



## OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

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**CONTACT:** Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony

(313) 347-2820

### 1964-2014...50 Years Later

#### One Man's Commitment...One Nation's Promise

Good morning! After 59 years, there is still no event like the one the people of Detroit present each year. All of us, from city to suburb, of every race, ethnicity, vocation, and station, should indeed be most proud of something that Detroit has, that no other city in America has yet to duplicate. Of course it is the Annual Fight For Freedom Fund Dinner, scheduled for Sunday, May 4<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m. at the Cobo Convention Center.

I am pleased to welcome as this years' Corporate Chair, Mr. Gary Torgow, CEO of the Talmer Bank and Trust. Mr. Torgow is a longtime supporter of Detroit, a real estate developer, a philanthropist who has engaged in positive community affairs, and is now serving as head of the Talmer Bank Corporation.

I am also pleased to welcome Mr. Mike Ritchie, President of Comerica Bank, which has been a longtime financial entity in the city of Detroit, to serve as our General Chair. We are pleased to have Senior Vice President Linda Forte, representing Mr. Ritchie today. Comerica Bank has served in the past as a Senior Corporate Sponsor of our dinner and we are pleased to have them back as General Chair today.

We also welcome Mr. Hiram Jackson, CEO of Real Times Media, home of the Michigan Chronicle and other African American newspapers, along with photographic and historical archives on the African American community throughout our nation, to serve as a General Co-Chair. Mr. Jackson is a long-time board member and was the youngest General Chairman of the Fight For Freedom Fund Dinner years ago.

Finally Ms. Donna Stallings, community activist, entrepreneur, and lifetime member of the NAACP, will also serve as a General Co-Chair of our dinner. We are excited about the enthusiasm that this team will bring.

Our theme is **“1964-2014...50 Years Later, One Man’s Commitment...One Nation’s Promise.”** Today we announce that we will honor from the state of North Carolina, a man who has demonstrated the true meaning of civil rights for all people. A man who has consistently worked to uplift the poor, defend women who are often marginalized, advocate for people from Appalachia and the urban community, by his organizing what is now known as “Moral Mondays” in the state of North Carolina. The Rev. Dr. William Barber, who is the State Conference President of the North Carolina NAACP, will be the recipient of our *Ida B. Wells Freedom and Justice Award*. Dr. Barber has gone to jail, rallied in snow and sunshine, fought for education, workers’ rights, and voting rights throughout the south.

As America continues to debate the question of income and inequality, the Detroit Branch NAACP believes just as the scriptures teach us, *“the laborer is worthy of his hire” Luke 10:7*. In that spirit, we join with 65% of the people in Michigan who believe that the minimum wage should be raised for people across our state. Michigan should not be last, in fact we believe that Michigan should be among the first in its quest to equalize and to economically stabilize the income levels of people throughout our state and our nation. We salute the men and women who go to work every day, working to feed their families, educate their children, and pay their mortgages, while pursuing a livable and meaningful living wage. We therefore will be presenting to those workers organized to make a difference known as Detroit 15 (D15), with the *Mary Church Terrell Freedom and Justice Award*.

This is indeed a historic year as Michigan will see the retirement of two of our nations’ leading elected officials in both the U.S. House and Senate. One cannot come to the state of Michigan or travel to the U.S. House of Representatives without encountering the impact of the longest serving congressman in the U.S. history. He is in fact the dean of the U.S. House of Representatives. This gentleman has served our nation for over 58 years as the Congressman from the 12<sup>th</sup> District of Michigan. He has served our nation since 1955, working in many areas of government but most notably on the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. He has served as its chairman on more than one occasion. He is of course the Honorable John

Dingell of Dearborn, Michigan. We will present him with the *James Weldon Johnson Lifetime Achievement Award*.

This is an unusual year. We have never had the occasion by which two iconic political leaders are retiring both at the same time and leaving such a tremendous void within our political community. Our Senior Senator who has served in the U.S. Senate for over 36 years, serving longer than any other Senator in Michigan's history, is also retiring. He also ranks 5<sup>th</sup> among his colleagues in the U.S. Senate. He has served on a variety of committees, most notably as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, and helped to lead the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, and on Senate Governmental Affairs, to name only a few. This Senator has been a friend to our city, an advocate for justice, and a voice of reason during international crisis. For the first time, we will present two James Weldon Johnson Lifetime Achievement Awards. This award, of course, will be presented to none other than Senator Carl Levin.

We are excited about our dinner. We are excited about the upcoming Freedom Weekend. We are planning a host of events related to a Jobs Jobs Jobs Expo, on Saturday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, prior to the dinner. We recognize that Detroiters still need jobs. We need more than vacant lots turned into farmland. We need job training, technology, and preparation for the jobs that are currently here. The Freedom Institute for Economic, Social Justice, and People Empowerment, will also have panel discussions dealing with youth leadership, entrepreneurial opportunities, and financial planning. There will be a major discussion involving Mayors from various cities both locally and nationally, coming to discuss the **New Urban Center and the appropriate role of the nation, the state, and the city, in the stabilization and future development of our local communities**. We will explore the question as to **whether the states are abdicating their responsibility to support economically and with effective public policy, their local municipalities?**

Very shortly we will be announcing additional special guests who will join us in the city of Detroit for this historic occasion. There will be a major presentation of youth from around the city of Detroit which will make everybody "HAPPY". We encourage everyone to call 313-871-2087 to secure your ticket to the dinner, as well as visit [www.detroitnaacp.org](http://www.detroitnaacp.org) to obtain more information. This is your time, this is your city, this is your event for such a time as this. See you at the dinner!

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For more information on the Detroit Branch NAACP please call (313) 871-2087 or visit [www.detroitnaacp.org](http://www.detroitnaacp.org)