

AFL-CIO's MLK conference honors past while fighting for workers



More than 800 union leaders, members and activists attended the AFL-CIO's MLK Civil and Human Rights Conference in Montgomery, AL.

In January, the AFL-CIO hosted the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Civil and Human Rights Conference in Montgomery, AL, to honor what the labor federation termed King's "vision for collective action at the voting booth, in the community and in the workplace to safeguard the pillars of our democracy." More than 800 union leaders, members and activists, including from NALC, attended the week-end's events, which were designed to boost mobilization ahead of this year's fall elections.

Along with his lifelong struggle on behalf of civil rights, King also championed working people and labor unions, which he saw as integral to racial and economic justice. He was supporting striking sanitation workers in Memphis, TN, in 1968 when he was assassinated.

Attendees at the Jan. 12-14 event were greeted by Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler and Sen. Laphonza Butler (D-CA). "We are 12 days into a year that is going to be a huge turning point for our country," Shuler said. "And our voices are going to make the difference in how it all turns out."

NALC Chief of Staff Kori Blalock Keller (l) led a panel on the importance of state houses in advancing a pro-worker agenda, expanding civil rights and pushing back against rising extremism.



Workshops were held on the first day, with topics that included the effect of artificial intelligence and other technology on workers, the empowerment of immigrants, the transition to clean energy, lobbying and advocacy skill improvement, and the protection of public education.

On the morning of the second day, attendees listened to panels of experts talk about the electoral work the labor movement is doing at the ballot box and beyond, such as the mobilizing of voters of color and the Labor 2024 get-out-the-vote campaign. A panel moderated by NALC Chief of Staff Kori Blalock Keller featured legislators from across the country, who discussed the importance of state houses in advancing a pro-worker agenda, expanding civil rights and pushing back against rising extremism.

The attendees spent the afternoon on volunteer work—giving back to the Montgomery community, packing essential needs kits for the homeless, writing letters to veterans and more.

The last day featured a tour of the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, which chronicles the horrors of slavery as well as the enduring racial inequality and injustice in this country. The weekend's events ended with the AFL-CIO Civil and Human Rights Awards Gala, celebrating those who work tirelessly for the labor and the civil rights movements.

"Unions, such as the NALC, are strengthened when all voices are heard and we work for the betterment of all workers," NALC President Brian L. Renfro said. "This is the way that we honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and continue his legacy." **PR**