

FIRED UP & # VOTEREADY: Black Youth Vote! Prepares Young People to VOTE in 14 States



Jamaal Rose, Florida Black Youth Vote! coordinator with FAMU students Kim Wilson (middle) and Sharon Davis encouraging students to vote early or on Nov. 6.

Washington, DC – Determined to keep the swagger going among their peers, Black Youth Vote! (BYV!), the youth program of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP), is hustling hard as they transition their iThink 2012 Campaign efforts from voter registration to voter education and mobilization for the last days of the 2012 Presidential Election cycle.

BYV! national field coordinator, Jessica Brown, believes that the young adults won't be easily deterred during this election. "Regardless of what is often reflected in the music and the culture, we are concerned about issues that impact us and we pay attention."

Virginia BYV! coordinator, Tiara Davis adds, "Because of the voter suppression laws passed to reduce the number of people who can vote, we are getting the message out to vote early and if someone tries to block you from voting, Stand Your Ground and VOTE."

Active in 14 states and DC, BYV! is making tremendous waves at the grassroots level. The young leaders are dorm knocking,

staging vote raids, working with the fraternities and sororities to get their members to the polls, and collecting voter pledge cards. Florida BYV! organizers Lucas Melton and Jamaal Rose even convinced their college president, Florida A&M University (FAMU) interim president Larry Robinson, to sign a BYV! pledge card and cancel classes for a few hours so FAMU students could participate in a march to the polls on the first day of early voting!

“We’re out here on a daily basis getting young people fired up about this election,” said Melton. “In addition to making sure they understand the voter ID requirements, we are reminding them that this election is beyond selecting a president, there are state and local races and referendums that will impact our daily lives.”

Other tactics BYV is using to empower the hip hop nation are debate watch parties; town hall meetings; a digital hit squad getting the message out via social media; and the recruitment of radio DJ’s to play the BYV! theme song, “Vote4Justice”, by Andre “Champ” Hobson. Jeremy Tribblett, Wisconsin BYV! , is one of several club DJ’s around the country playing the theme song and urging people to vote while in the nightclubs.

“A major part of our voter registration campaign was to register and educate ex-offenders, so now we’re contacting them to help them identify their poll location and offering rides to the polls to make sure they vote,” adds Portia Tyson, Alabama BYV!.

With the alarming talk of voter suppression efforts and protesters looking to block African-Americans from voting, the organization is working with Common Cause and others to recruit volunteers, called Foot Soldiers for Democracy, to train to work as poll monitors and poll workers. Poll monitors will work outside the polls on Election Day reporting problems via text, mobile apps, and by calling the 1 – 866- OUR VOTE hotline to report problems to lawyers.

Black Youth Vote! iThink2012 partners include, Generational Alliance, BET VOTE 2012, Hip Hop Caucus, Black Men Vote, 100 Black Men of America, Inc. and the Cost of Freedom Project.

“Young people have always been the catalyst behind any movement. They are impacted by issues such as student loans, military enlistment and unemployment,” cites Melanie L. Campbell, president and CEO of NCBCP and co-founder of BYV!. “That’s why Black Youth Vote is such an integral component in our Unity 12 Voter Empowerment Campaign. BYV! also has a special voter empowerment focus on young black males because so many of them are hurt by the unjust voter suppression laws and those who were formerly incarcerated have problems getting their right to vote restored.”

Black Youth Vote! (BYV!) is a national grassroots coalition of organizations and individuals committed to increasing political and civic engagement among black youth and young adults between the ages of 18-35. The iThink2012 Campaign is made possible with support from the Open Society Foundations, Workers Voices, Boule Foundation, The Ford Foundation, Youth Engagement Fund and Tides Foundation-BCEF. Co-convened by NCBCP and A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Unity '12 Campaign is a national non-partisan effort to turn out Black voters. For more information visit www.ncbcp.org or www.unityvoterempowermentcampaign.org.