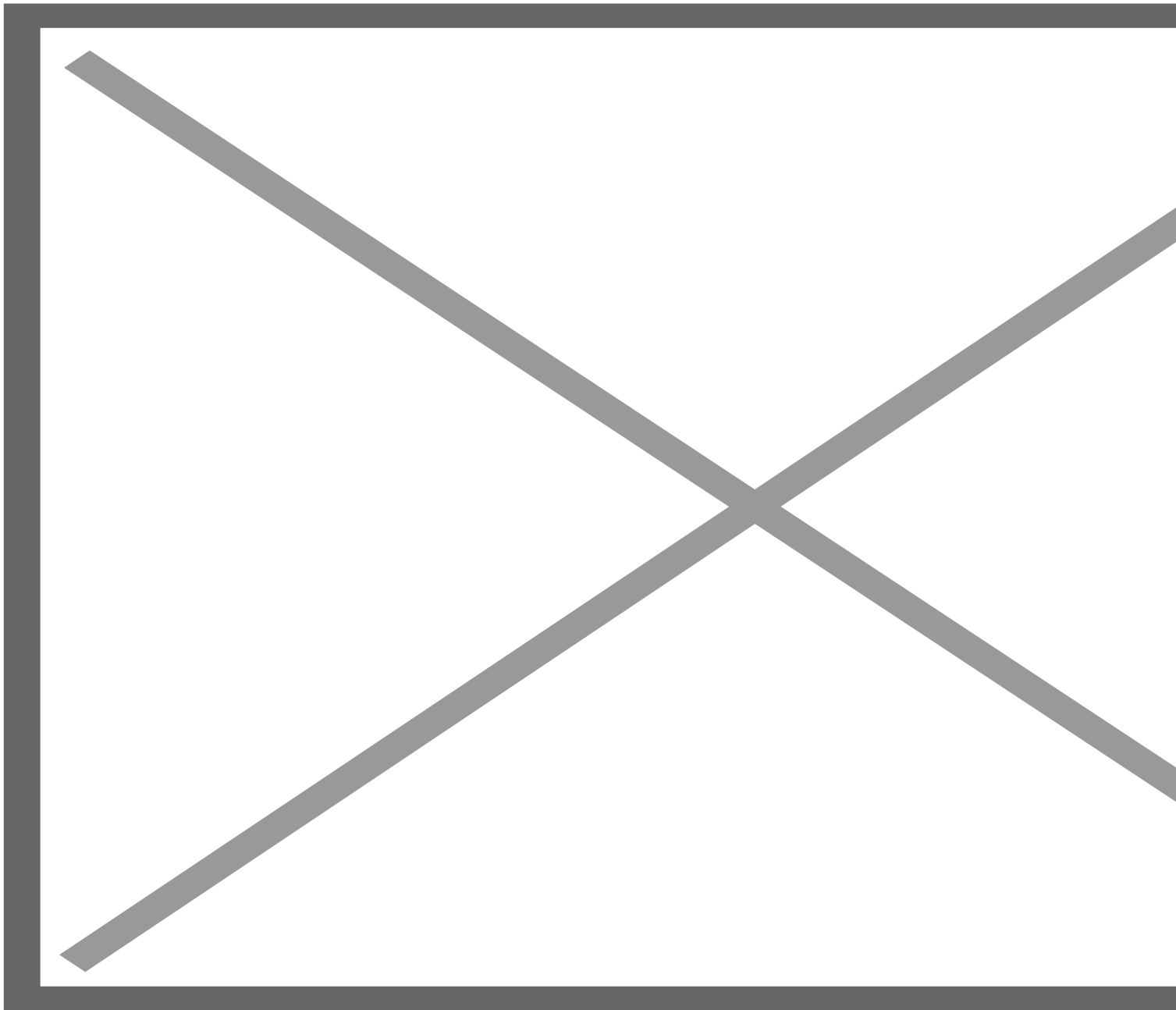


At NBCUSA denominational meeting, church leaders and AOC urge voter turnout

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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A choir performs during the National Baptist Convention USA Inc. annual session in Orlando, Florida. (Photo courtesy of National Urban League and NBCUSA)

The leader of the National Baptist Convention USA Inc., a historically Black denomination, said gerrymandering threatened to “destroy” the power of voters, in a plea for turnout in the midterm elections this fall.

“You got to get back up and fight for your vote,” NBCUSA President Rev. Boise Kimber continued in his presidential address on September 10, the last day of the denomination’s annual meeting in Orlando, Florida.

“Supreme Court has become the puppets of the land, but you got to get back up and fight until justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,” Kimber said, referencing a verse from the Bible’s Book of Amos. “They’re trying to make voting difficult, but you stand in line if you got to stand all day. You are immovable.”

Kimber’s remarks came after two earlier days of the meeting featured representatives of partner organizations highlighting ways the Baptists in attendance and their church members at home can work together on get-out-the-vote efforts. The strategizing at the meeting, attended by about 8,000 people, occurred in the wake of a Supreme Court decision earlier this year to [gut a portion](#) of the landmark 1965 Voting Rights Act.

In a different speech, Starsky Wilson, president and CEO of the Children’s Defense Fund, a national nonprofit focused on child advocacy and research, urged NBCUSA members to take into consideration reductions to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [through Republicans’ “One Big Beautiful Bill Act”](#) when they head to the polls.

An estimated 4 million fewer people are receiving food assistance through the federal aid program compared to before the bill was passed last year, according to data analyzed by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Associated Press reported.

“I want you to vote for the 1.5 million children who had food taken off of their tables in the last year because of SNAP cuts,” Wilson said, adding that many students are also at risk of losing access to free school meals.

Wilson shared resources from the Children’s Defense Fund, including a 12-page voter action guide designed for congregations, and a link to use to verify voter registration status and polling place location. He recalled sitting near a woman at a Texas church revival earlier this month, who said she had checked her status the week before to see her name on the rolls, and checked it again and found it had been removed.

“We need you to check your voter registration status and verify it weekly,” said Wilson, a step his organization is encouraging faith leaders to take before the closing of services on Children’s Sabbaths weekend, a CDF-sponsored observance on the third weekend in October.

US Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), spoke during a panel discussion with Wilson about the current state of electoral politics—including redistricting and possibilities that depend on the outcome of the midterms.

“In the short term, we have to turn out in record numbers out here in the South to show them that they can’t draw us out of nothing,” she said, noting her confidence that Democratic wins could lead to passage of the [John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#), a bill introduced in 2021, and which passed the House. She also expressed optimism about potentially expanding the number of justices on the Supreme Court if the midterms go well for Democrats.

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National Urban League officials also attended the Baptist meeting aiming to increase Black church cooperation in the civil rights group’s Reclaim the Vote initiative, especially through “Sound the Trumpet Sunday” on the fourth Sunday of each month before Election Day.

In efforts to urge people to vote, the group advised not focusing on Washington but on kitchen-table topics to prevent people from sitting the election out.

“Our churches cannot be silent about the issues affecting the very people we’ve been called to serve because the people sitting in our pews are not thinking about politics in the abstract,” said Rhonda Spears Bell, a senior vice president of the league. “They’re not worried about political theory. They are thinking about whether their paycheck will last until Friday.”

For those advocating to potential voters, she encouraged answering questions about the difference a vote can make by explaining rather than shaming.

“Talk to the young adult who has never voted,” Bell said. “Talk to the brother who feels nobody listens to Black men. Talk to the sister who’s working two jobs and doesn’t even know if she has time to vote. Talk to the member who’s confused about everything that they see online, and let’s move them from information to action.”

Yusef Jackson, the son and successor to the late Jesse Jackson as the leader of the Rainbow Push Coalition, encouraged an increased “level of cultural maturity” through linkages between civil rights organizations, like the Urban League and his coalition, with the Baptist denomination.

“If I pass today, we leave this earth and this country with fewer rights than my father left me,” said Jackson, who joined National Urban League President Marc Morial and political and housing experts for a panel discussion. “We can never, never let that happen. So we have to fight. We have to go to the polls.” —Religion News Service