



Rev. Dr. William Barber delivers the keynote address to the crowd after the march.



Thousands of supporters from different non-profit and religious organizations at the Corpening Plaza.

March

from page A1

the voting law passed in North Carolina in 2013 is the worst voter suppression law in the country.

"Forward Together, Not One Step Back" was the theme of the march and rally, while various groups, such as Democracy N.C. and Veterans for Peace, were represented in the crowd. Religious organizations also were present in this rally. Many signs were held up with sayings like "Voting Rights Now," "50 Years After Selma," "Voting Rights Still Matter," "Voter Protection, Not Suppression," and "Jim Crow Must Go."

Before they marched, different groups came to the stage to pump up the crowd that was already in anticipation. Prayers were made from the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins of Covenant Presbyterian Church, Rabbi Leah Citrin of Temple Beth Or and Imam Khalid Griggs of the Community Mosque of Winston-Salem.

The Rev. Lennox Yearwood, Hip Hop Caucus president, delivered a short message to the audience, especially to the younger generation, about exercising their right to vote.

At 5:15 p.m., the crowd officially began to march. Protesters traveled from Second Street, to Cherry Street, on Fourth Street, to Main Street and back to Second Street. Along the way, the marchers stopped in the front of the federal courthouse, where the Rev. Dr. William Barber II and other plaintiffs in the case joined the march that traveled back to Corpening Plaza.

But before they left the federal building, Barber and the plaintiffs held a press conference outside the federal courthouse. Barber said more importantly than anything, he wants to see equal voter opportunities for all.

"We never heard about voter fraud until President Obama was elected," Barber said. "We never said change the rules; we said abide by the rules. Even the claim of fraud is racist. It all goes back to one question: Why don't they want us to

vote?"

During the march, protesters voiced their opinions in a number of different ways, some held signs while others sang songs and chants that focused on voting rights, racial violence and the fight for economic justice.

Many of the protesters had to travel to attend the march. A number of charter buses were parked behind the Corpening Plaza, many of which were filled with protesters of all ages and different backgrounds.

One of those who traveled by bus was Army veteran Bob Feldman. Feldman said the two-hour trip from Asheville was well worth it to make sure his voice was heard on this historic day.

"We drove about two hours to get here, but I had to be here. I didn't want to miss this," Feldman said. "If we aren't heard, if we don't speak out now, nothing will ever change."

Feldman is a member of Veterans for Peace Chapter 99, which is in Asheville. During the march and the rally, Feldman could be seen carrying a large American flag. He said he brought the flag to show that we are all affected by voter suppression.

"We are all Americans and we are all affected by this law," he said.

Earlier in the week, it was estimated that about 2,000 people would attend the march. Judging by the crowd and photos, it is safe to say those estimates were wrong. As the march made its way through downtown Winston-Salem, protesters seemed to be multiplying.

Fay McCauley, a member of the N.C. NAACP, stayed at the plaza, but gave her reasons of why she attended the rally.

"I have always been taught from a young child that my vote is supposed to count, and that it's a right that my fore-par-

ents fought for and died for, and I can't afford to give it up," McCauley said.

McCauley, who worked at the voter polls and assisted those who turned 18 to register to vote, strongly opposes the voter ID law. She has also been deciding whether to continue to work at the polls.

"I have had to turn people away, against my will, because of the laws that have changed. How are you going to deny young people that are eligible to vote?"

Betty Dunn of Kansas, whose son Donald Dunn helped organize the march and rally, came down for support. She was among those who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and was now witnessing another march.

"He [Dr. King] said there will always be a time that we're going to have to march," said Dunn. "History repeats itself."

By 6 p.m., the marchers returned, and more guest speakers gathered by the stage to speak to the rallying and supportive crowd.

Penda Hair, Advancement Project co-director, and Plaintiff Armenta Eaton gave a brief synopsis of the open statements made at the federal court hearing earlier that day.

"We had a great first day," said Hair in reference to the court hearing. "This is a pivotal moment in North Carolina and United States history."

Eaton brought her 94-year-old mother Rosanell Eaton, one of the lead Plaintiffs, who stood up before the audience as they cheered for her.

Moises Serrano of the N.C. American Friends Service Committee expressed that not only African-Americans are feeling voter suppression, but the Hispanic/Latino community is, too.

"Together we must work to dismantle the racist ideals that we inherited from our colonizers," Serrano said.

J. David Cox, a North Carolina native and president of the American Federation of Government Employees, addressed the audience about working hard to continue to provide the people their Social Security funding, jobs and government assistance for those in need.

Rev. Dr. John Mendez, pastor of Emanuel Baptist Church in Winston-Salem introduced Barber to deliver the keynote address.

Barber gave his concerns about the H.B. 589, the 2013 voter law, and talked about how African-American leaders and ancestors in the past have fought so hard for voting rights and freedom.

"Everything that our fore-parents have fought for is under attack," Barber said.

He said the 2013 law, which was passed without hesitation, was sinful.

"It's time to call it what it is. It's not merely political conservatism, it's sin. It's not merely right versus left, it's sin. And our fore-parents knew what sin was. That's why they went to church and marched, and got beaten on Bloody Sunday, to fight the sin."

After Barber spoke, the Rev. Dr. T. Anthony Spearman of the N.C. NAACP read a letter that came from David Goodman, the brother of Andrew Goodman, one of the volunteers involved in the Freedom Summer project that was murdered on June 21, 1964. Volunteers James Chaney and Michael Schwerner also were murdered.

"Thank you all for your patriotic action to let all of America know, that Moral Monday is here to stay as long as necessary," read the letter. "At 17 years old, I became witness to the hatred. It changed the course of my entire life, but the story of Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner is not my story. It's the story of we the people. We the people can never be defeated."

Goodman was 13 years old when his brother was murdered.

At the end of the rally, everyone joined hands as they sang along to the Oscar-winning song "Glory," performed by Common and John Legend based on the soundtrack to the movie "Selma."

Case

from page A1

affected by the changes in voting laws.

Before the trial, the N.C. NAACP held an event in front of the federal building to sum up its case. Among the speakers showing their support was Bishop Todd Fulton, leader of the Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity, who said the case reminded him of the biblical story of David versus Goliath.

"We are going up against a giant," he said.

Jamie Cole, public policy and legal coordinator of the N.C. NAACP, outlined her organization's arguments against the law as local activists and politicians flanked her.

"The law is a calculated effort to manipulate voting rights by targeting the measures that African-American and Latino voters use at significantly higher rates than white voters," she said. "The measure has a disparate impact on voters of color and abridges the right to vote for people across the state. This is exactly what the Voting Rights Act was intended to prevent."

The case challenges several aspects of the

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omnibus voting law, including the reduction of early voting from 17 to 10 days, banning out-of-precinct voting, ending same-day registration and stopping 16- to 17-year-olds from pre-registering so they would automatically be registered to vote when they turn 18.

The case also challenges the voter ID requirement that will go into effect in 2016, but those arguments will be heard at a later time because the state made changes to the law last month. Under the changes, voters who don't have a valid form of government-issued photo ID and have a "reasonable impediment" to acquiring one, can use their voter registration card or the last four digits of their social security number and date of birth date instead. The reasonable impediments are lack of transportation, disability or illness, lack of

birth certificate or the documents to obtain an ID, work schedule, family responsibilities, lost or stolen photo ID, they haven't an ID yet that they applied for, and "other reasonable impediment," which the voter will need to write a description of.

The Election Reform Act, or House Bill 589, was signed into law in August 2013. It was one of many voting laws passed in various states shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the preclearance requirement of the Voting Rights Act, which forced certain states and counties with a history of voter discrimination to get U.S. Justice Department approval when changing election laws. The majority on the High Court said the criteria for which states got scrutiny was dated and charged Congress with coming up with a new formula, which wasn't done.

While no longer subject to preclearance, voting law changes could be challenged as discriminatory in court under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. That's exactly what happened with North Carolina's Election Reform law. The day it was signed, the N.C. NAACP and the League of Women Voters both filed suit in the state's Middle District against the law. A month later, the U.S. Justice Department also filed suit. The three lawsuits, all making similar arguments, were consolidated into one for the purpose of trial, with N.C. NAACP v. McCrory as the lead case.

The NAACP case's main plaintiff is Rosanell Eaton, a 92 year-old black woman who has lived in Louisburg, N.C., her whole life. She was one of the first African-Americans registered to vote in Franklin County in the

1940s. A longtime NAACP member, the lawsuit says that her ability to vote and to help others to vote, which she still does, would be hindered by longer lines and shorter early voting periods. Also the name on her birth certificate and voter registration card doesn't match her driver's license, a problem it says would be a burden on her to fix and would've prevented her from voting before the law was changed last month.

The case has been given to U.S. District Judge Thomas Schroeder. Last July, he ruled against a

request to block the law from going into effect for the November 2014 election. A Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judge was more sympathetic, reversing the decision in October, but the U.S. Supreme Court overturned it a week later, allowing the law to go into effect for last November's election.

The trial is expected to last several weeks and may be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

When reached for comment, Gov. Pat McCrory's press office had no statement or comment on the trial. The N.C. Attorney General's office responded that, though lawyers with the office have an obligation to defend state laws challenged in court, Attorney General Roy Cooper is personally opposed to the law and urged McCrory to veto it in 2013.

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