

## Remembering Representative Elijah Cummings



Dear Friend,

Today is a sad day for Maryland and our country as we mourn the loss of Representative Elijah Cummings, a great leader and a great man. He loved our country, treasured our democracy, and treated everyone he met with kindness and respect.

I had the privilege of working with Representative Cummings when I was a Congressional staffer when he chaired the Congressional Black Caucus. A few memories stand out: the first is a story he told to a group of us on the Hill at least a decade ago. He told us about a young man he met from Baltimore who had many odds stacked against him, including extreme poverty. The young man found money left behind by someone and worked to return it to the person who lost it. I don't remember the details but I do remember my eyes welling up as he got to the point: if you give people the benefit of the doubt, as he did with this young man, they will rise to the occasion.

Representative Cummings moved me to tears a second time when he spoke at an event a few months ago and told the story of when he was a little boy and wasn't allowed to swim in the local pool because it was segregated. He said how hard it was as a child to understand how people could think less of him because of the color of his skin. He said our country has come far since those days but that we are facing real danger as a nation and called on everyone in the room to be part of the solution.

Third is a conversation I had with him shortly before I was sworn in last January. We reminisced about the Hill before it was so polarized and about the steps that can be taken to preserve our democracy. At the end of our conversation he gripped my arm, looked me straight in the eyes, and in his deep voice said very slowly, "You are ready for this." Until that moment, I had not felt completely ready for my new role but his confidence was contagious. I walked away thinking - if Elijah Cummings says I'm ready for this then yes, I really am ready! During tough moments in the Statehouse I've thought back to that conversation many times with gratitude, and it has always helped me.

Representative Cummings once said, "When we are dancing with the angels, the question will be asked - in 2019, what did we do to make sure we kept our democracy intact?" As 2020 approaches, the stakes are even higher. Let's honor his call to action by stepping up and doing more - doing everything we can, as he did - to strengthen the democracy we love! Mr. Chairman, the angels couldn't have a better new dance partner. Rest in Peace.

All the best,

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