

# Marching for voter rights

NAACP protests proposed voting registration laws despite overcast weather.

BY: **Marissa Peterson**  
Durham Voice

DURHAM — “The rain is trying to silence us so we have to raise our voices.”

Fred Foster Jr., NAACP Durham chapter President and Durham County Commissioner Chair gave final words of encouragement before leading a group of 10 through the rain on March 24.

Though 39-degree, overcast weather discouraged a large crowd, the show went on at 3:30 p.m. The small group chanted a civil rights anthem “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round,” and endured the unpleasant weather on the short walk from the Shannon Plaza Post Office to the Markham Chapel Missionary Baptist Church.

The Durham chapter of the NAACP marched to protest voter ID laws, restriction laws, and voter suppression laws, while also honoring the victims of Bloody Sunday — a day that was broadcasted around the world on March 7, 1965, when 500 peaceful marchers in Selma, Ala., were brutally attacked by Alabama troops with clubs and tear gas.

“We thought it was going to be much more people but you know Baptist people, they tend to be afraid of water.”

- Rev. Herbet G. Bell

“On this anniversary of Bloody Sunday, this place should be over flowing,”

Foster said. “The weather didn’t keep them from marching. Those people bled and died. One gave his life, but guess what, we won’t even come out. Why? Because we feel like we’ve got it made, but we don’t have it made yet.

“We have to keep on. It’s going to take all of us coming together and being sick and tired of being sick and tired. So we have to keep on marching and demonstrating, and putting this out in front of people of consciousness.”

Foster organized the march at the request of North Carolina NAACP President Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II to materialize statewide marches in response to the Voting Rights Act being challenged by conservatives in a case that the Supreme Court will rule on this summer.

Other branches of the NAACP were set to march Sunday, including delegations from Fayetteville/Cumberland County, Guilford County, Mecklenburg County, and the Raleigh-Apex area.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits states from executing any “voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure ... to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.”



The small delegation from the Durham chapter of the NAACP march with the banner through rain. (Staff photo: Peterson)

These new proposals could discourage many people from voting in North Carolina. It would also stop voters from registering during early voting by eliminating same-day registration.

The proposals would also require voters to show a government-issued photo ID in order to vote, which opponents say would create a barrier for African Americans, low-income citizens, seniors who do not drive, women and youth.

Sunday voting would also be eliminated, which is seen by opponents as a direct attack on African American churches and the “Souls to the Polls” program.

“The biggest thing that most people don’t realize is that it was 48 years [ago] this month that it took them to get everything done,” Foster said. “Forty-eight states ratified and two did not. This is a time where our people need to understand everybody did not go for the same thing.

“It seems like history just keeps repeating itself and we’re not prepared for it because we don’t study our history, we don’t teach it to

our children.”

The Durham chapter of the NAACP has been trying to connect with Durham residents, informing them of their rights and telling them about changes that need to take place.

Two attendees of the march, Rev. Herbert G. Bell, Jr. and his wife Ruthie M. Bell, recently joined the Durham chapter after leaving their Oxford chapter because they wanted to be more active.

“We thought it was going to be much more people but you know Baptist people, they tend to be afraid of water,” Rev. Bell jokes under the shelter of the post office.

The couple’s NAACP participation is revered by their preceding generations.

“Our grandkids are very proud, they like to keep up with what’s going on, what’s current, what progress is being made,” Ruthie Bell said.

Unfortunately, most residents of Durham do not share the Bell family’s outlook on the significance of the NAACP.

“They don’t believe NAACP is relevant,” Foster



**Left to right: Vivian Timbers, Diane Standeart, Terry Alabard, Willie Jones, Ruthie Bell, Rev. Herbert Bell, Charles Perry, Bob Hall, Fred Foster J. hold the NAACP banner before marching. (Staff photo: Peterson)**

said. “You know when they think it’s relevant? When they’re in trouble. That’s the only time my phone jumps off the hook.

“And that’s the problem with us as people, black people in general. We don’t get excited until there’s a problem, we can’t be reactive we’ve got to be proactive!”

Foster said that there are more than 260,000 people in Durham County and nearly 70,000 of those residents are African American.

“With a \$30 membership I would never have to have a fundraiser in the history of

the Durham branch,” Foster said. “How mind-boggling is that? If everyone just bought a \$30 membership I would have enough money to take care of the branch for the rest of my life and your life too, but we won’t even give a \$30 membership.”

Foster reiterated that they do not charge people to be members, but admits that the chapter could be significantly more powerful with the additional funds.

The Durham branch is the only branch that has attempted to set up a fund to have lawyers on retainer

for community members’ use, but there isn’t a way to funnel money into the special fund.

“We don’t keep up with what’s going on,” Foster said. “We’re not involved civically...Why? Because we’re disengaged, if it doesn’t directly affect us, we’re not going to do it.”

The Durham branch of the NAACP will have an event, “Racial Profiling on the Community and State,” on April 28 at 4 p.m. A discussion with lawyers, community members, and NAACP leaders will take place, explaining a person’s rights

when stopped by the police. The NAACP hopes Durham residents will come out to take part in the discussion, and share their stories, as many of our own have been searched without reason, or wrongfully accused.

Foster and the NAACP hope to see a change in Durham’s participation and both reiterate that a vote is more than choosing who makes decisions.

“You change your situation with your vote,” Foster said.