

We've devoured the Thanksgiving turkey, shopped 'til we dropped, and brought our families together for Christmas. Now there's one more holiday to go in the season as we ring out the old and ring in the New Year.

New Year's Day is, more than anything, a moment to reflect, to set goals, and to steel ourselves for the year ahead. It's the first moment our children think about going back to start the new semester of school, and for the rest of us to consider that the balance of winter is still ahead.

In Southern Missouri, there are lots of important resolutions for our congressional district. It's imperative that the Corps of Engineers complete the levee restoration on the Mississippi River. We need the Small Business Administration to find worthy opportunities to invest in new ideas, and job creation is on everyone's mind. Congress is beginning in earnest the process of writing a new Farm Bill. And transportation infrastructure is a leading priority in an agenda of economic renewal.

Policymakers and the public are tasked with working together to advance these priorities. On issues ranging far and wide, from agriculture to telecommunications, from tax reform to national defense, from one end of our economy to the other, there is much to do. Employers large and small and families of all sizes depend on the outcomes for their livelihoods, safety, educations, and opportunities.

Though many noses will be to the grindstone, these will not be quiet months for public discussion.

This will, undoubtedly, be a year dominated by politics. It is also an important year for elected officials, however, to make sure the people they represent are heard in our political process. That means helping constituents get timely, complete and accurate responses from their government, as well as pressing for completion of all of the people's business in our legislative institutions.

We must collectively decide this year if we are going to keep the Affordable Care Act or repeal it, and we must weigh whether or not we will allow the egregious regulatory efforts of the

Environmental Protection Agency to move forward.

Simply pushing back isn't enough. Our congressional district, our communities and our country deserve progress on important issues this year. Agreement and consensus have become dirty words in Washington, but at the New Year we can all reflect on the ways in which public officials serving in the public trust should fulfill their duty to the people they represent. Only by forging agreement can we clear the path forward for a more competitive tax code, for safer and better highways and rivers, for ag policy that promotes growth in all sectors of our rural economy, for protections for our men and women in uniform and for the freedoms of families to hold dear their truest beliefs.

The New Year's resolutions of a single person can be daunting, but we should all work together to accomplish our commonsense goals for our nation and its future in 2012. Happy New Year to you and yours – I hope it is healthy, safe and (most of all) prosperous.