

The first session of the 110th Congress came to a close just over a week ago, marking the completion of the first full year under the leadership of the Democratic majority. As we mark the end of one year and prepare for the beginning of a new one, I, like many Southern Marylanders, have found this holiday season to be a time for both reflection and resolution.

Over the course of this first year, the House of Representatives has had a remarkable level of achievement, passing 130 key measures – with nearly 70 percent passing with significant bipartisan support.

A number of these measures were signed by the President - including the College Cost Reduction and Access Act; legislation enacting the 9/11 Commission's Recommendations; a major Energy Independence and Security Act to reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil and invest in alternative clean energy sources; critical Innovation Agenda legislation to increase America's competitiveness; and the first Minimum Wage Increase in a decade. And we have restored accountability and fiscal responsibility to our government by enacting the most sweeping ethics reforms since Watergate and adhering to strict fiscal principles that helped usher in budget surpluses in the 1990s.

Throughout this first year, the new Congress has consistently demonstrated that it is listening to the American people and providing the New Direction the people voted for in November 2006. We set out to pursue an agenda anchored in core American principles: restoring the American dream; protecting our citizens and strengthening the security of our nation, and restoring accountability and fiscal responsibility to our government – and we have done just that.

Although we have had a very productive year overall, on many issues, the Administration has been a stubborn opponent of progress for the American people. The President has vetoed six key measures so far this year and is threatening to veto 41 more House-passed measures. In a number of cases, the President has vetoed or holds veto threats over measures that have significant public support, such as life-saving stem cell research, middle-class tax relief, and health care for 10 million poor uninsured children. Most recently he went to great lengths to object to Congress making much needed investments in education, medical research, law enforcement, and transportation infrastructure.

The Administration has also failed to consider the views of a majority of Americans when it comes to its policies regarding the war in Iraq. While change has proved difficult under these circumstances, the New Direction Congress has significantly moved the debate, as well as made the Bush Administration more accountable for the execution of the war.

We have instituted vigorous oversight, uncovering tens of billions of dollars in waste, fraud, and abuse in spending in Iraq by companies like Blackwater and Halliburton. And we have passed a series of measures to initiate the responsible redeployment of our troops and enhance national security and military readiness – measures that unfortunately were rejected by the President and those in Congress who helped to sustain his vetoes.

Despite those that would stand in the way of progress, we are proud of what we have been able to accomplish in the first year of the 110th Congress. America is in a better place than we were one year ago today, and I firmly believe that the new Congress is part of the reason.

However, we recognize that more needs to be done. The New Direction Congress remains committed to the issues important to all Americans, from changing direction in Iraq and refocusing our fight against terrorists, to addressing pocketbook issues here at home, to ensuring that the nation we leave for our children and grandchildren is greater than the one we inherited.

We will continue to fight for the American people's priorities in 2008 – and in the spirit of the season and the optimism that comes with the start of a new year, I remain hopeful that the President and a bipartisan majority in Congress will join in these efforts.