, as well as to bear the daily indignities of unequal justice. To use a religious metaphor, it is America's original sin. Some tolerate this glaring contradiction in America between our ideals and our reality; others try to justify it with strained arguments that people of privilege deserve their relative good fortune simply because they come from privilege, and those of misfortune somehow get what they deserve, as well. Some might call it hypocrisy that we have lived with such a contradiction for so long, but I prefer to think of it as a long wrestling match between our human shortcomings and our better angels. I think it is our constitutional government that has brought about and officiated that wrestling match in a manner that results in progress.

As one who grew up in segregated America, I think one must understand the civil rights movement to gain a full understanding of our American predicament and to understand the courage needed to overcome it. It has been said that one cannot understand America without understanding our relationship to race. I would broaden that to say we must understand our acceptance of inequality in the face of our commitment to equality.

We presume that when Lincoln posed the question of whether "a nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure" he was referring to the cleaving of the country in secession and war. However, the question equally well might be asked whether the enduring country can remain true to its conception of liberty and can remain dedicated to achieving the proposed

equality. As we Americans debate education, housing, healthcare, marriage and family, and so much more, reflecting on civil rights movement can help us understand the American quest to confront and overcome the persistent and pernicious inequalities in our society and our economy.

Prepare for the Risk of Spring Flooding

A flood does not have to be a catastrophic event to cause high out-of-pocket costs, and you don't have to live in a high-risk flood area to suffer flood damage. Around 20 percent of flood insurance claims occur in moderate-to-low-risk zones. We saw this in 2011. Keep in mind:

- **The time to prepare is now.** Remember to have a family evacuation plan, put an emergency kit together, and keep important papers and valuables in a safe, dry place. Visit ready.gov/floods for more on family preparedness for flood and other emergencies.

- **Most standard homeowners policies do not cover flood damage.** Visit floodsmart.gov to learn more about individual flood risk, explore coverage options and to find an agent in your area.

Supporting National Heritage Areas

The National Heritage Area Program is one of the Department of the Interior's most cost-effective initiatives, relying on a public-private partnership in which every federal dollar is matched with an average of \$5.50 in other funding.

In 2006, I helped establish the Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area which highlights the role of New Jersey during the American Revolution, which was the site of more battles and military engagements than any other state. It also brought protection to many historic landmarks, including battlefields, lighthouses, mills, wells, and the other Revolutionary War area sites in New Jersey.

Earlier this week, I cosponsored the National Heritage Area Act of 2012. This bipartisan bill would help partnerships like Crossroads to better preserve the nation's heritage and to spur economic growth with minimal federal support.

Sincerely,

Rush Holt
Member of Congress