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'Poor People's Campaign' readies nationwide mobilization

By Martha Waggoner

RALEIGH (AP) - The renewed version of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s campaign to lift poor people is holding its first national mobilization, with actions and events planned Feb. 5 in 32 states and the nation's capital.

Poor people, clergy and activists in the Poor People's Campaign plan to deliver letters to politicians in state Capitol buildings demanding that leaders confront what they call systemic racism evidenced in voter suppression laws and poverty rates.

Among those who have signed on to the campaign is the Rev. John Mendez, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, who recalled protesting in New York City in the 1960s.

"I've been waiting for almost 50 years for this to actually happen," said Mendez, 68.

The campaign is especially important now because the leaders who don't want to help the poor "should not have a free hand to say and do whatever they want and there be no resistance," he said.

Led by the Revs. William Barber of North Carolina and Liz Theoharis of New York, the campaign officially began Dec. 4, 50 years after King started the first Poor People's Campaign. King was assassinated a few months later and "nobody really picked it up" until now, Mendez said.

The letters to politicians call for a new course in government. "Our faith traditions and state and federal constitutions all testify to the immorality of an economy that leaves out the poor, yet our political

discourse consistently ignores the 140 million poor and low-income people in America," the letter states.

Barber, who will be among the group that delivers letters to the office of House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, said the campaign is building toward a "season of direct action and civil disobedience" that begins on May 13 and continues through June 21, the anniversary of the slayings of three civil rights workers in 1964 in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

The actions, including a poverty tour, will be followed by more work as part of a multiyear campaign to build power "among the poorest and most powerless communities," he added.



Members of the Congressional Black Caucus wear Kente cloth-inspired prints, during the State of the Union address on January 30. The CBC members stood in solidarity with the Americans, Haitians and the African nations smeared by President Trump's comments during a bipartisan meeting about immigration at the White House. (Lauren Victoria Burke/NNPA)



REV. WILLIAM BARBER

And on Feb. 12 - the 50th anniversary of the sanitation workers' strike that brought King to Memphis, where he was assassinated - fast-food cooks and cashiers plan to walk off their jobs in Memphis to support higher wages and union rights. Protesters plan to march from Clayborn Temple to Memphis City Hall, the same route the sanitation workers took.

The most important part of the campaign is that the people who are hurting because of poverty and racism are its leaders, Theoharis said. "I feel very positive that the real heroes and heroines of our country are coming together to cross all kinds of lines that usually divide us like race, gender, economic status, political party."

Leslie Boyd of Candler has followed Barber since he began the "Moral Monday" protest movement in North Carolina almost five years ago. Her son, Mike Danforth, was 33 when he died of colon cancer in 2008 because he lacked insurance even though he had a job and couldn't afford the yearly colonoscopies that he needed.

Her hope for the campaign is that it changes what she sees as a national narrative that not only blames the poor for the poverty but uses religion to do so. Too many people believe that "if you were a good person, Jesus would bless you," she said.

U.S. Census figures show that the poverty rate among blacks was 22 percent in 2016, while it was almost 9 percent among whites. But in sheer numbers, almost 17.5 million white people are classified as living in poverty, compared to 8.7 million blacks. The U.S. poverty rate was almost 13 percent in 2016.

"It's not immoral to be poor," said Boyd, 65. "It's immoral to make people poor with our actions as a government and as a people."

CBC Chairman Offers Stinging Rebuttal to President Trump's State of the Union Address

By Freddie Allen (Editor-In-Chief, NNPA Newswire)

—Members of the Congressional Black Caucus wore Kente cloth-inspired prints to the State of the Union address standing in solidarity with Americans, Haitians and the African nations smeared by President Trump's racist rhetoric.

—Janelle Jones, an analyst with the Economic Policy Institute, told Vox that, "The recovery of employment was happening long before Trump got into office."

—The Black unemployment rate is almost double the White unemployment rate, a trend that has endured for decades.

Rep. Cedric Richmond, the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus railed against President Donald Trump's boasts about the economy, especially his claims about the Black community, in a blistering response to the president's State of the Union (SOTU) address.

CBC members also wore Kente cloth-inspired prints to the State of the Union address.

Richmond said that every action taken by President Trump, since his election, has been destructive for poor, working-class, and middle-class communities throughout the country, as well as communities of color.

Richmond said that nothing that the president said during his speech wiped that slate clean.

The CBC chairman also leveled the charge made by lawmakers and economists alike that Trump is just riding the economic wave that began

during President Barack Obama's tenure.

"He boasts about a booming economy, but it is not something he can take credit for," said Richmond. "Much like the money he inherited from his father to start his business, President Trump inherited a growing economy from President Obama."

Richmond continued: "The low Black unemployment rate he boasted about has been falling for eight years and has only changed by one percent since he took office. In addition, while the Black unemployment rate is at an historic low, it is still double the rate of White unemployment and doesn't take into account the fact that African Americans are disproportionately underemployed and underpaid."

Janelle Jones, an analyst working on a variety of labor market topics within EPI's Program on Race, Ethnicity, and the Economy (PREE) told Vox that, "The recovery of employment was happening long before Trump got into office."

Richmond said that even though the president's infrastructure proposal sounded good, he doubted that the proposals would live up to their promise.

"We know that it will be more of the same: toll roads, reduced federal cost-share, and giveaways to his wealthy friends in the construction industry," said Richmond. "It is important to note that he said nothing about contracting with minority firms."

Richmond said that the CBC can now answer the question

hat Trump posed to the Black community in 2016, "with 100 percent certainty."

Richmond continued: "African Americans have a lot to lose under the Trump Administration and we have lost a lot already, especially when it comes to his justice, voting rights, education, housing, and healthcare policies. President Trump is still who we thought he was and we won't be fooled by this speech."

Voters ask US Supreme Court not to delay legislative maps

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - Dozens of North Carolina voters are asking the U.S. Supreme Court to ensure this year's legislative elections are held under district lines redrawn recently by federal judges, since previous elections this decade occurred under what have been deemed unconstitutional maps.

Their legal brief filed Feb. 2 asked the court to refuse a request by Republican legislative leaders. The GOP officials had asked the high court to block enforcement of a ruling last month by three judges approving a court-appointed expert's changes to House and Senate lines.

If the GOP request is denied, then the amended maps would be used beginning with candidate filing for the General Assembly on Feb. 12. If the request is approved, then districts likely would be used this fall that are again tainted by racial bias, as happened during the 2012, 2014 and 2016 elections, lawyers for the voters wrote.

"The citizens of North Carolina have been forced to endure an egregious racial gerrymander for over six years and three election cycles," Jessica Ring Amunson wrote in the brief to Chief Justice John Roberts, who receives appeals from North Carolina. "If the court grants the stay, the voters of North Carolina will have to endure another election under unconstitutional legislative maps, and (the Republicans) will be rewarded for their tactics of delay at nearly every stage of this case."

There's no timetable when Roberts or the entire court will decide. The voters originally sued in 2015, and the following year the three judges ruled that House and Senate redistricting performed by the Republican-dominated legislature in 2011 contained 28 districts that relied too heavily on race. They said the maps must be thrown out and redrawn. The Supreme Court upheld that decision last June.

The General Assembly said it didn't use racial data in August when new lines were drawn, but the same judges decided four new districts were too similar to the 2011 districts, reflecting continued racial bias. Another five House districts also shouldn't have been altered, the judges said, because that violated the state constitution's provision against mid-decade redistricting.

After address, Trumps ride back to White House in same car

By Laurie Kellman

WASHINGTON (AP) - Scenes from the Capitol on a night of pomp, pageantry and politics for the State of the Union address:

It's not a question that typically needs asking. But yes, the White House says, Melania Trump rode back from the Capitol in the same car as her husband, President Donald Trump, after his State of the Union speech.

That wasn't a foregone conclusion. The first lady had not been seen in public with her husband since the Wall Street Journal reported that lawyers for Trump paid Stormy Daniels \$130,000 to stay quiet about what the porn star said was an affair with the future president. Daniels said in a statement Tuesday that the affair she had described never happened.

The couple's 13th anniversary passed without public comment. And Mrs. Trump abruptly canceled her trip with the president to Davos, Switzerland, for an economic summit.

Mrs. Trump traveled separately from her husband to the Capitol for the address. Her aide said she had held receptions at both places for the guests seated with her for the speech.

The president began his speech by acknowledging "the first lady" along with other congressional leaders. Mrs. Trump did not visibly react.

It wasn't the longest State of the Union address. That designation still goes to former President Bill Clinton.

But an hour and 20 minutes of President Donald Trump talking Tuesday was plenty long enough for House Democrats. Just before Trump finished, their leader, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, made eye contact with Rep. Joe Crowley of New York and pointed toward the back of the House chamber.

Democrats followed their lead and made an unusually quick beeline for the exits. Earlier, Pelosi had warned House Democrats not to leave the chamber mid-speech.

Trump's first State of the Union address clocked in at about eight minutes shorter than the final such address by Clinton.