

N.C. NAACP begins campaign: 'It's Our Time, It's Our Vote'

BY CASH MICHAELS
FOR THE NCBPA

It was announced on Dec. 1, the 60th anniversary of the day civil rights icon Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of a Montgomery, Ala. bus. And it is with that spirit, says N.C. NAACP President Rev. Dr. William Barber, that the "It's Our Time, It's Our Vote" campaign will move forward in 2016, registering record numbers of North Carolinians to vote and mobilizing them to the polls.

The campaign, led by the N.C. NAACP and the Forward Together Movement, has been underway now for just over a month. A few weeks ago, black newspapers represented by the N.C. Black Publishers Association and the National Newspaper Publishers Association joined forces with the NAACP in North Carolina in the major 2016 voter mobilization effort, and to promote the upcoming 10th annual Moral March on Raleigh/HK on J People's Assembly on Saturday, Feb. 13 in Raleigh.

More than 80,000 people from across the state and nation participated last year.

Rev. Barber says there are over 180 coalition partners representing groups from civil and economic to environmental and educational rights advocacy involved in the nonpartisan campaign. The NC Council of Churches has also joined forces in the GOTV (Get Out The Vote) effort. Leaders in North Carolina's Hispanic community are also members of the coalition.

Per the N.C. NAACP, over 120 adult, youth and college branches statewide are involved. The overall training for the campaign is being conducted by the state civil rights organization and Democracy North Carolina, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy advocacy group.

"Our goal is long-term, issue-based voter registration, voter education, voter mobilization, and voter protection," said Rev. Barber.

The "It's Our Time" campaign is just one prong of the N.C. NAACP's voting rights battle. Ever since the NC Legislature passed the 2013 Voter ID law that effectively rolled back previous voting rights expansions, the N.C. NAACP and its partners have gone to state and federal courts to challenge its constitutionality.

"We have called for an injunction against the implementation of the voter ID [law], because even though we have won

a lot of concessions from the state and forced them to change the original [law] that they had through our protests and legal action, it is still quite confusing ... misinformation has gone out into the community ...," Rev. Barber says.

"We're still headed to court because of the constitutionality of the law itself, because we already know from the Texas case that voter ID on its face is unconstitutional. The courts have pretty much said that."

Rev. Barber also indicted that the N.C. NAACP will be appealing the 2011 redistricting case after the N.C. Supreme Court in December upheld the skewed voting districts the Republicans in the N.C. General Assembly created that "stacked and packed" black voters into limited districts so that they could dominate close races with white Democrats.

The N.C. NAACP is also waiting on the ruling from the federal judge in Winston-Salem involving s a m e - d a y registration/early voting heard last July. Same day registration and early voting are still in effect until that ruling because the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals issued an injunction maintaining it.

Meanwhile, Jan. 25 is when the N.C. NAACP will be back in court to argue the unconstitutionality of voter photo identification. Last June state lawmakers softened the requirement of using only a government-issued photo ID while voting, realizing that they could lose in court.

Per grassroots organization, Rev. Barber says there will be a mass "Souls to the Polls" campaign, though not necessarily on Sundays since not all counties will have Sunday early voting this year. There will be a mass media campaign, intensive training for NAACP branch members, faith leaders and other members of the coalition.

"Our goal, in coalition, is to raise at a minimum of ten percent of the 281,000 unregistered black population of North Carolina," Rev. Barber said, adding that that's in addition to a broader target of voter registration beyond the African-American community. The effort has also set a goal with the denominational leadership - inclusive of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faiths - of having 3,000 faith communities to work with the "Souls to the Polls" program, which would include registering particular denominations, doing religious studies and preaching around the theme of civic engagement that is

nonpartisan and issue-based.

In anticipation of a lot of Election Day confusion at the polls, there will also be GOTV and voter protection training in all parts of the state for 1500 grassroots leaders in 90 counties, Rev. Barber says, beginning this month. There will be monitors at the polls to ensure legal procedures are adhered to.

There will be more Moral Monday demonstrations on the road, going into counties where many of the extreme legislators come from. Rev. Barber says many of the citizens in these districts reject the repressive policies of the Legislature, and the N.C. NAACP has been able to start new, predominately-white chapters in these areas.

A large number of young people will be hired this summer for the "Freedom Summer Fellowship Program," where the work of Freedom Summer 1964 will not only be remembered, but reenacted.

Several hundred thousand robo-calls to voters will be made before the general election of 2016, and 50 Moral Marches to the polls will be held before both the March 15 primaries and the Nov. 4 general election.

Rev. Barber said the upcoming 10th annual Moral March on Raleigh/HK on J People's Assembly on Saturday, Feb. 13 in Raleigh will also promote the theme, "It's Our Time, It's Our Vote."

"It's going to be livestreamed across the state and nation. We will have people who have been impacted by repressive policies [to stop the vote]," Rev. Barber said, adding that the uncle of Andrew Goodman, one of the three 1960's civil rights workers killed by the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi, will be a special marshal at the march.

After the march, Rev. Barber says they will take the campaign on the road across the state and a 2016 voter guide will also be released, focusing on where the candidates have taken stands on the issues. Local branches and coalition partners will hold town halls to help better educate their communities on what the key issues are.

"Healthcare is on the ballot; public education is on the ballot; environmental justice, living wages and collective bargaining are all also on the ballot," Rev. Barber said.

"Black lives are on the ballot. We see this election not just in terms of the personalities, but the critical public policy issues that we'll all be affected by on

N.C. NAACP comes to W-S for training

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Over 100 members of the N.C. NAACP and its Forward Together Moral Movement gathered at Goler Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church on Saturday, Jan. 9, to receive training on how to register voters and learn more about the upcoming election.

The training sessions were part of the N.C. NAACP's fight for voting rights, better known as "Our Time, Our Vote."

The campaign is a collaboration with Democracy N.C. and is designed to promote voter education, engagement and empowerment.

During a press conference held before the training session, the N.C. NAACP president, the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber said it is important that the

community understands how important voting is.

"Others have had the time to vote on policy. It's our time now to judge them at the ballot box," said Barber. "We aren't just building for 2016; we are building an infrastructure that will last a long time, beyond this election."

The N.C. NAACP on Tuesday, Jan. 12, held a press conference in Durham to provide an update on the organization's lawsuit that challenges the state's restrictive voter ID requirement.

"North Carolina's voter ID requirement is one of the many provisions of the state's massive voter suppression law, H.B. 589," the organization said in a statement. "Knowing the ID requirement would not

pass constitutional review, the legislature modified the law just weeks before the July 2015 trial challenging H.B. 589. The trial proceeded regarding the law's other provisions, though the photo ID requirement will not be addressed in court until Jan. 25 [in federal court in Winston-Salem]. Under the modified ID requirement, voters who do not have one of the limited forms of accepted ID due to a 'reasonable impediment' can sign a declaration confirming their identity."

At Tuesday's press conference, the NC NAACP reported on the continued legal challenge to this requirement and urged voters to make their voices heard at the polls in March "despite the obstacles."



Photo by Tevin Simson
N.C. NAACP President Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II speaks during a press conference on Saturday, Jan. 9, in Winston-Salem at Goler Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church.



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