

# OPINION

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## Honor King and Follow his Agenda

Continue struggle against injustice

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Dr. King would no doubt be honored by the numerous parades, dinners, and celebrations held throughout the past holiday honoring his birthday. He would also be proud of those who marched for justice in his name. Indeed many chose to celebrate the King holiday by continuing his legacy of struggle against injustice.

In Columbus, Georgia thou-

Jesse Jackson, Dennis Hayes, interim president of the NAACP, and many others in the march for justice on behalf of Kenneth Walker. Thousands of people from Columbus and Atlanta, Georgia came together to honor Dr. King by marching for justice on behalf of Kenneth Walker. In addition to providing support for his wife, daughter, and mother, we were able to add momentum to the fight for justice on behalf of Kenneth and so many other victims of police misconduct and racial profiling.

The spirit of Dr. King should live on, not only as a celebra-



*The spirit of Dr. King should live on, not only as a celebration, but also as inspiration for our continuous struggle against injustice.*

sands marched for justice over the killing of Kenneth Walker by a country police officer. Kenneth Walker was an unarmed African-American killed in a police traffic stop over a year ago.

The officer was fired from his job after it was determined he had no legitimate reason for shooting the law abiding husband and father. Yet, several months after being fired from his job for the shooting, the county's grand jury refused to indict him for the crime. Currently, federal investigators are reviewing the case as a possible civil rights violation. Hopefully, they will issue an indictment.

I was privileged to join Rev.

tion, but also as inspiration for our continuous struggle against injustice. Dr. King died as a martyr for the cause of justice and equality, not just for a holiday celebration.

We must not only honor him, we must follow his agenda.

George W. Bush and many right wing war-mongering political conservatives are now honoring Dr. King but work against everything he represented. Let us distinguish ourselves by following Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.



## Decent Standard of Living Gone Astray

Tie minimum wage to salaries in Congress

BY HOLLY SKLAR

Did you know that raising the minimum wage was a demand of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I have a Dream" speech?

King, A. Philip Randolph and other leaders of the 1963 march demanded "a national minimum wage act that will give all Americans a decent standard of living." They didn't dream that four

decades later, the value of the minimum wage would go down as the cost of housing, food, health care and other necessities went up. They didn't dream that four decades later, 36 million Americans would be below the official poverty line — far below a decent standard of living. They didn't dream that four decades later, the black poverty rate would still be triple that of whites.

At the time of the march, the minimum wage was \$7.80 an hour, adjusting for inflation in 2004 dollars. Today's minimum wage prescribed by federal law is far lower — just \$5.15 an hour.

In "Where Do We Go From Here?" King wrote, "There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen whether he be a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid or day laborer."

The minimum wage reached its peak value in 1968, the year King was assassinated. Today's \$5.15 minimum wage is 41 percent less than 1968's inflation-adjusted minimum wage of \$8.78.

Full-time, year-round minimum wage workers made \$18,262 in 1968, adjusting for inflation. Today's full-time minimum wage workers make just \$10,712 a year. The minimum wage sets the wage floor. As the floor sinks, millions of work-

ers find themselves in poverty.

Certainly, King didn't dream that four decades after the March on Washington, the U.S. Conference of Mayors would find in its annual "Hunger and Homelessness Survey" that 17 percent of the homeless were employed, as were 34 percent of adults requesting emergency food assistance.

Most Americans believe a job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it. Most Americans want to raise

Congress earned nine times the pay of minimum wage workers. Now, they earn 15 times as much. To reverse that growing gap, Congress should tie their pay raises to raises in the minimum wage.

Georgia Congressman John Lewis, a leader of the March on Washington, has said if King were alive, "he would be in the forefront of reminding the government that its first concern should be the basic needs of its citizens - not just black

*At the time of the 1963 March on Washington, members of Congress earned nine times the pay of minimum wage workers. Now, they earn 15 times as much.*

the minimum wage significantly.

Yet, Congress has had seven pay raises since 1997, when the minimum wage was last increased, while approving no increases for minimum wage earners since then. This month, congressional pay rose to \$162,100-way up from \$133,600 in 1997. That \$28,500 congressional pay hike is more than the total earnings of two minimum wage workers.

At the time of the 1963 March on Washington, members of

Americans but all Americans - for food, shelter, health care, education, jobs, livable incomes and the opportunity to realize their full potential."

Congress and the White House should stop taking a holiday from King's dream and enact, "a national minimum wage act that will give all Americans a decent standard of living."

Holly Sklar, a longtime journalist and activist, is co-author of "Raise the Floor: Wages and Policies That Work for All Of Us."



Denyse O. Peterson

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