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Congressmen John Lewis, Bennie Thompson Will Attend Grand Celebration of Mississippi Civil Rights Museum

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U.S. Congressmen John Lewis and Bennie Thompson will be in Jackson, Miss., on Feb. 23-24 for the first annual Grand Celebration and Gala at the new Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. The diverse Friends of Mississippi Civil Rights, Inc., comprised of community leaders, elected and appointed officials, and organizers from across Mississippi and Washington, D.C., formed in December to honor past and current civil-rights heroes such as the two congressmen and other legends. The Friends are hosting a two-day celebration worthy of people who believe the honest history inside the newly opened museum provides a roadmap to racial healing and transformation in Mississippi and the nation. This two-day event will showcase to the world this most significant, state-of-art and interactive Civil Rights Museum, which sits in the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi's capital city.

Both Lewis and Thompson, who did not attend the museum's initial grand opening in early December, have confirmed that they will attend the Grand Celebration and Gala, speak and accept their awards. Congressman Lewis will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award, and Congressman Thompson will receive the Chairman's Award.

"The Friends of Mississippi Civil Rights are thrilled that these heroes of racial equity, human rights, and social justice in America will be among our inaugural honorees and attendees in February," Carlos Moore, a Mississippi attorney, Clarksdale Municipal Judge and the co-chair of the steering committee, said. "Their agreement to attend makes it clear that this is a legitimate celebration befitting of the heroes and heroines who will be honored and who fought then and still fight now for civil rights and equality in Mississippi and across the country."

The gala on February 23 will be a night to celebrate and laud great American heroes. The awards dinner will honor five men and women who have long dedicated their efforts to freedom and equality of black Mississippians, and acknowledge the efforts of two ex-governors, a Democrat and a Republican, for helping make the Civil Rights Museum a reality: Governors William Winter

and Haley Barbour. The committee will reveal a full list of honorees later in January.

“The accomplishments and heroism of these honorees are on full display inside the museum,” steering committee co-chair and state Rep. Sonya Williams-Barnes, said. “We invite current and native Mississippians, as well as people from around the nation and world, to join us in Jackson on February 23 and 24 as we give these greats the recognition they deserve.”

The Friends of Mississippi Civil Rights are organizing a series of symposiums, open dialogues, and limited museum tours for Saturday, February 24, all free to the public. Congressman Lewis will give the opening keynote address at 10 a.m. Saturday to kick off that day’s festivities. Tickets for the Friday night gala are \$50 each, and available for purchase on at FriendsOfMississippiCivilRights.org starting on Thursday, January 18. Interested sponsors should email fundraising chairman Brandon Jones at bjones@barialaw.com to donate and purchase ads or full tables. Donors can send checks to Friends of Mississippi Civil Rights, Inc., P.O. Box 1487, Grenada, MS 38902.

Updates on the events will be available at FriendsOfMississippiCivilRights.org. Media can call Judge Carlos Moore at 662-614-1111 or Burns Strider in Washington at 202-215-2490. Get more information on the Civil Rights Museum at <https://mcrm.mdah.ms.gov/>.

Read a Mississippi column announcing the Celebration and Gala at <http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2018/jan/16/rep-john-lewis-bennie-thompson-attend-grand-celeb/>

About the named honorees:

- Civil Rights icon and **U.S. Congressman John Lewis** of Georgia is an American hero with countless movies and books about his life from impoverished farm boy to nonviolent agent of change to the halls of the United States Congress. He was a leader of the Student Nonviolent Organizing Committee in the 1960s, a Freedom Rider and helped organize sit-ins. He is our special guest and honoree who will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award. This will be his first visit to the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum.
- Civil Rights great and **U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson** is our own Mississippian in Congress. As a student nonviolent protestor at Tougaloo College, he stood with Dr. King, Bobby Kennedy and others for justice. During his distinguished career in local, state and national politics, Thompson has defended and been a voice for those who are often not heard. He is also our special guest and honoree who will receive the Chairman’s Award.

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