



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**RIDLEY-THOMAS TO HOST 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS  
SUMMIT FEATURING REV. AL SHARPTON and LOCAL LEADERS FROM  
ACROSS THE NATION**

**Los Angeles**—Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and the Empowerment Congress will host the 20th annual Empowerment Congress Summit at 9 a.m. Saturday, January 14<sup>th</sup> at the University of Southern California's Bovard Auditorium.

Rev. Al Sharpton, civil rights activist and host of MSNBC's PoliticsNation, will deliver the keynote address. Actor and author Hill Harper, whose bestselling books have made him a nationally recognized voice for self help and community empowerment, also will speak.

As a special highlight of the program, two of Los Angeles' most prominent labor leaders, Maria Elena Durazo, Secretary Treasurer of the LA Federation of Labor, and Laphonza Butler, President of SEIU Long Term Care Workers Union, will make a special presentation to Rose Mary Gudiel, the San Gabriel Valley woman who, with the assistance of community and labor organizers, successfully averted foreclosure on her home by "occupying" her own house.

After the plenary session, participants will attend workshops on topics such as public safety, economic development and the arts. The afternoon portion of the event will feature a resource fair, with more than 40 booths with information about County and community services, and a luncheon. The entire event is free, but advance registration is encouraged. More than 1,000 people have registered to attend.

The Empowerment Congress was born in the aftermath of injustice and violence: the beating of Rodney King, the acquittal of the Los Angeles police officers responsible and the wave of destruction that swept throughout Los Angeles. Under Ridley-Thomas' direction, a budding neighborhood improvement effort -- begun before the civil unrest -- was formalized into the Empowerment Congress, with the motto ***Educate, Engage, Empower.***

The dynamic coalition of neighborhood groups, residents, nonprofit organizations, businesses, religious institutions, and community leaders served as a model and precursor to the City of Los Angeles' Neighborhood Councils, and now serves over 2.5 million residents in the Los Angeles County Second Supervisorial District, from Koreatown south to Carson, Playa del Rey to Compton.

The Empowerment Congress' tried and true methods of civic engagement have garnered national attention. This year, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the non-profit Community Partners organization, have launched the Community Engagement Leadership Institute, bringing together teams of elected leaders, and civic and business leaders, from around the country for a three-day institute where they will study our home-grown civic engagement model. The teams hail from the following locations: Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Washington and Wisconsin.

The program is designed to help participants develop strategies to improve their respective community and public policy outcomes by using the practices,

techniques, and tools that have been most effectively applied by the Empowerment Congress since 1992.

For more information, please contact: <http://www.empowermentcongress.org/>