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Federal Glover: Now is the time to act to improve conditions for all people

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ON JAN. 18, I was honored to be asked to speak at the Martin Luther King Day observance at Antioch's Beede Auditorium. My apologies for those who were in attendance, but with some minor editing here, the message I was trying to convey is worth sharing, I think. Here's what I said:

This is the 52nd anniversary of Martin Luther King's death. It has been 57 years since he made that famous "I Have a Dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial.

A lot has happened since then.

- African-American astronauts have flown in space;
- An African-American general and an African-American Stanford grad were consecutive Secretaries of State;
- Oprah, a black woman, is often called the most powerful — certainly the most influential — television personality in the country.
- What would King think of Barack Obama — an African-American president?

Would he think that his dream has been reached?

His speech, made in 1963, is as relevant now as it was then.

King's legacy is not the speech, not the dream that he spoke about so eloquently. No. King's legacy is going beyond the dream. Living the Dream. Being the Dream!

We cannot be satisfied with dreaming. We cannot be satisfied with hoping.

People remember Martin Luther King and they remember his great speech. What is

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so often forgotten are the many steps — how many marches — how many boycotts, protests and how many bloodied heads it took to get to the point for that great march on Washington when King shared his dream.

Martin Luther King and his generation were men of action. Yes, they were eloquent, but more than making speeches and sermons, they acted on their beliefs.

My friends, despite Oprah, despite Barack — today — once again, we are being called to act.

When African-Americans live shorter lives than whites, when most African-Americans earn less than almost every other ethnic group, when the death rate among African-American babies is greater than some Third World countries, when African-American kids are dropping out of school at great rates and score less than their

classmates, when African-Americans make up more than our share of the prison population, when the middle class is shrinking, when people are losing their jobs, when families are losing their homes "... IT IS TIME TO ACT!

Now, what does that mean?

Is it enough to yell at the teacher? Is it enough to file lawsuits? Is it enough to be angry? Is it enough to elect a black man as President?

What it means is that we have to get into positions where decisions are made. We need more doctors, teachers, principals, police officers, policy makers.

We need more city council members. We need more county supervisors. We need more people on the committees and commissions where the real decisions are made that affect our education, our health, our jobs "... our very lives.

There was a time when I was a kid, George Wallace was saying "segregation now and segregation forever." He

could say it in public — on national television — and people would cheer. Now he can't do that. It still may go on in some backrooms. Look at the Internet, you can feel the hatred and anger being blogged.

But through the years, we have taught the children about equity, fairness and inclusion. Today, any public figure who would say what Wallace said would be castigated immediately.

That's how far we have come. That also says how much we still have to go.

And we can't do it alone.

When King marched on Washington, he walked arm-in-arm with white allies.

When Obama was elected, he needed the votes of whites, Latinos, Asians, young people and women to beat McCain.

When a bank forecloses a home, they don't see a color. I see a ray of hope when the Rainbow PUSH organization works with CCISCO — a largely Latino organization to pressure the banks to renegotiate home loans.

When a good man or woman runs for office — no matter what their color — we need to support him or her.

When young people look for mentors, we need to answer that call.

When schools have PTA meetings, we need to attend.

When food pantries ask for donations, we need to look into our cupboards.

When people need shelter, we need to look into our hearts.

When volunteers are needed to clean up the community, we need to raise our hands.

Martin Luther King's day shouldn't be seen as simply a day off. It should be seen as a "day on," a day of action, a day of volunteering, a day to get involved in some community service. I was there when Barack Obama made his oath of office. When he became President, I got chills — and it was not because of the weather. I got chills up my back.

I'm not ashamed to say that I cried. I remember those who came before me. I remember the sacrifices they made and the indignities and injustices they suffered.

That moment I'll never forget.

King's dream was that people of all races, colors and creeds would be able to sit at the same table, drink from the same water fountains, go through the same college doors, sit in the halls of Congress and to lead in the White House.

I conclude with the words of the man we honor today:

"There is nothing new about poverty," said Rev. King. "What is new, however, is that we have the resources to get rid of it. "... There is no deficit in human resources; the deficit is in human will. The well-off and the secure have too often become indifferent and oblivious to the poverty and deprivation in their midst. The poor in our countries have been shut out of our minds, and driven from the mainstream of our societies, because we have allowed them to become invisible."

President Obama is not the culmination of King's dream. He is just one manifestation of that dream.

The other manifestation of King's dream is YOU, and YOU, and YOU and YOU.

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