

Efforts To Suppress To Black Votes Galvanizing Volunteers Nationwide For The Critical GA Senate Runoffs



Organizers from the Georgia Coalition for the Peoplesâ€™™ Agenda pause for a photo as teams prepare to deliver GOTV materials, signs and posters to barbershops and other businesses in the Atlanta Metro area. Credit: La Fonda Smith Fotographer

ATLANTA â€“ Ongoing efforts to suppress and invalidate the voices of Black voters in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Georgia have galvanized theÂ Georgia Coalition for the Peoplesâ€™™ AgendaÂ (Peoplesâ€™™ Agenda),Â Clayton County Black Womenâ€™™s RoundtableÂ (BWR) and other groups to register, educate and mobilize voters for the upcoming Senate runoff elections. The disenfranchisement efforts serve as a rallying call and enabled the coalition to expand their get-out-the-vote activities.

â€œWe organize year-round in the Black community and voters trust us. We will motivate them to vote,â€ saidÂ Helen Butler, executive director of the Peoplesâ€™™ Agenda.Â â€œBefore civil rights leaders like Dr. King and the founder of the Peoplesâ€™™ Agenda, Dr. Joseph Lowery, endured beatings and jail for us to have the right to vote, people used poll taxes, literacy tests and even violence to stop us from voting. Today,Â instead of suppressing Black voters, their efforts are creating a groundswell of support.â€

“We’ve received calls from across the country from people eager to help beyond the much-needed donations they’re making,” adds Felicia Davis, convener of Clayton County BWR, a member of the Peoples’ Agenda coalition. “We need people outside of Georgia to help by calling their family and friends in Georgia and let them know to vote. With the Coronavirus raging we’re encouraging voters to vote absentee by mail or early in-person to keep the lines at a minimum on Jan. 5.”

In addition to celebrities and dignitaries volunteering to make calls, produce robo calls and public service announcements, state affiliates of the NCBCP Unity 20 Black Voting Campaign will keep their 2020 operations going to support Georgia GOTV activities. The Eastern Michigan Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Philly Unity Coalition, and Ohio Unity Coalition will help with phone banking, social media, texts, online events and the Clayton County BWR postcard campaign.

Despite the challenges created by the COVID-19 virus, the Peoples’ Agenda has worked nonstop the entire year. They even spent Thanksgiving week training over 500 phone-bankers, registering and educating voters at turkey give-aways, and dispatching teams of canvassers to distribute flyer with voting information packaged with PPE door-to-door in communities throughout the state.

“It’s clear that expanding access to absentee voting boosted turnout,” said Butler. “The Peoples’ Agenda is working with our partners to make sure voters receive and return their absentee ballot requests. For those who want to vote in-person, we’re providing rides to the polls starting December 14 when early in-person voting begins.”

“This year we lost Dr. Lowery, Rev. C. T. Vivian and Congressman John Lewis, three civil rights heroes whose sacrifices played a key role in the passing of the Voting

Rights Act. Their memory fuels our resolve," adds Davis, who also serves as director of HBCU Green Fund. "Our message to anyone trying to suppress or void Black votes is best communicated through a quote from Dr. Lowery, "We ain't going back. We've come too far, marched too long, prayed too hard, wept too bitterly, bled too profusely, and died too young, to let anybody turn back the clock on our journey to justice."

The Georgia Coalition for the Peoples' Agenda is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization performing year-round voter registration, education and mobilization in Black communities throughout Georgia. Led by board chair, Rev. J. A. Milner, the organization has headquarters in Atlanta and offices in Athens, Albany, Macon, Augusta, LaGrange and Savannah. To donate or volunteer visit www.thepeoplesagenda.org email coalition@bellsouth.net or call the Peoples' Agenda at (404) 653-1199.



A canvasser with Clayton County Black Women's Roundtable, Vanessa Wilder, distributes voting information and PPE for the upcoming GA Senate runoff elections at a mall in Jonesboro. Photo Credit: La Fonda Smith Fotographer