

**AS PREPARED**

**Congressman David Price**

**Remarks upon acceptance of the 2017 Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award**

**International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)**

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- It is an honor to be here with so many friends, colleagues, and distinguished guests to receive this year's Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award. I am especially pleased to join you as IFES celebrates 30 successful years of working to strengthen democratic institutions around the world.
- Other than my longtime friend Bill Sweeney, many of you may not realize that the namesake of this award actually had a good bit to do with my own entry into party politics more than 35 years ago.
- I had taken leave from Duke University to serve as Executive Director of the North Carolina Democratic Party for the 1980 election, and I had hardly returned to the classroom when I was pressed into service as the Executive Director of the DNC's "Commission on Presidential Nominations"—otherwise known as the "Hunt Commission," or the people who brought you "super delegates" (no commentary needed on that).

- Chuck Manatt, who had just been elected chair of the DNC, had recruited his long-time friend Jim Hunt to chair the commission, and Hunt recruited me. It was not what you would call a glamorous assignment—in fact, it gave me a lifelong aversion to writing party rules—but it also gave me my first real exposure to the workings of our national party, at a time when Democrats were reeling from electoral defeat and pursuing ambitious internal reforms.
- As the party chair at the time, Chuck was at the forefront of this reform effort. He was a mentor to Bill Sweeney, Ron Brown, and others he brought into party leadership, and I considered him a mentor as well.
- A few years later, following a 1984 election that proved especially vitriolic in North Carolina—and especially disastrous for Democrats—I decided that I could do about as well as a candidate as some of the people whom I had been trying to get elected. So in 1986, halfway through Ronald Reagan’s second term, I won what we would now call a “front-line” House seat.

- Although my initial focus in the House was not on international affairs, I was aware of the challenges of the time: the Cold War was waning; the “third wave” of democratization was imminent; and the United States had begun to view promoting democracy abroad as an enduring goal of its foreign policy.
- For a political scientist who had focused academically on the institutional role of the legislative branch, it was an auspicious moment to be asking what lessons our own democratic experience could offer the rest of the world.
- One early answer to this question came in the form of a congressional task force chaired by Martin Frost and the late Gerry Solomon, which worked in the early nineties to support the democracies emerging from communist rule. These countries had parliaments in name only, with neither the experience nor the capacity to serve as legitimate governing institutions. And so we reached out to support and strengthen their parliaments, with an emphasis on staff training and IT and research capabilities.

- The Frost-Solomon Task Force met an untimely end as an indirect casualty of the “Gingrich revolution,” but a decade later, democracy promotion was back at the forefront of our national debate. While there was bitter disagreement over what this term meant in the context of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a fledgling, bipartisan group of members—led by former Representative Doug Bereuter and me—began to contemplate once again what role Congress as an institution could play in supporting democracy abroad.
- And so, after some fits and starts, in 2005 the House of Representatives established what was known initially as the House Democracy Assistance Commission. Then-Speaker Dennis Hastert appointed former Representative David Dreier as its founding chairman, and I became its founding ranking member, later serving as chairman from 2007-2011.
- The basic idea was to work member-to-member and staff-to-staff to provide resources, training, and support to legislatures trying to find their foothold in a developing democracy. But now our scope was worldwide, from Peru to Afghanistan and from Kenya to Kosovo. It’s fortuitous that the recipient of the Baxter

Award tonight hails from one of our original and most active partners, Georgia!

- Moreover, unlike Frost-Solomon, our new commission could now work in partnership with USAID and a well-developed network of democracy support organizations—NDI, IRI, IFES, and others—to build upon each other’s efforts and amplify our collective impact.
- Twelve years later, the House Democracy Partnership has formal partnerships with 20 legislatures around the world, continuing to offer training and support to our early partners as well as more recent additions such as Tunisia and Sri Lanka. In fact, in Tunisia, I personally witnessed the extraordinary work of IFES while serving as an International Election Observer in late 2014, during the first post-Arab Spring democratic presidential election.
- I have already exceeded my allotted time, so I’ll close with two brief observations from HDP’s work that I think are relevant to the collective endeavor that brings us together tonight. First, democracy as a system of government remains, and always will

remain, a work in progress. This is true in every country and in every context—including our own, 228 years in.

- This fact should counsel humility: what has worked for the United States may not work for Liberia or Georgia or Indonesia; none of us have it figured out exactly. One of the most rewarding aspects of HDP's work is to return from an overseas mission realizing that we have learned as much as we have taught.
- It should also counsel vigilance: democratic backsliding is a threat not just in faraway places but right here at home. HDP's unofficial motto is that while free and fair elections are essential, what happens in between elections—the slow, uneven development and careful stewardship of the norms, traditions, and institutions that are the real lifeblood of democracy—is just as important, perhaps more so.
- The second and final observation is that supporting democratic institutions abroad remains in America's core national interest. Even before the current administration, there was often a false trade-off posed between governance and other development

priorities—as if the strength of a country’s institutions were somehow unrelated to the challenges it faced in health or education or military capability.

- This was always a shortsighted approach, but now, if this year’s budget request is any indication, defending democracy support as a goal of national policy has become an existential challenge. So even as we celebrate 30 years of good work, we must redouble our collective efforts to make sure that we can continue our good work for the next 30 years to come. I am proud to stand with all of you in this fight, and I thank you again for this recognition.