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Voting law called Jim Crow-like
Indiana’s voter ID rule, others like it restrict access, the Rev. Jesse Jackson tells journalists.

By Courtenay Edelhart

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ATLANTA — The Rev. Jesse Jackson on Friday criticized Indiana’s new voter identification law and similar laws around the country designed to decrease fraud.

Addressing members of the National Association of Black Journalists, whose annual meeting continues here through Sunday, Jackson said the growing number of such laws nationwide are the modern-day equivalent of Jim Crow-era poll taxes and restrict access to the ballot.

As of July 1, Indiana voters need to show a photo ID before voting. The Indiana Civil Liberties Union is fighting the new law, claiming it will prove a hardship for poor and elderly voters.

The issue should remind activists that the civil rights movement still is very much alive, Jackson added.

Jackson stopped by the convention while in town to participate in today’s “Keep the Vote Alive” march and rally in Atlanta, commemorating the 40th anniversary of the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Supporters of Indiana’s voter ID law say it’s only a barrier to those who would cast a fraudulent ballot.

“This is a common sense approach to making sure not only that everybody’s vote counts, but it counts only once,” Indiana Secretary of State Todd Rokita told The Star in April.

The law allows impoverished voters to obtain a state ID card for free, supporters point out. Those with religious objections to being photographed, such as the Amish, can cast provisional ballots.

An angry Jackson also criticized the journalism group for putting him and other panel speakers in a remote meeting room of the Hyatt Regency Hotel, site of NABJ’s 2005 convention. The room was hard to find and too small for the hundreds who came to hear the discussion.

Jackson also defended Bishop T.D. Jakes, who has been criticized for skipping the weekend’s planned march even though the televangelist and his followers are in Atlanta for a religious meeting.

Calling such criticism a “diversion” and unfair, Jackson urged critics to focus their energy on reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act.

“The vote without protections is like a gun without the bullets,” he said.

Jakes, pastor of The Potter’s House, a Dallas church with more than 30,000 members, stopped by the convention Friday for a session on the rise and influence of megachurches. Jakes said he would have supported the march, but his event was scheduled a year ago.

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and he owed it to registrants to keep that commitment.

Jakes stressed his support for voting rights, however, noting that his church had organized many voter registration drives over the years and would continue to do so. The black community owes it to the many martyrs who gave their lives for the vote to remain vigilant, he said.

Eboni Gatlin, 21, an Indiana University journalism student who was job-hunting at the convention, said she appreciated hearing Jackson and others recount the difficulty in getting the original Voting Rights Act passed and explaining its significance today.

"I think it's important to know these things because in school we miss out on a lot of our history," she said. "I do think a lot of the younger people are apathetic. I feel like a lot of them don't see a direct effect on their lives."

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