

Selma to Montgomery March to Protest New Voter Laws

Written by Hazel Trice Edney
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A commemoration of the 1965 March from Selma to Montgomery will take place March 4-9, led by the National Action Network.

With a potential 5 million voters being affected by prospective new laws in 34 states, the Rev. Al Sharpton says his Selma to Montgomery march to be held March 4-9, aims to expose what appears to be a goal of disenfranchisement in the Nov. 6 election.

“It will dramatically show, by bringing scores of people – labor and others who are supporting us - to the steps where this was enacted in the first place, how this is not about anything except the violation of voting rights,” Sharpton said in an interview. “The drama of going back to Selma and staying every night where they stayed in ’65 makes it an irrevocable pitch to America that they are uprooting and under mining what was achieved in the Civil Rights Movement.”

Sharpton’s remarks were made following a Capital Hill press conference last week alongside members of the Congressional Black Caucus who represent a string of states that are being hit by the new laws. “Five million people who voted in 2008 will not be able to vote this year if those laws go into effect in 34 states,” Sharpton said.

The event will commemorate the historic 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights march. It will begin at the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 4 and end with a rally at the Alabama State Capitol on Friday, March 9. Civil rights icon U. S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) will participate in the march activities it was announced. Georgia is one of the states affected by the new laws.

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The main issue is that states are passing laws that require voters to have a government-issued photo identification card in order to vote. Those states include Kansas, Texas, Wisconsin, Indiana, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. Several other require proof of citizenship.

The issue has been targeted and heavily dealt with by civil rights leaders who say the laws are clear attempts to undermine the Black vote.

“Eleven percent of all Americans and 25 percent of African-Americans do not have driver’s licenses. In Georgia, 36 percent of those over 75 do not have a driver’s license,” wrote columnist Julianne Malveaux recently.

Republicans claim the new laws intend to prevent voter fraud. But, according to Malveaux, “a five-year investigation by the Bush Department of Justice showed a scant 86 voter fraud conviction, and most of these cases could not have been prevented by voter ID laws. Another study showed that only 24 people were convicted of or pled guilty to illegal voting between 2002 and 2005.”

Various legal strategies are being used by legislators and activists to fight the laws from state to state. The bottom line is that the powers that be need to see that the people are not sitting back in agreement with it, Sharpton said.

“This is going to be a long process. But, the courts and everybody else need to see people rise up,” he said.

Sharpton’s National Action Network is being joined by a string of other civil rights organizations, including AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees); the National Council of La Raza; the National Organization for Women; the National Urban League; The Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights; The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), NAACP; the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation; the American Civil Liberties Union; the American Federation of Teachers; and Communications Workers of America.

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Details and background on the history of the march on the NAN website explain how Sharpton believes the same kind of uprising that proved successful in 1965 can have the same affect today.

“National and international attention of the march highlighted the struggle, the adversity, the violence as well as the determination of the Selma protestors. As a result of the media coverage worldwide, Congress rushed to enact legislation that would guarantee voting rights for all Americans. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965,” said a statement on the site.

For more information on how to participate in the march and all activities, please visit <http://nationalactionnetwork.net/events/94/selma-to-montgomery-march/> or call the NAN Hotline at 877-626-4651.

“How did we get a Voting Rights Act in the first place?” said Sharpton. “We need to have consistent dramatic efforts.”{comments on}