Jazz Legend Nina Simone once sang:
"Birds flying high, you know how I feel. Sun up in the sky, you know how I feel. Breeze driftin' on by, you know how I feel. It's a new dawn, it' a new day, it's a new life for me…and I'm feelin' good."

Though I have heard the song many times, never have the words resonated with me as clearly as at this moment in time. As we enter the 111th Congress, I can feel the electricity of that new dawn and that new day… of change that we have longed for and that we truly believe in. For the first time in a long time I am "feelin' good" about our future and the start of Barack Obama's first term as President of these United States.

As the newly-elected Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, I know that my CBC colleagues would join me in saying that this is a particularly proud moment for us. To have one of our members elected to the highest office in the land is an achievement that will serve to inspire our members to be more diligent and committed in our efforts to make this great nation even greater.

Barack Obama's successful bid for the presidency is a transformative chapter in American history, signaling a dramatic shift in our nation's politics and priorities. It is an extraordinary event that illustrates to our neighbors abroad that America has made tremendous progress in breaking down racial barriers that have historically paralyzed our nation.

A generation ago, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the dream he held for America, he envisioned exactly this type of moment, where a man was judged by his character, his

intellect and his hard work -- and not by the color of his skin or his race or his ancestry. Now, children of color everywhere can truly dream without limitations and actualize the true promise of this great land. When a young child of color aspires to one day be the President of the United States, we can assure them: “Yes, you can!”

For 21 months, President Barack Obama issued a clarion call for change, and the message clearly resonated with every group of voters – young, old, white, Black, Latino, Asian, women and men and across party lines. His message of hope inspired millions of Americans who never participated in the election process to stand up and be counted for the very first time in their lives.

As we celebrate Barack Obama’s achievements, we must remember that we too play an important part in his vision for change. We must become engaged citizens that are willing to stand up for what is right and just. We have seen what can happen when Americans mobilize behind a dynamic candidate like Barack Obama. Now we must channel that same energy towards addressing this country’s most pressing such as access to quality healthcare, education and economic empowerment.

This is our time, this is our task and this is our moment. We stand at the dawn of that new day. Let us enjoy this historic achievement, but understand that we have much work to do to bring about the change that this country so desperately needs.

I pledge to do everything within my power to help President Obama reverse the damaging policies of the last eight years, and to positively move our nation into its remarkable third century – one that begins to unshackle the burdens of our past and limited only by our capacity to dream a new future.

Congresswoman Barbara Lee represents the Ninth District of California and is chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.