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U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd

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Honoring the Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Senator Byrd offered an amendment on Monday to provide \$10 million in federal funding for the planned national memorial in Washington, D.C., to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The amendment is cosponsored by the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Thad Cochran, R-Miss.

Authorized by Congress in 1996, the King Memorial is planned to be built on the Tidal Basin, adjacent to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial. According to Memorial planners, this four-acre memorial will be the first on the National Mall to honor a person of color. The cost of the Memorial is \$100 million. Groundbreaking is expected to take place in late 2006 and the project will be completed in 2008. More information about the memorial is available at <http://www.buildthedream.org>.

Senator Byrd and Senator Cochran offered the bipartisan amendment to the Fiscal Year 2006 Interior and Related Appropriations bill, which includes funding for the operations of the National Park Service.

The greatness of women and men is often best judged from an historical perspective. History gives us the detached perspective that allows us to better understand and appreciate the person, the cause, and the legacy.

This happens because great individuals often have been leaders who challenged the status quo as they pushed the country into areas where it had feared to go. As a result, such leaders often arouse

criticism and opposition.

The Revered Dr. Martin Luther King certainly was a controversial figure in his own time.

Black power advocates attacked him for moving too slowly, while more than one presidential administration attacked him for moving too swiftly.

The NAACP criticized his take-to-the-streets tactics.

Civil rights leaders broke with Dr. King because of his opposition to the Vietnam War.

I certainly had my share of differences with Reverend King -- a lot of them. We were both products of our times, and both of us were doing what we believed was right.

But time and the march of history afford a better understanding of Dr. King and his contributions toward making the United States a better, stronger, and greater Nation.

It is for this reason, I am proposing that \$10 million in funding be made available for the memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This \$10 million, which is available within the subcommittee's allocation, would supplement the approximately \$42 million that has already been raised and stands as a solid foundation to help make this memorial a reality.

I have come to appreciate how Martin Luther King, Jr., sought to help our nation overcome racial barriers, bigotry, hatred, and injustice, and how he helped to inspire and guide a most important, most powerful, and most transforming social movement.

Despite the hatred and the bigotry he encountered in his efforts, Dr. King never allowed his movement to be reduced to a simple racial conflict. He stressed on more than one occasion, that the struggle was not one between people of different colors. Rather, Dr. King believed that his fight was a fight "between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness."

His vision and his movement included all Americans. I remind my colleagues, and all Americans, that when Martin Luther King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and proclaimed that he had "a dream," he pointed out that he also looked forward to the time "when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles,

Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands."

I remind my colleagues that Dr. King's efforts also focused on the economic rights of economically deprived people of all races and creeds, as well as on the civil rights of African Americans. In this quest, he proposed a Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged. He advocated a Guaranteed National Income. At the time of his death, Dr. King was organizing a "Poor Peoples March" on Washington, an effort meant to focus national attention on poverty among not only African-Americans, but among the poor whites of Appalachia, as well.

Dr. King's vision was not only about what America could be, but what America should be!

With the passage of time, we have come to learn that his Dream was the American Dream, and few ever expressed it more eloquently.

Dr. King touched the conscience of a Nation, and forced us, as a country, to confront our contradictions. How could the United States present itself as the leader of the free world, he asked, while denying equality and equal opportunity to a large segment of our own people? In his book, "Where Do We Go from Here," Dr. King asked why forty million Americans were living in poverty in "a nation overflowing with unbelievable affluence." Writing of the destructive effects of militarism, he asked: "Why [has] our nation placed itself in the position of being God's military agent on earth?" "Why have we substituted the arrogant undertaking of policing the whole world for the high task of putting our own house in order?"

With his works as well as his words, Dr. King left us a legacy that inspires and guides millions of Americans today. It is a legacy that demonstrates that human problems, no matter how big or complex, can be addressed - - a legacy that proves that one determined person can help make a difference.

Amid all his successes and triumphs, and all of his personal accomplishments, including receiving the Noble Peace Prize, Dr. King always kept his perspective. The night before he was assassinated, he explained: "I just want to do God's will."

What a powerful statement this was. What an inspiration it should be to all of us. "To do God's will."

Criticized, denounced, and opposed in his own time, Martin Luther King has become not only an American icon, but also an

international symbol of social justice, and one of recent history's most beloved champions of freedom.

We have named a National Holiday in his honor. It is just and proper that we now place a memorial on the mall of the Nation's Capital as a visible and tangible symbol of the thanks of a grateful nation. Martin Luther King taught us tolerance. How we need such teachings today. May his life, his legacy, and someday soon, his memorial ever remind us of his vision.

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