

News

Poor People's Campaign to Hold Bus Tours of Poverty Areas

Tours, led by Rev. William Barber, to begin in late March and continue through April

By Martha Waggoner
Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Poor People's Campaign will hold bus tours of poverty-stricken areas in more than 20 states to call attention to "what the national emergencies really are" in the wake of President Donald Trump's emergency declaration over the U.S.-Mexico border, a leader of the campaign says.

The tours will begin in late March and continue through April, said the Rev. William Barber of North Carolina. Participants will include poor people, religious and political leaders and other advocates, he said.

The tours were always planned as part a revived version of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign that launched in December 2017 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of King's original campaign, Barber said. But Trump's declaration of a national emergency to build a wall on the U.S.

border with Mexico added urgency, he said.

"Part of the problem that we see in policies of Democrats vs. Republicans is one talks about they want the wall and the other side said they don't want the wall," Barber said in a phone interview. "But nobody has sat down and said: 'Here are the real emergencies and here is how these resources could be used to address these real emergencies."

Barber is co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, along with the Rev. Liz Theoharis of the Kairos Center. The renewed Poor People's Campaign began after Barber led the "Moral Monday" movement in North Carolina, which began in 2013 and held protests about issues including voting rights, gerrymandering, LGBTQ rights and unions.

Instead of spending almost \$6 billion on a wall, the country could invest in health care, clean energy jobs or placing more children in Head Start programs, he said.

He and Theoharis announced details of the bus tours Monday in Washington. Theoharis said the tour is scheduled to visit almost 30 states and Washington, D.C. In California, the tour will visit the Yurok Indian reservation, while in New York state, the tour will go to Elmira, home to two maximum security prisons.

"We know as a nation we can lift up the load of poverty," she said at a news conference.

Trump issued an emergency declaration so he could access billions of dollars beyond what Congress authorized to start erecting a border wall that was a trademark of his presidential campaign.

Congress approved a vast spending bill earlier this month that provides nearly \$1.4 billion to build 55 miles of border barriers in Texas' Rio Grande Valley while preventing a renewed government shutdown. Trump had demanded \$5.7 billion to construct more than 200 miles.



In this June 23, 2018 file photo, Rev. Dr. William Barber II accompanied by Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis and Rev. Jesse Jackson speaks to the crowd outside of the U.S. Capitol during a Poor People's Campaign rally at The National Mall in Washington. The Rev. William Barber, a leader of the Poor People's Campaign says the social justice movement is planning bus tours of poverty-stricken areas in more than 20 states to refocus the country on its true emergencies.

In June, the Poor People's Campaign plans a People's Moral Action Congress in Washington with more than 2,000 people to discuss the realities of poverty. In conjunction with the meeting, the group will release a poor people's higher ground budget that focuses on inequality.

Attendees will call on

Congress to hold a hearing with people hurt by poverty and racism regarding what Barber calls "interlocking injustices" of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, a war economy and a distorted moral narrative.

The U.S. needs to "shut up and shut down the foolishness that our greatest threat is who

comes across our border rather than that the greatest problem is racism and poverty inside the border," Barber said.

Follow Martha Waggoner on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/mjwaggonernc>

This story has been updated to correct the name of the organization where Theoharis works to Kairos Center, not Institute.



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