



Contact: Nick Voutsinos
Email: nvoutsinos@afscme.org

AFSCME's Saunders at NAACP Labor Luncheon: We must vote for candidates who believe, as Dr. King said, that 'all labor has dignity'

LAS VEGAS – At a labor luncheon hosted as part of the NAACP's national convention, AFSCME President Lee Saunders delivered a speech on the importance of civic activism, especially in this critical election year.

During the event, Bill Lucy – a key organizer of the 1968 Memphis Sanitation strike and former secretary-treasurer of AFSCME – was awarded the prestigious Legacy Award, which he accepted via video. In his speech that followed, Saunders outlined the historic organizing work Lucy did to build lasting bridges between civil rights and labor rights:

“At the age of 34, [Bill Lucy] was AFSCME's representative on the ground during the 1968 Memphis Sanitation strike. Thirteen hundred Black men represented by AFSCME Local 1733 had walked off the job to protest poverty wages and degrading working conditions. This wasn't just about getting paid a few more cents an hour, as Bill Lucy has often said. This was about dignity and respect. It wasn't just about recognition of their union, but recognition of their basic humanity. That was reflected in their iconic slogan that Bill helped develop – four simple but powerful words: I AM A MAN.”

Saunders also honored the memory of the late Rev. James Lawson, who passed away in June and was instrumental in persuading Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to join the striking workers in Memphis:

“Thanks to visionaries like Bill and Rev. Lawson, there has been meaningful progress on civil rights, labor rights and human rights in our country over the last several decades. But we know – all of us in this room know – that the fight continues. We all know that structural racism is alive and well in America. We know the system is often rigged against working people.”

To close his remarks, Saunders affirmed that the best way to honor the legacy of Bill Lucy and the Rev. James Lawson is to continue their work by organizing and mobilizing:

“We must vote for candidates up and down the ballot who believe, as Dr. King said, that 'all labor has dignity'; candidates willing to walk the picket line, not those who have spent