



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 166

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

No. 9

Senate

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE'S FIRST MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY CELEBRATION

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I rise today in observance of the 20th anniversary of New Hampshire's first Martin Luther King Jr. Day. After legislation was enacted the previous summer, Martin Luther King Jr. Day in the year 2000 was the culmination of a years-long struggle to add Dr. King's name to the State's official Civil Rights Day holiday. I ask my colleagues and all Americans to join me in celebrating this recognition of such an influential figure and saluting the men and women who prompted this important and permanent change.

This anniversary is personal for me. I fought alongside so many when I served in the New Hampshire State Senate for an appropriate way to honor Dr. King, the preeminent leader of the civil rights movement. Years later, as Governor, I was proud to sign the bill into law that ended New Hampshire's status as the only State not to recognize his birthday as an official holiday. There were setbacks leading up to that triumphant June day, including many failed votes in the State legislature; yet with a sense of resilience typical of the movement that Dr. King inspired, we persevered and kicked off the new millennium in the Granite State by celebrating our first Martin Luther King Jr. Day on January 17, 2000.

It was an exciting time that reflected the positive change that many of us had seen in our lifetimes. As a child growing up in southern Missouri and attending segregated schools, I saw the daily injustices of life under Jim Crow segregation. We have made great strides since then in the march toward full equality, and these advancements are the product of Dr. King's leadership and the peaceful, nonviolent protest movements that he championed.

Whether writing from inside a jail cell or speaking from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. King delivered a stirring message with hope that Americans could come together and fully realize one of our country's founding principles, that *all* are created equal. He pledged himself and inspired others to work toward a more perfect union and embrace a belief in freedom and opportunity for all. He held a faith that engaged citizens—from the thousands who stood with him on the National Mall in 1963 to the many who worked tirelessly years later to establish a holiday in his name—are the most powerful promoters of positive social and economic change.

One of those engaged citizens was Rev. Dr. Arthur Hilson of New Hope Baptist Church in Portsmouth, NH. A beacon of wisdom and grace, Reverend Hilson was instrumental in garnering the public support to establish Martin Luther King Jr. Day. He understood that the people we choose to revere can send a powerful message to future generations and that the lifework and message of Dr. King must be a part of the heritage we leave to our children. We lost Reverend Hilson last year, but we still hold on to cherished memories of a man who, when asked how he was doing, would always answer, 'Too blessed to complain.' We are all blessed to have known such a loving neighbor, determined activist and living embodiment of Dr. King's teachings.

On behalf of the people of New Hampshire, I ask my colleagues and all Americans to join in celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day and in recognizing Reverend Hilson who was so dedicated to building Dr. King's 'Beloved Community' of justice, equality and love for all.