



From NFDW President Cindy Jenks

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Martin Luther King, Jr. was more than just a great American. His legacy will be vibrant forever, because he changed our country and our history when he challenged our consciousness about how persons of color were being denied equal treatment in our country.

It is hard to believe the prejudice, injustice and hatred that prevailed in our country back in that era. When a black man could be lynched just because a mob wanted to commit murder, or when a child was prevented from receiving an education because he or she was a person of color, our country was being blinded by this hatred.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership in the non-violent movement was a long and always difficult road traveled. A bullet fired by another man who hated the love that MLK preached needlessly took his life on April 4, 1968. Nevertheless, January 20th will always be celebrated because Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birth brought light where there was darkness and love where there was hate.

During the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. called for civil and economic rights and an end to racism in the United States. King was standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. and he was addressing 250,000 civil rights supporters from throughout our country. The speech was "a defining moment of the civil rights movement and among the most iconic speeches in American history," according to historical scholars.

As King was nearing the end of his speech, he began to improvise and he began with another theme: "I have a dream". According to history writer Jon Meacham, "With a single phrase, Martin Luther King Jr. joined Jefferson and Lincoln in the ranks of men who've shaped modern America." The speech was ranked the top American speech of the 20th century in a 1999 poll of scholars.

When we watch the videos of Martin Luther King delivering this iconic speech, it is as if he looking directly into our souls and he is talking directly to each of us. Maybe that is because in today's world there is still so much work to do and so many hearts and minds to change. Now we have to ask ourselves, "Will the Dream live on?" The answer is "Yes" if we help keep the Dream alive by continuing to seek social justice and working to end racism.

As we are celebrating, let us also recognize the tremendous accomplishment of the Democrats in the Virginia Legislature and their passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Virginia earned the iconic status of becoming the 38th state to ratify the ERA because of their years of hard work and dedication to adding the ERA to the U.S. Constitution thus providing more protection from the issue of sex discrimination. Women and men deserve to know that they will be treated equally in a court of law when dealing with a sex discrimination issue. It took 100 years to achieve ratification by a 38th state, and when the language of the Equal Rights Amendment is added to our Constitution, we will have achieved what most other countries already have in their constitutions: Equality for women and men in the document that sets the legal guidelines our country.