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State Representative — 202nd District

Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the March on Washington



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Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington

While Promoting a Recommitment to
its Goals of Racial and Economic Justice

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

On Aug. 28 our country will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the March on Washington. On that day in the summer of 1963, an estimated 250,000 people (more than twice the 100,000 people the organizers had originally hoped for) gathered in Washington, D.C., for a peaceful demonstration to promote civil rights and economic equality for African Americans. It was called the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” by its organizers. While most of the participants were African Americans, about 60,000 of the marchers were white. They walked together down Constitution and Independence avenues, and then gathered around the reflection pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial. The program at the memorial was televised live into American homes.

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At the time, it was the largest political demonstration in the nation's history and it was organized in less than two months. The country, and the world, was spellbound and deeply affected by the speakers, especially the Rev. Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr. who closed the day's program with his memorable "I Have a Dream" speech. The impact was dramatic. It seemed to many that for the first time America was listening. The event received favorable coverage on TV and on

newspaper front pages. But as we all know, the fight for racial equality and economic justice is not a single event but an ongoing process and commitment.

HISTORY OF THE MARCH

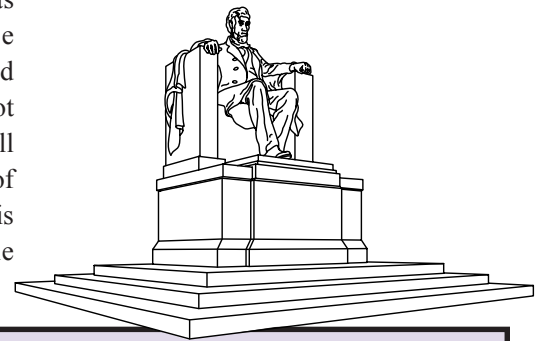
The march was initiated by A. Philip Randolph, international president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, president of the Negro American Labor Council and vice president of the AFL-CIO. He had been an activist for civil rights and economic justice for more than 50 years. Randolph was 78 in 1963 and was the "grand old man" of the civil rights movement. As such, he was the connection between the ideologically and philosophically diverse civil rights organizations sponsoring the march. Dubbed by the press as "the big six," the major players were Randolph; Whitney Young, president of the National Urban League; Roy Wilkins, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; James Farmer, president of the Congress of Racial Equality; John Lewis, president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; and Martin Luther King Jr., founder and president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

The group met on July 2 in New York

and set the date. Bayard Rustin, an activist and organizer associated with Randolph, was charged with the details of this massive undertaking. Rustin, from his small Harlem office, had less than two months to plan and mobilize for the march. The march was promoted in church pulpits and civil rights meetings. In addition to private transportation, more than 30 chartered trains and 2,000 buses were organized to bring people to the nation's capital. Money was raised by the sale of buttons at 25 cents apiece, church collections, celebrity benefits and cash contributions. The United Auto Workers Union was a major sponsor and other individual labor unions provided money and organization assistance. (This was despite AFL-CIO President George Meany's dislike of Randolph, and Meany's belief that the march would not advance the cause of the civil rights bill in Congress. He was proven wrong, of course.) President Kennedy overcame his initial reservations and endorsed the march.

Rustin: The Southeast Pennsylvania Connection

The main march organizer, Bayard Taylor Rustin, was an African American with a pacifist Quaker upbringing from West Chester. He was the 1932 class valedictorian of the non-segregated West Chester High School (later renamed Hendersen High) and attended what was then known as Cheyney State Teachers College.



Aug. 28, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial

"As I sat on the stone steps looking out on the vast throng I was fully conscious that this was one of the great moments in the history of blacks in America. Never had so many black Americans come together from all sections of the country to strike a blow for first-class citizenship . . ."

— **Louis Martin**, former advisor to President John F. Kennedy
(from *Walking with Presidents: Louis Martin and the Rise of Black Political Power* by Alex Poinsett)

Philip Randolph opened the program with these words: "Fellow Americans, we are gathered here in the largest demonstration in the history of this nation. Let the nation and world know the meaning of our numbers. We are not a pressure group. We are not an organization or a group of organizations. We are not a mob. We are the advance guard of a massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom."

Other speeches followed including one from John Lewis. The closing was reserved for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who delivered his now famous

"I Have a Dream" speech which many consider the most eloquent piece of oration of the 20th century. His words still resonate: "So I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed - we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

Clearly we still face those difficulties but the principals and the goals of the march are as relevant today as they were 40 years ago.

An Appeal to You from

MATHEW AHMANN	JOACHIM PRINZ
EUGENE CARSON BLAKE	A. PHILIP RANDOLPH
JAMES FARMER	WALTER REUTHER
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.	ROY WILKINS
JOHN LEWIS	WHITNEY YOUNG

**to MARCH on
WASHINGTON**

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 28, 1963

America faces a crisis . . .
Millions of Negroes are denied freedom . . .
Millions of citizens, black and white, are unemployed . . .

We demand: — Meaningful Civil Rights Laws
— Massive Federal Works Program
— Full and Fair Employment
— Decent Housing
— The Right to Vote
— Adequate Integrated Education

In your community, groups are mobilizing for the March. You can get information on how to go to Washington by calling civil rights organizations, religious organizations, trade unions, fraternal organizations and youth groups.

National Office —
**MARCH ON WASHINGTON
FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM**
170 West 130 Street • New York 27 • FI 8-1900
Cleveland Robinson Bayard Rustin
Chairman, Administrative Committee Deputy Director

THE FLYER DISTRIBUTED BY THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Of the "big six" civil rights leaders in 1963, only the youngest, John Lewis, is still living. He is currently serving as a U.S. congressman representing Atlanta, Ga.

National Goals for the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom

According to news accounts and the speeches of the day, the marchers had key goals and demands for the nation including:

CIVIL RIGHTS

- **Passage of civil rights legislation and federal enforcement of voting rights.**
- **Federal laws prohibiting racial discrimination in public or private hiring and in public accommodations.**
- **Immediate elimination of all racial segregation in public schools throughout the nation.**
- **Grant the attorney general the power to intervene when any constitutional right is violated.**

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

- **A program of public works, job training and a placement program for all the nation's unemployed.**
- **Pass a \$2-an-hour minimum wage across the board nationwide. (Equivalent to \$11.71 in today's dollars.)**
- **Provide Federal Aid to Education at all levels.**
- **A broadened Fair Labor Standards Act to cover more employers and employees.**

After the march, Congress eventually passed civil rights and voting rights legislation including the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, giving the federal government the power to intervene and stop many forms of official discrimination and discrimination in accommodations. Yet this was only a beginning. And in many cases the gains made in the 1960s and '70s in terms of minimum wage, labor rights, affirmative action and accesses to education once again came under attack by conservatives in the 1980s, '90s and recently. We need a renewed commitment by government to move forward on all the goals of the movement — not backward!

MARK COHEN'S RECORD AND COMMITMENT

My family has a long commitment to civil rights and economic justice. My father, city Councilman David Cohen, was a participant in the March on Washington in 1963 and joined Martin Luther King Jr. for his Selma march in 1965.

Support for Anti-discriminatory Laws

During my tenure in the Pa. House of Representatives, I have been a forceful advocate for strengthening the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission to better protect people from discrimination. I was also a leading advocate for the economic boycott which helped end apartheid in South Africa. My work has convinced me of the great need for a renewed state, national and international commitment to end racism in all its forms.

Quality Education at All Levels for All People

I have consistently worked for better schools and a fairer system of state funding for public education in kindergarten through 12th grade. The quality of your children's education should not depend on the wealth of their local neighborhood. Every child deserves a quality education to prepare him or her for the 21st century job market and a happy, productive life. We must remove the obstacles, financial and otherwise, to a college education for those students who have the academic ability and motivation. That's why the organizers of the 1963 march included funding and access to education at all levels in its goals for America.

It is the goal of fair access to higher education that motivated me this year to write and file an amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court, Grutter v. Bollinger, in defense of admission policies used by the University of Michigan Law School and many law schools in the nation in order to encourage student diversity. As legal counsel of record for the amicus brief, I filed on behalf of myself and 36 current and former Pennsylvania

legislators, as well as the Philadelphia NAACP and the Pennsylvania State Association of Black Clergy. My brief argued that schools have a right to encourage diversity: "Admissions policies are as fundamental to universities as free selection of submitted material is to newspapers and determining voting eligibility in political primaries is to political parties." I also argued to the court that university affirmative action policies to encourage student diversity were both legal and socially valuable. The Supreme Court upheld the affirmative action policies of the law school while striking down the university's undergraduate admissions policies. I will continue to push for policies that encourage diversity to the fullest extent allowed.

Minimum Wage and Economic Justice

The marchers in 1963 demanded a minimum wage that gave dignity to a minimum-wage worker and his or her family. They asked for \$2 an hour, the equivalent of \$11.71 in today's money. I agree that we need to value work with more than mere rhetoric.

The minimum wage continues to fall dramatically from its levels in the 1960s and 1970s when it provided a real safety net, allowing a full-time worker to keep a family of three above the poverty level. The 2003 Federal Poverty Guidelines establish that the poverty level for a family of three is now \$15,260, but a full-time minimum-wage worker at \$5.15 an hour earns only \$10,712 (assuming a 40-hour work week, 52 weeks a year). That wage level is \$4,548 below, or just 70.2 percent of, the new federal poverty guideline for a family of three. A worker today would need at least \$7.34 an hour just to keep a small family at the poverty line. That is why I have consistently offered legislation over many years to raise Pennsylvania's minimum wage to at least equal the poverty line for a family of three.

In the spirit of the March on Washington and all it stood for, I remain committed to fight for access to education, health care, fair wages and working conditions, and social justice for all Pennsylvanians.

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My Office Can Help With Any Government-Related Problem

As always, please feel free to contact either of my Philadelphia offices if I can be of any help to you, your family or your neighbors. The main office, open Monday through Friday, is located in the Fern Rock-Olney area at the corner of Champlost and Fifth — 6001 N. Fifth St., second floor — and by phone at (215) 924-0895 or (215) 924-3690. I have recently opened an additional office in the Rhawnhurst area in Room 200, Biggans Building at 7601 Castor Ave.,

Philadelphia, telephone (215) 342-2167 or (215) 342-2168. Office hours for the Castor Avenue location are 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

All the best to you and your loved ones,

Sincerely yours,

Mark B. Cohen

State Representative, 202nd District and Democratic Caucus Chairman, Pennsylvania House of Representatives

I HAVE A DREAM

REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free; 100 years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination; 100 years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity; 100 years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land.

So we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of our Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was the promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check; a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.

And so we've come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy; now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice; now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood; now is the time to make justice a reality for all God's children. It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the movement. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality.

Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content, will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds.

Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. This offense we share mounted to storm the battlements of injustice must be carried forth by a biracial army. We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one.

We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "for whites only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of excessive trials and tribulation. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi; go back to Alabama; go back to Louisiana; go back to the slums and ghettos of the northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can, and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

So I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed — we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day, even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith we will be able to hear out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to go to jail together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning—"my country 'tis of thee; sweet land of liberty; of thee I sing; land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride; from every mountain side, let freedom ring"—and if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. • Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. • Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. • Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. • But not only that. • Let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia. • Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. • Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children — black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants — will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

