

WASHINGTON - Congressman Steny Hoyer released the following statement today in observation of the 40th Anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which is tomorrow, July 2nd:

"Tomorrow, July 2nd, will mark the 40th anniversary of the historic 1964 Civil Rights Act, which finally guaranteed equal rights for minorities in America. It is hard to believe that it was only 40 years ago when, facing prejudice and stubborn odds, President Lyndon Johnson guided the Civil Rights Act through the House and Senate and signed into law legislation that guaranteed rights that so many of our fellow citizens had been denied.

"The Act made racial discrimination in public places illegal and established standards to thwart the rigged voting system in the South. It also required employers to provide equal employment opportunities without regard to a person's race. Projects involving federal funds could be halted if there was evidence of discrimination based on color, race or national origin. These are things inherent in our society today, but for much of 20th century, these protections only existed for white Americans - not blacks.

"Without the unshakable faith and fierce determination of members of the civil rights movement - many who literally sacrificed their lives - the Civil Rights Act may have taken many more years to arrive.

"My good friend, Senior Chief Deputy Whip John Lewis, was one of the leaders of that civil rights movement. He was just out of his teens when he was beaten because of his participation in the Freedom Rides. Yet he was not deterred. At the age of 23, he joined Dr. King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial for the March on Washington, and in the years that followed, he continued the fight for freedom and human rights, despite more than 40 arrests, physical attacks and serious injuries.

"In the years that followed its passage, the Civil Rights Act opened doors and created opportunities for black and minority Americans that were long overdue. With federal protections, blacks could attend any school or university, be hired for any job, and finally enjoy the Constitutional freedoms so many of us take for granted.

"Despite much progress, however, minority Americans still struggle for equal access and advancement. Right now we face a struggling economy that is not producing enough jobs, and

it has imposed even greater hardships on minorities. Since March 2000, black unemployment has soared to nearly 11 percent, almost double that of whites. And there is still a glaring wage gap confronting minorities in the workforce. Black men earned 73.9 percent of what white men earned in 2002, measured by median full-time wages and salaries. That's barely up from 73.4 percent a decade ago.

"In our health system, minorities still repeatedly receive inferior care. Last year's Institute of Medicine report found that health care delivery is very unequal depending on the race or ethnicity of the patient. That inequality is thought to be a major reason that African-Americans frequently have worse health outcomes than whites. The black infant mortality rate in fact remains twice as high as the rate for white infants and 20 percent of black Americans lack regular access to health care compared with less than 16 percent of whites.

"Without early and advanced education, individuals face a great handicap in this world. Yet in our school system today separate and unequal is still the reality in far too many places. Even in higher education, there exists a large gap between the percentage of whites with a college degree and the percentage of blacks.

"So while we acknowledge that the Civil Rights Acts was a crucial step forward for our nation, let us also acknowledge that it was not the end of the journey. Our continued vigilance and commitment is required if every citizen is to have an equal shot at the American dream. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, 'Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.'

"As a nation, we must redouble our commitment to the principles and ideals of the Civil Rights Act if we are to achieve the America envisioned by John Lewis and every citizen who fought for equal rights four decades ago. We have not yet reached the Promised Land, but we must continue the journey until America achieves the full measure of its promise."

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