



ILWU Mourns the Passing of Civil Rights Icon and Congressman John Lewis

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union joins millions of people across the country in mourning the death of Civil Rights icon and United States Congressman John Lewis. Our deepest condolences go out to his family, friends, and all of those whose lives were touched by Congressman Lewis' life and work.

John Lewis was an unfailing supporter of the rights and dignity of working-class Americans and a fearless champion for liberty and civil rights throughout his entire life. He was one of the original Freedom Riders in the summer of 1960. As a young leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Lewis helped to organize and also spoke at the historic 1963 March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered the "I Have A Dream" speech.

Lewis courageously put his body on the line in pursuit of racial justice and equality. He and Reverend Hosea Williams from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led a nonviolent march in 1965 across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, headed toward Montgomery. The pair led over 500 peaceful marchers into a line of violent racist police who attacked the group with clubs, bullwhips, and tear gas while Lewis urged everyone to kneel and pray. Lewis was so severely beaten in the "Bloody Sunday" incident that he had to be hospitalized with skull fractures.

John Lewis had longstanding connections with the ILWU that were forged over many decades because of a shared dedication to racial and economic justice, lifelong support for unions and workers, and the fact that his youngest sister, Rosa Tyner, was a member of ILWU Locals 10 and 91 for 23 years.

As a member of Congress, Representative Lewis was a champion of working people and a strong supporter of collective bargaining rights. He advocated for a living wage, calling for raising the minimum wage and supporting the Davis-Bacon and prevailing wage laws. He called for and strengthened workplace safety standards. Rep. Lewis was in all ways a true friend to longshore, maritime, and warehouse workers.

In 2010, President Barack Obama awarded Lewis with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor. During the ceremony, Obama said: "There's a quote inscribed over a doorway in Nashville, where students first refused to leave lunch counters 51 years ago this February. And the quote said, 'If not us, then who? If not now, then when?' It's a question John Lewis has been asking his entire life. It's why, time and again, he faced down death so that all of us could share equally in the joys of life."

"John Lewis was a true hero and warrior for the working class," said ILWU International President Willie Adams. "He was fearless, committed, and unwavering in his dedication to racial and economic justice. In the streets of Selma and in the halls of Congress, John Lewis fought for us all. The torch has truly been passed to a new generation of activists who today are continuing the fight for civil rights. May the memory of his life-long dedication and commitment to social justice and the struggle for freedom be a light that guides us through these challenging times."