

NEW SCHOOL ACTIVISTS SAY THEY WANT LESS TALK AND MORE ACTION FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS

As national elected officials continue spinning their wheels, hurling well-crafted sound bites at each other, a group of young activists is quietly making strategic moves. This week, the members of Black Youth Vote! (BYV!) launched into full gear for the final days of a three-month, ten-state, voter registration drive.

BYV!, the youth initiative of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP), had a major impact on the record increase in young voters during the 2004 presidential election. In 2006, they changed focus and are making a slam-dunk in the mid-term election as well.

"These young people represent a new day in politics. They want to be a part of mapping out what their future looks like," says Melanie L. Campbell, executive director and CEO of the NCBCP. "After ten years of teaching and preaching, I am proud to say that they are learning the connection between their everyday life and elected officials. They are developing new, innovative techniques to keep the movement moving," Campbell adds.

The youth can be found in the most unexpected places preaching the gospel of "Vote and Be the Change": Hodari Brown registers voters at a Tennessee State University fraternity house; Stephanie Moore visits the jailhouse in Kalamazoo, Mich.; Sherika Wilson hosts backyard barbecues at a trailer park in Baton Rouge, La.; Jordan Thierry sends text messages to thousands of young people in the nation's capital that have already registered to vote, reminding them to verify their names on the voting rolls.

"We register voters at concerts, homecoming events, and high schools. Wherever young people assemble is fertile ground for us. We are registering new voters, and also challenging them to be the change on Election Day," said Irene Schwoeffermann, national coordinator of BYV!

Schwoeffermann notes that a real connection is made when volunteers educate the youth on the significance of the 435 House seats up for election. She adds, "We explain how the elected officials will have the power to influence issues that impact their daily life. Matters like a college debt or the cost of gasoline in their state. They get the picture when you connect the dots."

According to Bradley Starks of Persuasion fx, a D.C.-based political consulting firm, "It is certainly a wake-up call when political bickering overrides crisis issues like the economy, disappearing jobs, and health care. These young people are just starting a lifetime of voting. It's a growing demographic that should not be ignored."

Now in its tenth program year, BYV! is dedicated to motivating the “hip hop” generation to effect change in their communities by active involvement in the civic process. This year, BYV! partnered with Young Voter Strategies to register 350,000 voters aged 18-30 years old. Young Voter Strategies, a nationwide initiative involving 12 organizations, is a nonpartisan project of The George Washington University’s Graduate School of Political Management, with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Natasha Jennings, Alabama BYV! coordinator, adds, “Like the BYV! song says, politics needs to be less about talking and more about action. It’s time for our leaders to move forward with a clear cut agenda that addresses our issues, or get out the way!”

For more information, visit www.myspace.com/blackyouthvote or call (202) 659-4929.