



PRESENTS

# CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR CANDIDATE FORUM

AT THE  
34<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SUMMIT

FROM VISION TO ACTION: A FORUM TO  
UNLOCK PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

PART OF THE NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. WEEKEND

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2026

California Science Center | Donald P. Loker Conference Center | LOS ANGELES

# THANK YOU

to our generous event sponsors, whose contributions  
support our legacy of empowerment

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## SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR MEDIA PARTNER, KBLA TALK 1580.

In addition to our sponsors named above, we are grateful  
to individual contributors to our mission and work to  
"EDUCATE, ENGAGE and EMPOWER."

Please consider a monthly recurring donation of \$19.92, in honor  
of our founding year, to sustain our civic engagement and  
community empowerment work.

**Scan the QR code or visit [www.empowermentcongress.org/donate](http://www.empowermentcongress.org/donate)  
for more information on how to become a supporter.**

*The Empowerment Congress is a fiscally sponsored project of Community Initiatives*



*Voting is the foundation stone for political action.*

– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Dear 34th Annual Summit Participants:

Thank you for joining us at the Empowerment Congress Annual Summit, which commemorates our 34th year building an **informed electorate through our mission to educate, engage, and empower**. This event represents our ongoing commitment to **civic engagement, intentional civility, and reciprocal accountability** as core values for our work and advocacy.

2025 showed us that now, more than ever, we must be fully invested in staying alert to and aware of the shifting landscape around us. Apathy is not an option as we see critical needs going unmet because we lack affordable housing, the cost of living continues to rise, and funding for service providers is nearly nonexistent. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose legacy we uplift this weekend, *"Our greatest defense...is to take offensive action in behalf of justice. We must with positive action seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity, and injustice..."* that plague our communities today.

This year's theme – **"From Vision to Action: A Forum to Unlock Participatory Democracy"** – offers us a platform from which to envision the world in which we want to live and to take the positive action of which Dr. King spoke nearly 60 years ago. Participatory democracy starts with the choice to be informed. We must make the decision to educate ourselves on how our government works on all levels. To learn what our elected officials and our public offices are designed to do and to investigate how they are meeting that charge. Once we gain this knowledge, our next step is continuous engagement. We cannot be satisfied with the status quo, but must also remain consistently alert to ensure that we know what is at stake as times and conditions change. As we keep our attention on how our lives, as well as those of our neighbors, are impacted by all levels of government, we can begin to speak out to remind our leaders that they are accountable for our well-being. This cycle keeps us moving forward and creating spaces where justice is at the forefront.

Your presence at today's Summit is a powerful step in civic engagement, and we are glad that you have joined us. The support of more than 30 sponsors to create this event truly magnifies the importance of joining together to reach a common goal. We are grateful to our co-sponsors for seeing the need to build community through voter education and for committing to that goal in partnership with us. We encourage you to use the information presented today as one tool to consider as you look deeper into the issues that matter to you and the candidates that are presenting themselves to provide leadership in this very critical time period.

We encourage you to continue your engagement outside of the Summit. Our monthly working groups offer spaces to deepen your understanding of government reform opportunities, to experience civic engagement as an evolving and continuous process, and to expand your knowledge of the wide-ranging impact of homelessness for those who are unhoused and the community at large.

For nearly 35 years, our many volunteers have been the life force that allows us to prioritize social justice and community well-being in creative ways. In addition to our core leadership body, our passionate community of loyal adherents that energize our working groups and other mobilization efforts are indispensable. We are grateful for your consistent presence, which enables us to make a lasting difference.

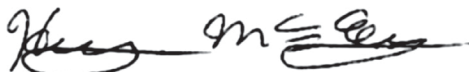
We thank you again for attending the 34th Annual Empowerment Congress Summit and encourage you to use what you have learned here today to motivate those around you to unlock their participatory democracy.

*On behalf of the Empowerment Congress Leadership Council,*



**GLORIA J. DAVIS**

*Empowerment Congress Co-Chairs*



**HARRY MCELROY**





## ***"From Vision to Action: A Forum to Unlock Participatory Democracy"***

### **SUMMIT PROGRAM**

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#### **9:00 AM CALL TO ORDER**

**Tavis Smiley**  
Nationally Syndicated Talk Radio Host and  
Chief Visionary Officer, KBLA Talk 1580

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#### **EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS WELCOME**

**Arna Fulcher**  
Chair, 34th Annual Empowerment Congress Summit

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#### **FOUNDER'S REMARKS**

**Mark Ridley-Thomas, PhD**  
Founder, Empowerment Congress

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#### **CANDIDATE FORUM for CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR**

*Moderated by Tavis Smiley*

**Gustavo Arellano**  
Features Columnist  
Los Angeles Times

**Lisa Collins**  
Founder and Publisher  
L.A. Focus

**Frank Stoltze**  
Correspondent  
LA1st

**Honorable Xavier Becerra**  
Former U.S. Health and Human  
Services Secretary

**Honorable Eric Swalwell**  
Member of Congress (CA-CD14)

**Honorable Ian Calderon**  
Former Assembly Member

**Honorable Tony Thurmond**  
California Superintendent of  
Public Instruction

**Honorable Katie Porter**  
Former Member of Congress

**Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa**  
Former City of Los Angeles  
Mayor

**Jon Slavet**  
Business Leader and  
Tech Entrepreneur

**Honorable Betty Yee**  
Former California State  
Controller

**Tom Steyer**  
Environmental Activist and  
Business Leader

**PLEASE SCAN THE QR CODE** or visit  
[www.empowermentcongress.org/annualsummit/ecsummit34](http://www.empowermentcongress.org/annualsummit/ecsummit34)  
for more information on today's programming,  
including candidate bios.





## FUTURE PROGRAMMING

The Annual Summit sets the stage for the Empowerment Congress' programming and advocacy year, providing a blueprint for the organization's work in the months to come.

### Working group meetings and special events

- Government Reform & Accountability Working Group (1st and 3rd Tuesday, monthly)
- Homelessness Working Group (2nd and 4th Thursday, monthly)
- Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count (Thursday, January 22, 2026)
- Season of Nonviolence (January 30 - April 4)
- Civic Engagement Capacity Building
- EmPOWER Hour Days of Dialogue
- Election Ready EmPOWERMENT Briefings

### Signature Events

- Juneteenth Dialogue and Celebration, June 2026
- 35th Anniversary Empowerment Congress Summit, January 2027

Please check our website for an up-to-date schedule and for meeting and event details. [empowermentcongress.org](http://empowermentcongress.org)



## WHO WE ARE

Civic Engagement + Dialogue = Community Building

In 1995, Los Angeles' deeply divided reaction to the verdict in the O.J. Simpson trial underscored how far apart the diverse communities of Los Angeles and the nation stand on some basic issues. As a result, then-Los Angeles City Council Member Mark Ridley-Thomas called a meeting with 20 prophetic leaders and community activists to defuse escalating tensions. Out of this was born an innovative nonpartisan initiative, Los Angeles' first citywide discussion—A Day of Dialogue.

Since then, Dialogues were created to address the critical issues facing our communities. Avis Ridley-Thomas, Executive Director and Founder of the Institute for Nonviolence in Los Angeles (INVLA) & Days of Dialogue, has been called upon by community leaders every time there is a dispute in our community that needs to be resolved.

We have conducted over 200 dialogues with 20,000 community participants, with the help of 992 volunteer mediators.

CONGRATULATIONS TO  
EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS ON YOUR  
34TH ANNUAL SUMMIT FROM VISION TO ACTION:  
A FORUM TO UNLOCK PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY  
WITH LOVE AND SOLIDARITY

St. John's  
Community Health

[WWW.SJCH.ORG](http://WWW.SJCH.ORG) f X @ SJHEALTHCA



## CANDIDATE FORUM JOURNALIST PANEL



### MODERATOR

#### **Tavis Smiley**

KBLA 1580 Talk Radio Host  
Chief Visionary Officer

Tavis Smiley is a nationally recognized broadcaster, author, and public intellectual who serves as the Chief Visionary Officer and host at KBLA 1580 Talk Radio. With decades of experience in media and journalism, Smiley has built a reputation for facilitating thoughtful dialogue on politics, culture, and social justice. His work centers on elevating underrepresented voices and fostering informed civic engagement through meaningful conversation. Smiley continues to play a leading role in shaping public discourse at the local and national level.

### PANELISTS



#### **Gustavo Arellano**

Columnist  
*Los Angeles Times*

Gustavo Arellano is a *Los Angeles Times* features columnist, covering Southern California everything and a bunch of the West and beyond. He was a finalist for the 2025 Pulitzer Prize in Commentary and was part of the team that won the 2023 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News for reporting on that infamous leaked audio recording that upended Los Angeles politics and exposed an unprecedented, racially motivated power grab. Arellano previously worked at *OC Weekly*, where he was an investigative reporter for 15 years and editor for six, wrote a column called ¡Ask a Mexican! and is the author of “Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America.” He’s the child of two Mexican immigrants, one of whom came to this country in the trunk of a Chevy.



#### **Lisa Collins**

Publisher  
*L.A. Focus*

Lisa Collins is the founder and publisher of *L.A. Focus*, a monthly newspaper spotlighting news of interest to Los Angeles’ African American community. A Los Angeles native, Ms. Collins is passionate about her goal of equipping Black Angelenos with information and resources to make better choices in their lives and showcasing the church as a critical component in community empowerment. Prior to establishing *L.A. Focus*, Ms. Collins served as the gospel editor at *Billboard Magazine* for more than a decade. She has published articles in *Essence* and *Black Radio Exclusive* and once served as West Coast editor for *Upscale Magazine*. *L.A. Focus’* Annual First Ladies High Tea, which she produces, honors the role women of faith play in shaping the next generation, while providing scholarships to at-risk youth.



#### **Frank Stoltze**

Civics & Democracy Correspondent  
*LA1st*

Frank Stoltze is a civics and democracy correspondent for *LA1st*. He’s worked at a number of radio stations over the span of his career, including as news director for KPFK Pacifica Radio in L.A. He arrived here in 1991, a year before the Rodney King beating trial verdict and the subsequent civil unrest that gave rise to the Empowerment Congress. He covers politics and criminal justice for KPCC and *LA1st*, but like most radio reporters, he ends up covering everything from fires and floods to police corruption and political scandal. He’s won a number of awards, including a Golden Mic for a documentary on the recall election that brought California Governor Schwarzenegger to power. The Los Angeles Press Club named him Radio Journalist of the Year in 2005.

## FEATURED CANDIDATES



**HONORABLE**  
**Xavier Becerra**  
Former U.S. Secretary of  
Health and Human Services



**HONORABLE**  
**Ian Calderon**  
Former State Assembly  
Member



**HONORABLE**  
**Katie Porter**  
Former Member of  
Congress



**Jon Slavet**  
Business Leader and  
Tech Entrepreneur



**Tom Steyer**  
Business Leader,  
Climate Advocate



**HONORABLE**  
**Eric Swalwell**  
Member of Congress



**HONORABLE**  
**Tony Thurmond**  
California Superintendent  
of Public Instruction



**HONORABLE**  
**Antonio Villaraigosa**  
Former Los Angeles  
Mayor



**HONORABLE**  
**Betty Yee**  
Former California State  
Controller



California  
**COMMUNITY**  
Foundation

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“

*And we must approach the right to vote in full  
knowledge that when we have accomplished it we  
shall have established democracy...*

”



# YEAR IN REVIEW

The Empowerment Congress thrives on consistent and meaningful engagement with constituents who are passionate about making a direct impact on the communities in which they live. Our signature events provide opportunities for citizens and stakeholders to interact, engage timely issues and to create action-oriented spaces that can inspire organic change.

## SIGNATURE EVENTS

### Where Do We Go From Here? – Chaos or Democracy 33rd Annual Empowerment Congress Summit

Nearly 400 residents, community activists, and clergy representing neighborhood groups, nonprofit organizations, businesses, religious institutions, and civic organizations attended the 33rd Annual Empowerment Congress Summit in January 2025. Once again held on the campus of Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science located adjacent to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Medical Center campus in the historic Watts-Willowbrook community, the event was a testament to the Empowerment Congress's enduring legacy and commitment to civic engagement.

Under the theme – **"Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Democracy?"** – the Annual Summit program was designed to confront challenging circumstances and increasing political accountability concerns. The program focused on highlighting the ways in which citizen voices still matter and how best to direct and conceive of their civic engagement efforts. The Summit commenced with an invigorating and powerful conversation between several elected officials, heralded for their championship of democratic participation, who are attempting to navigate unsettling political times punctuated by the January 2025 wildfire natural disaster and recovery. The panel was moderated by longstanding Empowerment Congress supporter and KBLA Talk 1580 Founder, Tavis Smiley.

The plenary session also highlighted one of the most impactful, but often underestimated, advocates for social equity and justice – the philanthropic sector. During a period of rising income inequality, philanthropic organizations provide funding for direct services to vulnerable Angelenos experiencing adversity, advocate to diminish prevalent social inequities, and challenge systems to adjust their perspectives towards increased servant leadership. The 2025 Summit highlighted the crucial role of philanthropy in promoting democracy and reducing chaos.

Four Summit workshops examined potential threats to democracy and encouraged civic engagement as a response to a pervasive sense of chaos. The sessions provided thoughtful insights to advance accountability in the implementation of L.A. County Measure A, clarify the implications of L.A. County Measure G for South Los Angeles residents, assess the threats and promises of President Trump's Agenda 47 and Project 2025's blueprint for "conservative" administration of federal government, and provide tools for conflict resolution amidst a landscape characterized by anxiety, fear, uncertainty, incivility, disrespect and visceral injustice.



## Educate, Engage, Empower: Resilience in the Face of Chaos 2025 Empowerment Congress Juneteenth Experience, Dialogue and Celebration

The Fourth Annual EC observance of Juneteenth explored the theme **“Educate, Engage, Empower: Resilience in the Face of Chaos.”** Held at The Beehive in South Los Angeles, more than 200 participants heard from news commentator, author and the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights President and CEO, Maya Wiley. Her remarks reminded guests of the strength and resilience our community has demonstrated generation after generation. During one particularly powerful moment in her presentation, Ms. Wiley stated “Our resilience is born from the fact that every single time they come for us, we get back up. We don’t stop! We resist! We persist! We assist! It’s who we are. It’s who we’ve always been.”

The program was enhanced by performances from Rhythm Arts Alliance and The Young Shakespeareans, who infused artistry and creativity into the celebration, along with an ancestral altar coordinated by LA Commons, highlighting civil rights giant, Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr. and longtime EC leader, Father Augustus Taylor. Trained Days of Dialogue facilitators from The Institute for Nonviolence in Los Angeles (INVLA) guided participants through a multi-generational structured dialogue centered around resilience and legacy, before participants transitioned to a high-energy outdoor celebration.

Upward Mobility band led participants in Freedom Songs and The Tree Yoga Collaborative led a brief interactive yoga session, reinforcing the spirit of community liberation that Juneteenth commemorates.



**At the 40 Acre Conservation League,  
we protect and restore land not just  
for today – but for future generations.**

We are California’s first Black-led land trust  
protecting 676 acres of land—but this is just the  
beginning.

Together, we’re reclaiming our connection to  
nature, honoring cultural roots, and building a  
legacy of stewardship, equity and belonging in the  
outdoors.

**JOIN US.  
EXPLORE. PROTECT. THRIVE.**

 [www.40AcreLeague.org](http://www.40AcreLeague.org) |  [@fortyacreleague](https://www.instagram.com/fortyacreleague)



Jade Stevens, Executive Director





**HEATHER HUTT**

LOS ANGELES COUNCILWOMAN  
10TH DISTRICT

On Behalf of the Tenth District

*Congratulations*  
to the

**EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS**

**ON THEIR**

**34 ANNUAL SUMMIT**

**"FROM VISION TO ACTION: A FORUM TO  
UNLOCK PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY"**

Your service is creating a more just and  
equitable Los Angeles for all!

with gratitude,

*Heather Hutt*





# YEAR IN REVIEW

One of the core drivers of Empowerment Congress success is the constant evolution in how we approach civic engagement. 2025 allowed us to find new ways to engage the community and to explore how to reach new stakeholders.



## PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

### Espresso & Empowerment

The EC partnered with Days of Dialogue (DoD) to host a monthly civic engagement residency at Sip & Sonder from October to December in Inglewood, California. **Sip & Sonder** was a culturally rooted coffeehouse that uplifted civic learning, creativity, and belonging in Black and Brown communities. Its nonprofit affiliate, Sonder Impact, designed programming to support capacity-building and community empowerment initiatives.

The residency, known as **Espresso & Empowerment**, created accessible community dialogue experiences centered on healing, well-being, civic reflection, participatory democracy, and collective resilience. The three-month program explored the themes of **civic education & shared language; shutdown stress, reflection & mutual support; and healing, culture & justice-centered civic action**. All sessions were guided by trained Days of Dialogue facilitators and grounded in EC's guiding values: intentional civility, participatory democracy, reciprocal accountability, empowerment, and servant leadership.



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“

*Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.*

”



is proud to support the Empowerment Congress as a  
**VISIONARY SPONSOR**

“

*Participatory democracy is an evolutionary process. It does not stop at the polls. It requires ongoing investment in challenging the status quo and holding ourselves and our representatives accountable for shaping the communities we deserve.*

”

# YEAR IN REVIEW

## Seniors Rally for Social Security

Observances and celebrations of the 90th Anniversary of the **Social Security Act** in 2025 coincided with drastic federal budget cuts that impacted the provision of services to seniors in the form of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. The EC joined with the **Raising Canes** movement, **Southern Christian Leadership Conference - Southern California**, and **South Los Angeles Clergy for Public Accountability (SLACPA)**, to convene seniors at the **Crenshaw Social Security Office** twice to rally to protect these services. The Empowerment Congress also hosted a virtual briefing that discussed the history of Social Security and its impact on Black Seniors and low-income elderly, the looming threat of insolvency to future retirees, and current efforts to undermine and dismantle the program being characterized as “reforms.”



## The Role of Clergy and Faith Leaders in the Civic Engagement Movement

In August 2025, nearly 30 faith leaders from across Southern California joined at **Gethsemane Christian Love Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church** to discuss the question “**What does Christian public witness require of faith leaders in pursuit of justice in a time of chaos and social crisis?**” Bishop James A. Ross of United Christian Communion and Dr. Jill M. Humphries set context for the facilitated dialogue with remarks on “The Historic Role of the Black Church: Civic Engagement as a Feature of Ministry and Witness” and “Civic Engagement’s Local, National and International Impact.”



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“  
We shall overcome because the  
arc of the moral universe is long,  
but it bends toward justice.  
”



# YEAR IN REVIEW

## WORKING GROUPS

EC Working Groups are the principal means through which civic engagement activists “EDUCATE, ENGAGE and EMPOWER.” Our working groups provide opportunities for individuals to learn about a range of local, state, and national issues that impact our everyday lives. Participation in working groups leads to stronger civic education that inspires and motivates participants to do more.

### Homelessness Working Group

*The Homelessness Working Group educates constituents about policies, programs and advocacy opportunities that would further collective action and solutions to address homelessness. The working group is dedicated to understanding the root causes of homelessness, advocating for more resources to the multifaceted response to the homelessness crisis (street strategy, interim housing, permanent housing, and prevention, with supportive services embedded throughout), and providing leadership around mobilizing and educating the community around needed policy changes.*

The Homelessness Working Group welcomed numerous speakers throughout 2025, who brought widely ranging expertise on the variety of ways in which the crisis of homelessness is being addressed in LA County. Featured guests included **Erika Hartman** of **Safe Place for Youth (SPY)**, **Dr. Jack Barbour** of **Southern California Health and Rehabilitation Program (SCHARP)**, **Saba Mwine-Chang** of the **Los Angeles Housing Services Authority (LAHSA)**, **Veronica Lewis** of **HOPICS**, and **Dr. Michael Hochman**, who provided great insight into innovative medical support provided to Los Angelenos experiencing homelessness. In addition to the regular presentations from service providers and advocates, the working group hosted multiple community dialogues on homelessness, facilitated by trained Days of Dialogue facilitators, allowing participants to share and learn from a wide range of perspectives.



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**SOCIAL JUSTICE SPONSOR**

“

*We are here also because of our love for democracy, because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest form of government on earth.*

”



GREATER LOS ANGELES  
**AFRICAN AMERICAN**  
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

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**EMPOWERMENT SPONSOR**

“  
We must come to see that the end we  
seek is a society at peace with itself, a  
society that can live with its conscience.  
”



# Congratulations

to the Empowerment Congress  
Community on your 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Summit!

For 50 years, Liberty Hill has served as  
L.A.'s social justice foundation.

*Thank you for being part of the movement.*

libertyhill.org |    @libertyhill

**Liberty Hill**  
FOUNDATION

## Government Reform & Accountability Working Group

The EC Government Reform and Accountability Working Group (GRAWG) recruits and works with CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVISTS who are committed to the EC's mission on matters related to: community quality of life issues, social justice and equitable distribution of resources; and governmental organization, governance and accountability.

### GRAWG goals aim to:

1. **DEMYSTIFY GOVERNMENT** by sharing and discussing the content of research into and information about implementation of government reform activity and action at the federal Agenda 47/Project 2025 and local level (County Measure G and L.A. City Charter Reform).
2. **ENCOURAGE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** by advocating for greater accountability, transparency and public participation in government reform efforts.
3. **IDENTIFY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES** by recognizing, sharing and creating opportunities to petition relevant public officials and express positions and informed opinion about reform actions and proposals.

GRAWG welcomed a range of presenters in 2025, covering federal topics like the FY25-26 budget, Social Security, and the Presidential Joint Address to Congress, as well as local topics like the County budget process, jail replacement, Proposition 50, grassroots advocacy and the County Governance Reform Task Force. Featured presenters included three members of the **County Governance Reform Task Force** (Sara Sadhwani, Derek Steele, and Brian Calderón Tabatabai), EVITARUS polling expert **Dr. Shakari Byerly**, Northridge Indivisible and Raising Canes Movement organizer **Duski Wanamaker** and **Gabrielle Howard**, Legislative Deputy for **Congressmember Sydney Kamlager-Dove**. Frequent partner **INVLA/Days of Dialogue** also facilitated a dialogue among participants, to allow space for processing the many significantly impactful changes that took place last year.

**Visit our website to learn more about these and other programs, and to view replays of the presentations!**

# FROM VISION TO ACTION: BUILDING POWER THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Black Freedom Fund is proud to sponsor the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Empowerment Congress Summit.

**Like the Summit, Black Freedom Fund believes democracy works best when Black communities are informed, organized, and positioned to shape the decisions that impact their lives.**

This Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend, we are honored to support the leadership, accountability, and collective power that turns vision into action.

**BLACK  
FREEDOM  
FUND**

[fundblackfreedom.org](https://fundblackfreedom.org)



CURREN D. PRICE, JR.  
Los Angeles City Councilmember

THE NEW 9<sup>th</sup>

**CONGRATULATIONS**  
34TH ANNUAL EMPOWERMENT  
CONGRESS SUMMIT

**FROM VISION  
TO ACTION**  
Saturday, January 17, 2026

Since 1992, The Empowerment Congress has been a guiding force in participatory democracy, empowering Los Angeles communities to shape their own futures.

Through your commitment to uniting residents, Neighborhood Councils, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, businesses, and civic leaders, you have elevated community voices and inspired real, positive change. Your mission to educate, engage, and empower has transformed lives and strengthened neighborhoods across the City of Angels.

*Curren D. Price, Jr.*

f @currendpricejr

cd9.lacity.gov

**wesley**  
Health Centers  
JWCH INSTITUTE

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“  
For democracy demands  
responsibility, courage, and the  
will-to-freedom from all men.  
”



## About the Empowerment Congress

For more than three decades, the Empowerment Congress (EC) continues to empower and engage diverse communities to ensure our collective voice is heard by:

- Encouraging and enlisting full participation from our community to improve our quality of life;
- Educating and informing our community on how government works;
- Developing strategies that shape policy and legislation; and
- Connecting our community with public resources

The EC is a distinctive and deliberate model of civic engagement built on the core principles of participatory democracy, reciprocal accountability, and intentional civility. Founded by then-Los Angeles City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas, the EC fosters partnerships with neighborhood groups, residents, nonprofit organizations, businesses, religious institutions, and community leaders. A precursor to the City of Los Angeles' Neighborhood Councils, the EC is an ongoing effort in participatory government, founded on the tenet that elected officials are most effective when the constituents they serve are actively involved in the decision-making process.

The EC aspires to provide unique opportunities to build community and engage neighbors on issues that directly impact the quality of life. Our programming and partnerships generate dialogue that encourages and lays the foundation for economic, social, and political justice.

Born in the wake of the Rodney King beating trial verdict and experiences arising from the subsequent civil unrest and rebuilding efforts, the work of the Empowerment Congress continues its original focus: to encourage civic engagement rooted in African American community practices of mass participatory democracy, reciprocal accountability and intentional civility. Though not exclusively, our work continues to focus on communities boasting high concentrations of African Americans in both the City and County of Los Angeles. Our work builds on expressions of "self" – self-reliance, self-determination, self-governance, self-improvement and selflessness as well as a rich legacy of social responsibility, informed discourse, and multi-racial solidarity in pursuit of social justice. The EC applies its civic engagement mission to civic education, organizing, community building and advocacy around issues of government reform and governance, homelessness and housing affordability, neighborhood improvement and evidence-based public policy.

## Our Empowerment Congress and Civic Engagement Practice Values

These **VALUES DEFINE OUR PERSPECTIVE, PRACTICE AND ORGANIZING METHODOLOGY**. We employ these principles and values to regulate our interactions, guide advocacy, impact politics, and promote transformational change.

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>1</b> Civil discourse on matters of debate and contention               | <b>4</b> Reciprocal accountability                            | <b>8</b> Neighborhood empowerment   |
| <b>2</b> Evidence-based inquiry, discussion, and public policy development | <b>5</b> Non-violent, peaceful resolution of disputes         | <b>9</b> Collective advocacy and direct action in the redress of grievances   |
| <b>3</b> Inclusive, democratic participation                               | <b>6</b> Respect for diversity and the dignity of all persons | <b>10</b> Crowd sourced funding to promote self-reliance and mass mobilization rooted in the agency of the individual |
|  | <b>7</b> Principle-based organizing                           |   |



# The California Endowment

is proud to support the Empowerment Congress as a  
**SOCIAL JUSTICE SPONSOR**

“

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*

”



## Play Because it Matters



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Empowerment Congress as an  
**EMPOWERMENT SPONSOR**

“

*And let us not lose faith in democracy. For with all of its weaknesses, there is a ground and a basis of hope in our democratic creed.*

”



## EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS CO-CHAIRS

### Gloria Davis

Executive Director  
Girls Club of Los Angeles

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Community Engagement  
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Los Angeles County Community  
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Rhea K. Mac Consulting

### Danette McBride

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California Institute for Behavioral  
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