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Jan. 18 is MLK day - a day devoted to community service

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"The large house in which we live demands that we transform this world-wide neighborhood into a world-wide brotherhood. Together we must learn to live as brothers or together we will be forced to perish as fools." - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

January presents us with an important opportunity to be inspired all over again by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's enormous contributions to our nation, as we prepare for his annual commemoration on January 18, 2010.

His message of peace, acceptance and social justice gave us a lasting yardstick by which to measure our actions - as individuals, communities and as a country. In the workplace, schoolyard and in our own homes, his powerful words resonated, reminding us of our obligation to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves- with equality, dignity and justice.

Dr. King's conviction about community service was equally urgent. We can all be great, he said, because we can all serve. That simplicity of vision captured our attention and altered our actions. He left us with a lasting, precious legacy that every simple deed transforms our world.

On April 21, 2009, President Obama ushered in a new era of volunteerism and service to our nation, signing into law the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. That legislation is an extraordinary reminder that we can honor Dr. King's work today and every day by committing to volunteerism in our cities and towns.

In fulfillment of that law, on September 10, I joined mayor Bloomberg and 15 other United States mayors in a growing coalition to develop best practices and support the development of local strategies for community service. We launched a national Cities of Service initiative, targeting the most urgent concerns of our cities through volunteerism and by pledging to grow our coalition three-fold. In the next few weeks, we will announce upcoming community service activities at our own Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Hall of Fame ceremony.

Mayors from across the nation are urging residents to adopt Martin Luther King Day on January 18 as a "day on, not a day off" that is devoted to community service. As leaders in the business community, your voice carries weight. Speak to your family, friends and neighbors, and organize activities to serve others on that holiday and throughout the year. Lend a hand to others: host a book drive, clean up a playground, or clear the sidewalks of elderly neighbors. Spend one day - or many - volunteering in classrooms, food shelters, community gardens, hospitals and non-profits. As Dr. King promised, the rewards will be profound.

David Cicilline is the mayor of Providence.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540