

YOUR GUIDE TO THE

SUBSTANCE OVER SYMBOLISM RALLY

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2026 • WASHINGTON, DC

12:00–2:00 PM — DNC Headquarters | 2:30–4:30 PM — The Third Way

"We need more than symbolism. We need substantive policy proposals that serve the public."

RALLY GUIDE & PARTICIPANT ORIENTATION PACKET

#SOSforAmerica

sosforamerica.org

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The “Substance Over Symbolism Rally” seeks to send the message to those in Washington that there is broad-based support for the populist policy proposals related to jobs, health care, public education, and affordable housing gaining traction across the country. The rally seeks to reclaim the unfinished policy objectives of the Civil Rights Movement, which centered upon federal legislation designed to eliminate unemployment and provide universal health care in America. Guided by the sense that for too long policymakers have prioritized the needs of the special interests over the public interest, conveners of this rally gather to declare that symbolic political gestures that do not provide redress for the substantive economic needs of our community will no longer be acceptable. From a policy perspective, we demand “substance over symbolism.”

We stand in opposition to those in the political establishment who seek to frame support for Medicare for All, or a Federal Job Guarantee, or universal affordable housing as somehow “un-American.” Those who advance such a narrative are in fact the ones who are out of touch with the American public, especially with the poor, the working class, and the Black community. We refuse to be distracted by the political labels currently being debated in the public square.

What matters, as Dr. King said, is that we have “a better distribution of wealth for all of God’s children.”

On Thursday, September 17, 2026, clergy and congregations from across the region will gather outside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, and then at the offices of the lobbying group The Third Way, to show our support for public policies that are widely popular among the American people: a Federal Job Guarantee, Universal Health Care/Medicare for All, Universal Pre-K, more federal funding for K-12, tuition-free public college, universal affordable housing, and the For The People Act. As a nation, we have the resources to prioritize the policies that prioritize the American people. We believe these policies will provide greater economic sustainability for the public, and put the country on a path towards reducing many of the underlying factors that contribute to social unrest and racial tension in America.

At this critical time in our nation, we must play a role in shaping how those in Washington prepare for our political future. For too long, we have accepted symbolism and contented ourselves with images of social and political progress. But we cannot feed our families on rhetoric, images, and aspirational politics. The role of government is to deliver for the people, and that time is now!

For too long, we have not attached our voices and our votes to specific policy demands. That time is over. Short-term, we seek productive conversations with DNC leadership about the party platform, and how our voices get representation within the platform committee. Long-term, we want to see Medicare for All, a job guarantee, and the other policies mentioned above adopted as official planks of that platform.

SUBSTANCE OVER SYMBOLISM.

RALLY DAY ITINERARY – THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

🏠 MT. ENNON BAPTIST CHURCH

9832 Piscataway Rd, Clinton, MD

10:30 AM	Orientation in the Chapel
10:45 AM	Board buses
11:00–11:15 AM	Depart for DNC National Headquarters

1 STOP 1 — DNC NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

430 South Capitol St SE, Washington, DC 20003

12:00 PM	Arrive at DNC National Headquarters
12:05 PM	Pray, sing, chant, demonstrate
2:00 PM	Depart for The Third Way

2 STOP 2 — THE THIRD WAY

1025 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036

2:30 PM	Arrive at The Third Way
2:35 PM	Pray, sing, chant, demonstrate
4:30 PM	Depart for Mt. Ennon

GETTING THERE

- **Stop 1 — DNC Headquarters:** 430 South Capitol St SE, Washington, DC 20003. Closest Metro: Capitol South (Blue/Orange/Silver), about a 5-minute walk. Street parking is extremely limited; Metro or church bus strongly encouraged.
- **Stop 2 — The Third Way:** 1025 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036. Closest Metro: Farragut North (Red Line). From Stop 1: Capitol South → Metro Center → transfer to Red Line → Farragut North (≈20 minutes).
- **Mt. Ennon buses:** Orientation in the Chapel at 10:30 AM; buses board at 10:45 AM and depart 9832 Piscataway Rd, Clinton, MD by 11:15 AM.
- **What to bring:** water, comfortable shoes, sun protection, your church's banner or signage aligned with the official messaging, and a fully charged phone for the social media toolkit.

RALLY INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of the Substance Over Symbolism Rally is to demand policies that put people over politics and communities over corporations. This is our opportunity to put our faith in action! There is strength in numbers!

- Complete and return the participant release form.
- Remain with your captain and bus group at all times.
- If you are asked about a permit, refer them to your captain.
- Follow the directions of the designated protest leaders.
- Remain on the sidewalk in the designated demonstration area.
- If you need a break, proceed to the bus or the designated rest area identified by your captain.
- Always be cordial and peaceful.
- Do not directly engage any onlookers, agitators, or counter-protestors.

Thank you for your participation in this event!

HIGH-LEVEL MESSAGING GUIDE

THE CORE MESSAGE

*Proclamations don't pay rent. Resolutions don't treat illness. Photo ops don't create jobs. The American people — across race, region, and party — support these policies. We are here to demand that those who represent us **actually deliver** them. Substance over symbolism.*

THE THRU-LINE (FOR EVERY SPEAKER AND EVERY POST)

- This is the unfinished work of Dr. King — economic justice was always the second half of the dream.
- These are not fringe ideas; they are widely popular among the American people.
- We are the church showing up as the conscience of the nation, not as a partisan arm of any party.
- We are shaping how Washington prepares for a post-Trump world — the future must be built on policy, not personality.
- We come with specific demands and specific asks: a platform conversation now, platform planks and party reform next.

TALKING POINTS BY DEMAND

1

FEDERAL JOB GUARANTEE

- Everyone who wants to work should be able to work — a federal job guarantee makes the government the employer of last resort, at a living wage with benefits.
- Dr. King and the 1963 March on Washington called for jobs AND freedom; the Poor People's Campaign demanded guaranteed employment. This demand is over half a century overdue.
- There is no shortage of work that needs doing — caring for our elders and children, rebuilding infrastructure, restoring our environment. There is only a shortage of political will.
- A job guarantee sets a true floor under the labor market: it ends involuntary unemployment and forces every employer to compete with dignity.

2

UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE / MEDICARE FOR ALL

- The United States is the only wealthy nation on earth that does not guarantee health care to all of its people.
- No one should go bankrupt because they got sick, and no one should die because they could not afford to see a doctor.
- Tens of millions remain uninsured or underinsured while families ration insulin and skip treatment. That is a moral failure, not a market outcome.
- Health care tied to employment is health care that disappears exactly when you need it most — when you lose your job.
- Our long-term demand: Medicare for All as an official plank of the Democratic Party platform.

3

UNIVERSAL PRE-K

- The first five years shape the next eighty. Every child deserves a strong start regardless of their parents' paycheck.
- Child care now costs as much as college tuition in much of the country — pricing working families out of both work and parenting.
- Universal pre-K is a triple investment: in children, in working parents (especially mothers), and in the educators who deserve professional wages.
- This is one of the most popular policies in America — the question is not whether people want it, but why Washington won't deliver it.

4

MORE FEDERAL FUNDING FOR K-12

- Every young person deserves equitable access to quality public education.
- Disproportionate spending based upon local, state, and property taxes creates a two-tier system of public education.
- No district should go underfunded, and the federal government can bridge the gap.

5

TUITION-FREE PUBLIC COLLEGE

- We made high school free when the economy demanded it. The economy now demands more — and so must we.
- Student debt has become a lifetime sentence that delays homeownership, family formation, and wealth-building, and it falls heaviest on Black borrowers and first-generation students.
- Public colleges, HBCUs, and community colleges are engines of mobility; tuition walls turn them into gated communities.
- An educated public is a public good — we should fund it like one.

6

UNIVERSAL, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Housing is a human need before it is a commodity. No one working full-time should be unable to afford a decent home.
- In communities across this country, rent is rising faster than wages while families are pushed out of the neighborhoods they built.
- Homelessness in the richest nation in history is a policy choice — and different policy choices can end it.
- We demand serious federal investment in affordable housing supply, protection for renters, and pathways to homeownership that close, rather than widen, the racial wealth gap.

7

THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

- None of these demands survive a broken democracy. Voting rights are the gateway to every other right.
- The For The People Act expands voter access, ends partisan gerrymandering, and confronts the power of big money in politics.
- Our grandmothers and grandfathers bled for the ballot; we will not watch it be legislated state by state.
- Paired with our call for ranked choice voting and platform committee representation, this is how we make the party — and the country — answerable to the people.

ANSWERING THE CRITICS (QUICK RESPONSES)

“Is this socialism?”

This is about reclaiming the unfinished work of the civil rights movement, which was about economic justice and the creation of an economic Bill of Rights related to jobs, health care, education, and housing.

“Isn’t this partisan?”

No. We are petitioning the institutions that claim to represent our communities. The prophetic tradition speaks truth to whoever holds power.

“These policies are too expensive.”

We always find money for what we value. The question is never cost; it is about centering our priorities.

“Why rally at the DNC?”

Because accountability is not disloyalty. Symbolic allyship without substantive policy is a broken covenant with the very voters the party depends on.

“We are not asking for a seat at someone else’s table. We are setting the table.”

— THE SUBSTANCE OVER SYMBOLISM RALLY

WHY DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

Too often, powerful moments of moral witness happen — and then vanish, seen only by those standing on the sidewalk. Decision-makers move on, the press cycle turns over, and the demands that brought us together never reach the very people with the power to act on them. Digital engagement is how we make sure that doesn't happen on September 17. Every post tagged #SOSforAmerica, every share of SOSforAmerica.org, and every tag directed at the DNC, Third Way, and members of Congress transforms a two-hour rally into a sustained national demand. When thousands amplify our seven policy priorities online, we're no longer a gathering outside a building — we're an unavoidable presence inside the conversation. Your voice on the ground matters; your voice online multiplies it.

HASHTAGS & HANDLES

#SOSforAmerica
sosforamerica.org

- Primary hashtag (every post): #SOSforAmerica
- Tag on every post: politicians, The Third Way, the media, and your own church's accounts. Use the official graphics wherever possible, and point people to SOSforAmerica.org.

DURING THE RALLY (SEPTEMBER 17 — RALLY DAY)

- **Go live:** stream the 12:20 PM framing address and the Six Demands segment; caption with #SOSforAmerica.
- **Show your congregation:** “[Church name] is HERE at DNC headquarters demanding substance over symbolism.”
- **Amplify the speakers:** quote-post one line from each speaker — use the thru-line language from this guide.
- **At Stop 2 — Third Way:** “We’ve moved from the party’s front door to the lobbyists’ front door. The demands don’t change. #SOSforAmerica”

AFTER THE RALLY (SEPTEMBER 18 AND BEYOND)

- **Day one, not one day:** “Yesterday we rallied at their front doors. This was day one, not a one-day event. #SOSforAmerica”
- **Photo + one demand:** “We won’t stop until Medicare for All is in the platform.”
- **Invite the ongoing work:** “Join the faith leaders convening monthly to finish the unfinished work. [link]”
- **Give thanks:** thank-you posts recognizing every partner congregation by name.

SONGS

GLORY, GLORY, HALLELUJAH! (SINCE I LAID MY BURDENS DOWN)

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Since I laid my burdens down.
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Since I laid my burdens down!

Friends don't treat me like they used to
Since I laid my burdens down.
Friends don't treat me like they used to
Since I laid my burdens down!

I'm goin' home to live with Jesus
Since I laid my burdens down.
I'm goin' home to live with Jesus
Since I laid my burdens down!

I feel better, so much better
Since I laid my burdens down.
I feel better, so much better
Since I laid my burdens down!

AIN'T GONNA LET NOBODY TURN ME 'ROUND

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round,
turn me 'round, turn me 'round,
Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round
I'm gonna keep on a-walkin', keep on a-talkin',
Marching up to freedom land.

WOKE UP THIS MORNING WITH MY MIND STAYED ON FREEDOM

Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on
Jesus/freedom (3x)
Hallelu (hallelu), Hallelu (hallelu), Hallelujah
Walking and talking with my mind stayed on
Jesus/freedom (3x)
Hallelu (hallelu), Hallelu (hallelu), Hallelujah
Singing and praying with my mind stayed on
Jesus/freedom (3x)
Hallelu (hallelu), Hallelu (hallelu), Hallelujah
Ain't no harm to keep your mind stayed on
Jesus/freedom (3x)
Hallelu (hallelu), Hallelu (hallelu), Hallelujah

HOLD TO GOD'S UNCHANGING HAND

Time is filled with swift transition.
Naught of earth unmoved can stand.
Build your hopes on things eternal.
Hold to God's unchanging hand.
Trust in Him who will not leave you.
Whatsoever years may bring.
If by earthly friends forsaken,
Still more closely to Him cling. [Refrain]
Covet not this world's vain riches
That so rapidly decay.
Seek to gain the heav'nly treasures.
They will never pass away. [Refrain]
When your journey is completed,
If to God you have been true,
Fair and bright the home in Glory
Your enraptured soul will view. [Refrain]

Refrain:

Hold to His hand, God's unchanging hand.
Hold to His hand, God's unchanging hand.
Build your hopes on things eternal.
Hold to God's unchanging hand.

LIFT EV'RY VOICE AND SING

Lift ev'ry voice and sing,
till earth and heaven ring,
ring with the harmonies of liberty.
Let our rejoicing rise
high as the list'ning skies,
let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has
taught us.
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has
brought us.
Facing the rising sun
of our new day begun,
let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
bitter the chast'ning rod,
felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
yet with a steady beat,
have not our weary feet
come to the place for which our people sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has
been watered.
We have come, treading our path thro' the blood
of the slaughtered,
out from the gloomy past,
till now we stand at last
where the bright gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
thou who hast brought us thus far on the way,
thou who hast by thy might
led us into the light,
keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God,
where we met thee;
lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world,
we forget thee;
shadowed beneath thy hand,
may we forever stand,
true to our God, true to our native land.

ADDITIONAL SONGS (LED BY SONG LEADERS)

“How Great Is Our God” • “Victory Is Mine” •
“This Is the Day”

These worship songs are under copyright, so the full lyrics are not reprinted here. Song leaders will lead them from the printed songbook or from memory — most congregants will know them by heart.

CHANTS

Chant 1

CALL: What do we want? **RESPONSE:** JOBS!

CALL: When do we want it? **RESPONSE:**
NOW!

CALL: What do we want? **RESPONSE:**
HEALTH CARE!

CALL: When do we want it? **RESPONSE:**
NOW!

CALL: What do we want? **RESPONSE:**
JUSTICE!

CALL: When do we want it? **RESPONSE:**
NOW!

CALL: What do we want? **RESPONSE:**
FREEDOM!

CALL: When do we want it? **RESPONSE:**
NOW!

Chant 2

People Need Substance – Not a Show!
DNC, It's Time To Go
Third Way? NO WAY
The Middle of the Road
Is How You GET Run OVER
Make Way for the People

Chant 3

ALL: The People united... Will never be
defeated!

Chant 4

CALL: This is the age... for a living wage!

RESPONSE: This is the age... for a living wage!

Chant 5

Rent is high! Wages low!
We need change – Not one more show
No More Talk! No More Delay
Working families
Need Help Today
Hear our Voices. Hear Our Plea!
Turn Your Promises INTO Policy

Chant 6

CALL: Show me what DEMOCRACY looks
like!

RESPONSE: This is what DEMOCRACY looks
like!

CALL: Show me what AMERICA looks like!

RESPONSE: This is what AMERICA looks like!

CALL: Show me what THE DREAM looks
like!

RESPONSE: This is what THE DREAM looks
like!

LETTER OF SUPPORT

THE SUBSTANCE OVER SYMBOLISM RALLY: A POLICY AGENDA FOR A BETTER AMERICA

As a person of faith and concerned U.S. citizen, I am submitting this letter to express support for a unified policy agenda that our fellowship of churches has advanced through the Substance Over Symbolism Rally. This agenda seeks to preserve our democracy and create a stronger economy for the benefit of the American people.

This agenda is built around two core pillars: expanding access to the BALLOT and expanding access to the BUDGET. This is based on the understanding that these two pillars are key to facilitating the expression of the will of the public. By protecting voting rights AND responsibly harnessing the full extent of the federal government's spending capacity to attend to public needs, we will strengthen our democracy and create opportunities for all Americans, especially the poor, minorities, and the most vulnerable among us. These two fundamental pillars are expressed as follows:

THE BALLOT

We must restore the integrity of our democracy by protecting the interests of voters, so our voices are not drowned out by voter suppression tactics and the influence of special interest groups. We must do everything possible to preserve and protect those victories.

THE BUDGET

The conventional approach to economics and fiscal policy is outdated and flawed. It assumes that the federal government is limited by revenue when it comes to spending. This results in the idea that we "can't afford" many of the policies that would benefit the American people. The federal government does not operate its budget like a household, and as such, responsible deficit spending for the public good is how the federal government invests in public priorities. Inflation, not revenue, is the only limit to responsible federal spending.

THE AGENDA

The policy demands of the Substance Over Symbolism Rally include a Federal Job Guarantee — which scholars and advocates regard as the unfinished work of the Civil Rights Movement — Universal Health Care/Medicare for All, Universal Pre-K, more federal funding for K-12 public education, tuition-free public college, universal affordable housing, and voting rights protections through the For The People Act.

For more information on the Substance Over Symbolism Rally, go to: sosforamerica.org

I am in support of this agenda.

Sincerely,

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Signature: _____