

Rep. David Price
Remarks at the Launch of Scott Berg's Wilson
Hosted by Woodrow Wilson Center and Motion Picture Association
December 5, 2013

I appreciate the invitation to share this event with all of you. The Wilson Center has been kind enough to provide me with a text for the evening! It is the inscription on this year's White House Christmas ornament, taken from President Wilson's War Message to the Congress of April 2, 1917:

Peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty.

Let me remind you of the full context of that statement, beginning with a quotation you will find even more familiar:

The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

This is the paradigmatic statement of the idealistic basis of American foreign policy. It is still much discussed as to its historic role, how it must be complemented or qualified, and so forth.

But the statement stands, as an enduring expression of what our country stands for. Note too that it has an empirical component: peace depends on political liberty. We still base much of what we undertake in foreign policy on that premise. I think for example of the work I have helped lead on the House Democracy Partnership. We work with fifteen parliaments in emerging democracies, believing that to make these institutions more inclusive and more effective is to make these societies more peaceful and secure.

Of course, we often discuss the unpopularity of representative institutions, how people react to what they see on C-SPAN! But we always contrast the alternative, which too often is fighting in the streets. The difference is absolutely critical: we know that countries where liberties are suppressed and

representation denied are more likely to see deprivation and conflict. And they are more likely to draw on the blood and treasure of our country and our allies, as well as to make their own people miserable.

So this year's inscription for the White House's ornament is well chosen: a tribute to a great President in a centennial year, and also a maxim that our country and other democracies continue to live by.