

Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Congress of Racial Equality, Urban League, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or many religious groups that came together and worked together for the common good.

The first meeting for the plan to March on Washington included the so-called "Big Six." Martin Luther King Jr., A. Philip Randolph, James Farmer of CORE, Whitney Young of the Urban League, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and young John Lewis of SNCC (Lewis was 23 in 1963, the year of the march). And from that meeting, that first meeting, we invited four major religious leaders and labor leaders to join us.

AW: *What happened to that coalition and unity?*

JL: Well, what emerged here in D.C. that became much more all-inclusive was The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. It made those groups bolder there, but they were not action oriented like we were, because they were legislative: all about the bills and what was happening on the Hill.

But now, more than ever before, I think we need people that are going to be engaged in everything. *Everything*. Because there are forces in America, as a result of this election, trying to take us to a different place and take us back. And people have to come together. You grow the coalition. It's all about the future of humankind, not just in America, but around the world.

When you hear someone talking about a way to expand gun rights, it's frightening. You've seen, in effect, that we're prepared to spend millions and billions — maybe trillions of dollars — on arms. What happened to poor people? What happened to resources for education? For housing?

How do we protect our environment? I say all the time, "We have the right to know what is in the food that we eat, what is in the water we drink, what is in the air we breathe." We have limited resources and we have to learn to live together as humankind.

For what affects people in the Delta of Mississippi or in the Black Belt of Alabama, affects people here in Washington, D.C. or in New York or Seattle, or affects people around the world. When you have dirty, filthy air, it's not just going to stay here in America, but it's going to blow around the world.

We should be trying to bring this little planet, this little piece of real estate we call Earth, closer together — not dividing people because of their nationality.

AW: *On an individual level, where does someone begin to do that?*

JL: I've said this from time to time, and it's not anything new, and it's not just me: You have to come to that point where you believe, truly believe, that when you see something that's not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up.

Find a way to speak out. Find a way to become involved. You organize, you push, you pull. You probably saw that we took action on the House floor last June, trying to do something about gun violence. And you're probably going to see some action in the days and weeks to come. Some people are debating right now — maybe not on the



Washington, D.C., street paper *Street Sense* (left) interviews John Lewis (right) on Jan. 5.

floor, but in rooms with closed doors, high places and secret meetings — how they're going to repeal Obamacare.

And what do you have to put in place of it? How long will it take? There will be people coming in and testifying in front of Congress. It's their goal, it's their mission, to take healthcare. They're not saying it, but that's what they're going to do: take healthcare away from people, privatizing Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security.

AW: *You mentioned the sit-in that you led last year. What do you think the public needs to do to make sure that we push issues that are affecting the lives of millions of people on a daily basis? What else can the public do to help the members of Congress?*

JL: The people of America must become informed and engaged. Provide people with the information, provide them with the tools and instruments to put pressure on the members of Congress, for them to say, "This is what we want, this is what we need, and this is what we're going to get." You have to make it uncomfortable for people — people in high places. It cannot be business as usual.

AW: *So therefore we should not assume that our congressmen and senators will take care of things for us?*

JL: You should not assume that. You should assume and believe that people are going to do the right thing. But sometimes you need others to make people do what is right, to do what is fair. You've got to be able to disturb the order of things. Sometimes I think the American people are too quiet. You need to make a little noise.

Dr. King used to say from time to time, "There may come a time when you need to turn things upside down to set things upside right."

Josh Maxey: *You've been a member of Congress for many years and witnessed so many different things. What would you say is your proudest moment?*

JL: One of my, I guess private thoughts, well, proudest moments, is when we got the Voting Rights Act renewed in 2006. And I

think we still need to fix it.

AW: *On that point, there are some people who are saying that if we had not gotten it reapproved that we would be set back another 40 or 50 years — that it would have been devastating. Do you feel that way?*

JL: Yeah, we still need to fix the decision in the United States Supreme Court where they have gutted the essence of the Voting Rights Act. And it's too bad we didn't do it in this last Congress. It's going to be much harder, it's going to be much more difficult. We must see who's being considered for the Attorney General. I don't think leadership is going to come from there, from Jeff Sessions from Alabama.

If not for the Voting Rights Act, I don't think President Carter would have been elected or Bill Clinton. President Obama wouldn't have been elected. So we need it now more than ever before. But some would think you need to just open up the political process and let the people come in: one person, one vote. That's what I said at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963.

The people can do it, put pressure on the incoming president and put pressure on Congress: the members, the rank and file members. President Johnson said to us in 1964, "If you want to pass the Civil Rights Act, make me do it." And we did.

As Dr. King would say, "There is nothing more powerful than the marching feet of a determined people." So I'm really gratified to know that all these women are going to be marching in the Women's March on Washington. And they're going to be marching all across America. And in my own district, they're going to march from the Human Rights Center to the state capitol of Georgia, those that are not coming here. And I think there are going to be protests in 80 cities or more.

My hope for the future is very simple: that we can leave this little planet a little greener and a little cleaner and a little more peaceful for the generation yet unborn. But if that is going to happen, we've got to stop spending our limited resources on more wars, more bombs, more missiles and more guns.

Spend it on the people: food, healthcare, clean air, clean water. We've got to stop the

madness. And to hear this man that is coming to the White House talking about nuclear weapons — billions and billions of dollars to be invested in bombs and missiles and guns, while people are starving with no housing. In a city like Atlanta and other places around America, to see the number of people sleeping on the street with limited shelter — what is going to happen to the hundreds of thousands of people without shelter?

Are people going to open their doors and take people in? Mothers with children, many men of color, on the streets — it's true in almost any major urban center in America. And many of the men are people who served in our military and fought in our wars. That's not right, it's not fair, it's not just. But I'm still hopeful. I'm still optimistic. But we must fight. And we will, in a non-violent fashion.

Post-interview vendor comments

Angie Whitehurst: I have the greatest respect and admiration for the Honorable John Lewis. He has wisdom, experience, vision and resolve. He is my hero because of his humility, strength and ability to stand tall, not just in verbiage and lore, but in everyday life. He serves us all as a living, stellar example of achievement on behalf of all people through peaceful dialogue and nonviolence.

Ken Martin: It was about to be one of the biggest days of my life. I've met foreign dignitaries, great musicians, entertainers, other congressmen, street legends, people of great wealth and knowledge. But to have a conversation with a civil rights icon? To have the honor of photo documenting the event? Me? Wow! This is Huge!

Of course, it was not the first time I'd seen him in person. I was a gopher college intern during a D.C. march for the missing children of Atlanta. I got relatively close and was even a "parade marshal." But that was over 30 years ago, a blur. And nothing like this. This living legend was about to further the impact that he had made upon my life. Impact that includes nearly every right and privilege I have enjoyed as a Black male in America.

I knew that because of him and the other proud men with whom he travelled — names like Lowery, Randolph, Young, Jackson, Wilkins, Rustin, Gregory, Farmer, Abernathy and King — I could be a man of substance and dignity, a contributor to my society and my community. This was my chance to let him know on a personal man-to-legend level, as it were, just how much his work means to me. It changed and continues to change our country for the better.

He has received all kinds of honors, so he has heard it all before, I'm sure. It is probably routine for him. But for me? To meet and shake the hand of a man who took a brutal beating so that I might not have to? A man who has dedicated his life to the service of his, no, *our* country? A man, who even today is berated by the ignorant minds of this land while toiling unselfishly for the greater good of humanity? "Huge" is too small a term for what this meant to me. John Lewis, and me? *Wow!*

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