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## **AFT-Maryland President Marietta English Statement on the Passing of Congressman John Lewis and Rev. C.T. Vivian**

When giants the size of Rev. C.T. Vivian and Congressman John Lewis passed, the country rightfully paused to reflect on the way they helped shape our nation into a more perfect union. It's important that we reflect on what these men fought for and how that fight remains. They fought for justice and equality here in the United States. Rev. Vivian was heralded by none other than Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the "greatest preacher to ever live." His moral clarity and willingness to sacrifice are a guide to every freedom fighter. One such fighter was 16 years his junior but would go on to be his colleague.

John Robert Lewis took over as Chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in 1963 and would be a constant moral compass for the rest of his life. As a student activist and young adult, he stood face to face with Bull Connor and endured blows from billy-clubs as well as imprisonment in Mississippi all to make the country live up to its promise. Later in life, Congressman Lewis was a clear voice for jobs and justice just as he had been in 1963 when he was the youngest speaker at the March on Washington for Jobs and Justice. Even sick with cancer, Congressman Lewis donned his mask and stood on the streets in solidarity with activists around the country demanding the nation recognize Black Lives Matter. These national heroes offered themselves as living sacrifices in the battle against racism and white supremacy.

Now more than ever Congress needs to pass the Voting Rights Act to honor the legacies of these two great American heroes. As the words of condolences poured in over the weekend, I couldn't help but think of the best way to honor Congressman Lewis and Rev. Vivian. The words are nice and the respect for both men was hard earned, but an updated Voting Rights Act is a bi-partisan action our Congress and country can take to simply say thank you to two men who gave so much of themselves to make the United States live up to everything it says it is and has the potential to be.

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