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PRESS RELEASE

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Detroit Branch NAACP, Congressman John Conyers, ACLU of Michigan, Arab American Civil Right League, La SED and Michigan State Conference NAACP Launch Commemoration of 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act

DETROIT -- The Detroit Branch NAACP held a press conference today, Thursday, August 6, 2015, to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony, President, Detroit Branch NAACP was joined by Congressman John Conyers, Jr; Duron Marshall, Chief of Staff, Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence; Samia Hamid, Field Director, Arab American Civil Rights League; Mary Carmen Munoz, Operations Manager, La SED; Michael Steinberg, Legal Director, ACLU Michigan and Yvonne White, President, Michigan State Conference NAACP to champion the VRA.

“President Lyndon Baines Johnson said over 50 years ago, ‘A man without a vote is man without protection,’” said Rev. Anthony. “We must protect and defend the right and the privilege of voting. This 50th anniversary celebration is only a prelude to the direct action necessary not to allow others to deny and repress it. We must continue to uplift and to expand it.”

Congressman Conyers highlighted the significance of the VRA among civil rights laws and spoke to the need to ensure the VRA continues to prevent barriers and obstacles to voting.

"Fifty years ago Democrats and Republicans set aside partisan divisions to enact the Voting Rights Act - the Crown Jewel of our civil rights laws," said Conyers. "Today, second generation voting barriers - voter ID laws, limits on early voting, bans on voting for ex-felons and, most recently, the Supreme Court's elimination of Section 5 pre-clearance provisions - threaten to dismantle voting rights for minorities, seniors, young people and other historically-disadvantaged Americans. As the only currently serving Member of Congress who voted for the Voting Rights Act in 1965, I implore all of my congressional colleagues to again come together: to protect the right to vote for all citizens and safeguard Democracy itself."

During the press conference local and national activities to celebrate and commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the VRA were also announced. These activities include:

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- Participation in the America's Journey for Justice led by National NAACP. The 860 mile journey began on August 1 in Selma, Alabama. The Detroit Branch NAACP, Michigan State Conference NAACP and UAW-Ford will take 5 buses to Washington D.C .for a rally and national day of action on Wednesday, September 16, 2015.
- Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the VRA during Detroit's 33rd Annual African World Festival.

Echoing the importance of commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the VRA were collaborative partners, Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence, UAW President Dennis Williams and NAACP National Board of Directors Member Jimmy Settles.

"The passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 became the foundation for ensuring that states that had blatantly discriminated against African Americans, and many other people of color, meet a series of simple but important requirements to ensure all American citizens had the right to vote, " said Congresswoman Lawrence. "As hard as it is to understand, the Supreme Court of the United States of American in 2013 threw out most of the VRA, though the court did not strike down Section 5 itself, leaving it to Congress to devise a new formula for the VRA. Today, on the 50th anniversary of the first passage of the VRA, I call on my colleagues in Congress to do just that and to restore the Act so that no citizen of this great nation, the world's most successful Democracy, be denied the one right that best defines what it means to be an American. The time to act is now, and we must succeed, so that current and future generations will have a voice and the means to shape their own destiny and realize their American dreams."

"UAW members are proud to have stood behind the civil rights movement and Voting Rights Act a half a century ago and our commitment has not wavered to this day," said Williams. "Walter Reuther and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were of the same mind when it came to social justice. No one can be free unless all of us are free; free from discrimination, free to vote, and free to join a labor union."

"On August 6, 1965 fifty years ago today the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson and on this day we have an obligation to honor those who fought before us by exercising our right to vote in every opportunity we get," said Settles. The UAW has known for many years that voting is key in fighting for legislation that benefits working class men and women, particularly organized labor. Our great leader, Walter Reuther, understood this when he echoed this quote: " There is a direct relationship between the ballot box and the bread box, and what the union fights for and wins at the bargaining table can be taken away in the legislative halls. We must remember, our lives, our jobs, and our communities matter."

Kayla Tucker, President, Michigan State Conference NAACP Youth and College Division shed light on why commemorating the 50th Anniversary for of the VRA is important for her peers. "It's so important that my generation is aware why the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed and it's continued importance today. Young people have the power to change the world, but we must exercise our right to vote in order to do so."

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To view the full schedule for America's Journey For Justice please visit naacp.org.

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

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