AFL-CIO Executive Council Statement
Lake Buena Vista, Fla.
February 27, 2013

SUPPORT FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

On Aug. 28 our nation will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom that was held on the National Mall. On that day in 1963, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his historic “I Have a Dream” speech, which accelerated the nation’s own march toward social and economic justice, including passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

AFL-CIO Vice President and President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters A. Philip Randolph, along with Bayard Rustin, field coordinator, conceptualized and called for the march. Along with the leadership of Randolph and Rustin, the UAW, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union and the Transport Workers were instrumental in supporting the march.

Fifty years ago the planners of the March on Washington reminded our nation that millions of our citizens, black and white, were unemployed. The flier from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom carried this quote: “Discrimination and economic deprivation plague the nation and rob all people, Negro and white, of dignity and self-respect. As long as black workers are disenfranchised, ill-housed and denied education and are economically depressed, the fight of white workers for a decent life will fail.”

In order to change the social and economic paradigm all Americans were called on to join the movement to demand the passage of effective civil rights legislation that would guarantee to all:

- Decent housing;
- Access to all public accommodations;
- Adequate and integrated education;
- The right to vote;
- To prevent compromise or filibuster against such legislation;
- To demand a federal massive works and training program to put all unemployed workers, black and white, back to work; and
- To demand a national minimum wage, to include all workers, of not less than $2 an hour.

Today, 50 years since the March on Washington, millions of working families of all hues, genders and immigrant status are struggling to find decent jobs with decent wages that can support and sustain themselves and their families. They want an economic model of shared prosperity for all.
Fifty years since the March on Washington working families, including our veterans, still need access to decent and affordable housing, without fear of getting caught up in real estate bubbles that lead to foreclosure, unaffordable rents and in too many cases, homelessness.

Fifty years after the March on Washington, working families and our communities still want access to quality public education for all our children.

Fifty years ago the March called for a massive federal works and training program—today, we still need massive investments to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure.

Fifty years ago the March called for an increase in the minimum wage. Had the minimum wage been increased to $2 an hour as called for in 1963, it would be worth $15.05 an hour in purchasing power today.

Fifty years since the March on Washington we still hear cries for freedom:

- To have a voice at work;
- From voter suppression schemes;
- For marriage equality; and
- To come out of the shadows and contribute and live the American Dream.

Guided by the call for jobs and freedom in 1963, the AFL-CIO and our affiliated unions will honor the legacy of a civil and human rights movement that helped liberate an entire nation from the chains of oppression and segregation.

We believe the best way to ensure the legacy of the 1963 March on Washington is continued and the promise of jobs and freedom is fulfilled is to reflect, to inform, to educate and to take action. As such, the AFL-CIO with our affiliates will endorse and support the commemoration of the march in new and creative ways, including:

- A national symposium on jobs and freedom that will bring the labor movement together with national civil and human rights organizations, progressive think tanks and others to examine and discuss how we forge a new model of economic growth—one in which everybody who wants to work can find a decent job, everybody who wants to join a union is able to do so, workers can afford to buy the things they make, we actually make things in America again and prosperity is broadly shared.

- Establish a scholarship program to help talented high school seniors from families in need—including union families and those in the community—to help pay for the costs of higher education.
Support teaching staff and classrooms to help educate young people on the vital connection between workers’ rights and civil rights, including adopting school(s) and other initiatives that connect union workers to students.

We pledge to use the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington to recommit ourselves to extending and deepening freedom, equality and democracy for all in this country, and building a strong social and economic justice movement.

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