

NAACP
**THE FIERCE
URGENCY OF
NOW**
116TH NAACP NATIONAL CONVENTION

LABOR AWARDS LUNCHEON

JULY 16 | 1PM ET

116TH NAACP NATIONAL CONVENTION | CHARLOTTE, NC

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LABOR AWARDS LUNCHEON PROGRAM

Welcome & Opening

Merwyn Scott, Community Advocacy & Partnership Engagement Director, NEA

Invocation

Rev. Dr. Robert Charles Scott, Senior Pastor, St. Paul Baptist Church

Remarks

- Leon W. Russell, Chairman, NAACP Board of Directors
- Derrick Johnson, President & CEO, NAACP
- Shawn Fain, President, UAW

ACT-SO Performance

Kamarie Barnes, President, NAACP Charles County Youth Council

Lunch

Fireside Discussion- Protecting Workers on the Frontlines

- April Verrett, President, SEIU
- Milton Jones, President, UFCW
- Shavon Arline Bradley, President, NCNW

William "Bill" Lucy Legacy Award Presentation

Presented by: Robin Williams | Accepted by: George Gresham

Dr. Annie B. Martin Leadership Award Presentation

Presented by: Robin Williams | Accepted by: Rev. Regena Thomas

Benjamin L. Hooks Keeper of the Flame Award Presentation

Presented by: Claude Cummings, President, CWA

2025 Recipients:

- Rev. Corine Mack
- Sandra Lee Williams
- Kim Smith
- Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig
- Jimmie Garland

Benediction

Leah Hill McNair, Founder, The Sister Circle International; Lead Pastor, Circle City Church

GEORGE GRESHAM

William “Bill” Lucy Legacy Award



George Gresham is the former President of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, the largest healthcare union in the United States, representing over 450,000 caregivers. A lifelong labor leader who began his career as a hospital worker, Gresham rose through the ranks to lead the union through a period of remarkable growth and influence. Under his leadership, 1199SEIU secured historic contracts that delivered wage increases, protected healthcare benefits, and expanded education and training opportunities for frontline workers—many of whom are women, immigrants, and people of color.

A powerful voice for racial and economic justice, Gresham positioned the union as both a labor and moral force. He championed campaigns to raise the minimum wage, expand Medicaid, protect immigrant rights, and defend democracy through voter mobilization. Through coalition-building and political engagement, he ensured that 1199SEIU remained at the forefront of the fight for dignity, equity, and opportunity. Gresham retired in 2024, leaving a legacy of transformative leadership rooted in service, solidarity, and justice.

Reverend Dr. Regena Thomas is the Co-Director of the Human Rights and Community Relations Department of the American Federation of Teachers. She came to the position as of June 16, 2015 from the Democratic National Committee where she was the director of community engagement and constituency group services. Thomas served as Secretary of State for the state of New Jersey from 2002 through 2006, appointed by Gov. James McGreevey. Prior to her appointment



as Secretary of State, Rev. Thomas was considered a leading political consultant for the Democratic National Committee, Democratic Governors' Association and the Democratic Senatorial Committee specializing in African American turnout. She has worked for District of Columbia Mayors Marion Barry and Sharon Pratt Kelly both in government and their political campaigns.

After graduating from Morehead State University, Rev. Thomas began her political career in Kentucky working for the Legislative Research Commission (LRC) where she met the Hon. Georgia Davis Powers, the first and only African American and the only female serving in the Kentucky State Senate. In 1984 Sen. Powers would be called upon by her friend Rev. Jesse Jackson to spearhead his presidential bid in Kentucky. Sen. Powers facing a legislative session entrusted the grassroots organizing to Rev. Thomas. This assignment led Rev. Thomas to Chicago & Washington, D.C. She worked on the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns for the Rev. Jackson. Having been bitten by the political bug, Rev. Thomas would move to Washington, D.C. to become a staff member for the National Rainbow Coalition.

However, while the Secretary of State; Ms. Thomas was called to a different field of organizing: Organizing souls for Christ. She accepted her call to ministry and was ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She earned her Master of Divinity from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and received her Doctorate of Ministry with a specialty in Urban Ministry from Wesley Theological Seminary.

REGENA THOMAS

Dr. Annie B. Martin Leadership Award





REV. CORINE MACK

BENJAMIN L. HOOKS KEEPER OF THE FLAME AWARD RECIPIENT

Reverend Corine Mack is a nationally respected civil rights leader, labor advocate, and community organizer based in Charlotte, North Carolina. A former Vice President of TWU Local 100 in New York, she represented over 40,000 transit workers before relocating to Charlotte, where she became the founding Vice President of the Charlotte chapter of SEIU for city workers. She co-wrote and led the fight for the first living wage policy for municipal employees in North Carolina, secured a \$3/hour wage increase for city workers, and helped win a statewide Ban the Box initiative. She collaborated with NAACP chapters to support hotel and homecare workers in the Fight for \$15 campaign and submitted an economic equity plan that helped generate 900 jobs and expanded opportunities for women of color small business owners. She also co-authored a green jobs program proposal projected to create 10,000 jobs in its first year.



SANDRA LEE WILLIAMS

BENJAMIN L. HOOKS KEEPER OF THE FLAME AWARD RECIPIENT

Sandra Lee Williams is a trailblazing labor and civil rights leader who has dedicated her career to uniting the NAACP and the labor movement in pursuit of justice, equity, and economic empowerment. She currently serves as President of the Atlanta North Georgia Labor Council, 2nd Vice President of the NAACP Cherokee County (GA) Branch, and Deputy Political Director of the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU). A tireless organizer, Sandra has led voter engagement campaigns, organized major rallies—including the March on Washington—and developed civic education classes to empower communities. She is also the founder of the NAACP Cherokee County STEM Scholarship Program, which provides resources for Black high school seniors pursuing STEM careers. Sandra's influence extends to national policy, where she consistently advocates for anti-discrimination laws, fair wages, workplace safety, and stronger protections for workers and marginalized communities.

KIM SMITH

BENJAMIN L. HOOKS KEEPER OF THE FLAME AWARD RECIPIENT



She has received several degrees; one in Business MGMT and a Masters in both Theology and Christian & Biblical Counseling just to name a few. Kim was selected in 2011 to attend Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts, in which she received a certificate in Labor Studies. She has also received a certificate in Leadership from United Steel Workers Union and a certificate in Labor Studies from Wayne State University. Kim was inducted as an honorary member of Phi Theta Kappa when she made the international dean's list and was Mana Cum Laude and Summa Cum Laude throughout her education.

Kim currently serves communities within the entire district as the coordinator of the Women of Steel. She is the Vice President of the SC AFL-CIO, serves on the Santee Lynches Workforce Development Board, Charleton Alliance for Fair Employment Board, and leads the Statewide Organizing Table and is the Community Faith and Labor Leader. She also serves as a Chaplain with Coastal Crisis Chaplaincy.support to aspiring legal professionals, helping them navigate the complexities of law and public service.

JULIAN VASQUEZ HEILIG

BENJAMIN L. HOOKS KEEPER OF THE FLAME AWARD RECIPIENT



Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig is a nationally respected scholar, activist, and academic leader whose three-decade career bridges educational equity, labor rights, and civil rights. As a professor, union member, and NAACP leader, he has authored over 70 publications, advised national campaigns, and testified before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the United Nations. He has helped shape state and national education policy—advancing community-based accountability, opposing school privatization, and expanding diversity in the educator workforce. His leadership roles at institutions like the University of Kentucky and Western Michigan University resulted in major gains in faculty diversity, student enrollment, and shared governance. He also launched the historic NAACP Education and Civil Rights Initiative, the first such partnership with a flagship university.



JIMMIE GARLAND

BENJAMIN L. HOOKS KEEPER OF THE FLAME AWARD RECIPIENT

Elder Jimmie M. Garland Sr. is the former President of the Clarksville–Montgomery County NAACP Branch, where he served from 2001 to 2024 and now continues his service as an At-Large Executive Committee member and Vice President for Middle Tennessee in the Tennessee State Conference. A passionate advocate for civil rights and labor justice, Elder Garland led landmark investigations into racial discrimination in law enforcement and private industry, including cases involving Black officers and Bridgestone employees. He played a critical role in pausing EV battery plant construction in Kentucky due to lack of minority contractor inclusion and worked with federal agencies to enforce equity requirements. As Political Action Chair, he spearheaded redistricting awareness, expanded voter education and registration in public housing communities, and fought against Tennessee’s right-to-work constitutional amendment by mobilizing grassroots and coalition efforts to protect collective bargaining.



NAACP National Labor Committee

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