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Rev. Jackson in Sumter

Civil rights leader speaks of changing narrative in New South

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Civil rights leader, former presidential candidate and leader of the Rainbow Push Coalition, the Rev. Jesse Jackson stopped by *The Sumter Item* office Thursday to promote the emergence of a new narrative in the South.

Jackson said the Rainbow Push Coalition is helping to build an awareness that the South is moving in new directions.

He said the national media, which will gather in South Carolina for the primary election, are behind the times.

"All roads will lead to South Carolina when they leave New Hampshire and Iowa," he said. "We are going to set in front of them an agenda that they haven't written. They look at whites as a block, blacks as a block, but that is not the South they are going to find in South Carolina."

He said they see only blacks and whites living in fear.

"We socialize together; now we can define our interests together," Jackson said.

Jackson said it is not enough that the Confederate flag has come down from the Statehouse, however.

"Let's bring down the flag agenda," he said.

Jackson praised Gov. Nikki Haley for her leadership after the Charleston church shooting.

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THE SUMTER ITEM
 The Rev. Jesse Jackson, center, and Sumter native James L. "Jim" Felder, third from left, pose for a group shot in *The Sumter Item* newsroom during a visit to *The Sumter Item* offices on Thursday. Jackson and Felder were in town to address an audience at Morris College about the importance of changing the narrative of the "New South." Felder, a Sumter native, secured his place in American history as the leader of the honor guard for President John F. Kennedy's casket on Monday, Nov. 25, 1963.





JACKSON

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"I think on the strength of the blood of the martyrs in the church at Charleston, Nikki Haley and Mayor (Joe) Riley did such a good job the way they related to the people and the sensitivity that they showed," he said. "That could have been a major national explosion, but between the victims choosing redemption over retaliation and the governor leading the drive to take down the Confederate flag and being at every funeral, that leadership made a big difference."

He called for people to find "common ground."

"There is a new South emerging, and we must keep pushing it," he said. "As the South continues to make its transition and rejoins the Union in every way, we must move from the racial battleground to the economic common ground and the moral higher ground."

He said that people in the South learned to live apart now must learn to live together.

"If we insist, it will happen; it is happening, but we can't stop at the water's edge," he said.

Jackson said he was traveling around South Carolina building relationships so the Rainbow Coalition could make a push to register 100,000 voters in the state.

He said the initiative was using the hashtag #RPC100000, and former state representative and President and CEO of South Carolina Voter Education Project Jim Felder, of Sumter, would be the state coordinator.

"In the last election, the governor's race was determined by 60,000 votes," Jackson said. "Four-hundred-thousand blacks were registered that didn't vote."

He discussed changes taking place throughout South Carolina and the re-

gion and the need for expanded Medicaid in the state, among other topics.

"The Affordable Care Act is the first issue for us," Jackson said. "It is a big issue for poor people."

"There are a million poor people in South Carolina who are Medicaid eligible; 20,000 to 50,000 have no health insurance and they are more white than black. We must lift this boat so all can rise together," he said.

He criticized the southern states that have rejected the ACA and expanded Medicaid.

"This notion that we cannot take money in the South from the federal government, that's irrational," he said. "First of all, 45 percent of our state budget is federal. Our hospitals are sustained by federal investment and federal research, the highways are 90 percent federal, the ports at Jasper and Charleston are federal, Forts Jackson and the penitentiaries are federal."

"We should not continue to cripple the life of poor people based on that," he said.

Having spent a lot of time in Greenville with his mother in recent months, Jackson said he is very sensitive to the issue.

"My mother died a few days ago, and she needed

Medicaid," he said.

Jackson also took a shot at the Republican candidates in last week's CNN debate.

"The other night when they had the big event they made four promises," he said.

"When you need health care, you won't get it — they promised that."

"They promised to keep wages low — they promised that."

"We'll be quick on the trigger finger if there's a war — they promised that."

"They promised they would reject the Iran deal without an alternative."

In contrast, he remembered the debate in the Statehouse concerning the Confederate flag.

"I was all night in the chambers," he said. "It was almost like the Lincoln-Douglas debates about freedom and slavery and abolition; as the night wore on, they took the right position."

Jackson said he planned on spending "a lot of time" in South Carolina.

He said he found South Carolina a much nicer place to be than when he was a youngster in Greenville.

"What delights me is that once the walls came down, legally, they began to come down culturally, and people saw that their fears were not well-founded," he said.

"To see people socialize so freely in restaurants and bars — that's a delight," he said.

Jackson said he likes to ask people if they know where Atlantic Beach was.

"They say 'I know where Myrtle Beach is,'" he said.

There used to be a rope, he said.

"That rope, that side was Atlantic Beach, this side was Myrtle Beach; if we went over the line, we were arrested," he recalled.

"There's now only Myrtle Beach."

For more information on the #RPC100000 initiative, call Jim Felder at (803) 261-0167.

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KEITH GEDAMKE / THE SUMTER ITEM

The Rev. Jesse Jackson talks about a variety of issues on Thursday during his visit to *The Sumter Item*.

