

Civil rights veteran John Lewis urges black clergy to 'fix' Voting Rights Act

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June 25, 2015

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Civil rights veteran and Congressman John Lewis urged black clergy to work for changes in the Voting Rights Act on the second anniversary of the Supreme Court decision that removed key provisions of the law.

“It’s time again for religious leaders, the ministers of the gospel, to get in trouble,” said Lewis, speaking Thursday (June 25) at the Rayburn House Office Building to Progressive National Baptist Convention pastors attending a briefing. “There are forces in our country, in Washington and all around America, want to take us back. But we’re not going back. We’ve made too much progress. We’re going forward.”

They gathered two years after the 2013 Supreme Court ruling, *Shelby County v. Holder*, that invalidated a Justice Department review of new voting regulations in states with a history of voting discrimination. Lewis is one of the co-sponsors of the Voting Rights Advancement Act that was introduced Wednesday and seeks to restore the portions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act removed by the nation’s highest court.

“We need to fix it before next year’s election. We’ve got to do it, brothers and sisters,” said Lewis (D., Georgia), who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. “We have a moral obligation, a mission and a mandate to do it.”

The gathering of about 70 PNBC pastors and other religious leaders headed to lawmakers’ offices to press for changes in the law. But they also stressed the need for voter registration efforts even as dozens of state laws have grown more restrictive.

“We look at all of these new voting rights laws as just being the slick packaging of a new way of voter suppression,” said James C. Perkins, PNBC president. “There ought not be impediments put in the way to deter people from having access to the ballot

box.”

Raphael Warnock, pastor of Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church—where King once served as pastor—said his church registers people to vote when they become new members.

“Part of the response to massive voter suppression is massive voter registration and massive voter activation,” he said. “That’s part of the solution.”