News



Police arrest the Rev. William Barber II, center left, and Suvya Carroll, center right, in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda June 2 in Washington. Nine people arrested were charged with "crowding, obstructing and incommoding." (RNS photo/Jack Jenkins)

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A group of clergy, faith-based protesters and disability advocates were once again arrested in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda on June 2 while praying against the Republican-led federal budget bill, including a wheelchair user who said potential cuts to health care programs would imperil her future.

Suvya Carroll, a disability rights advocate who was born with cerebral palsy, was among those who prayed in the Rotunda, asking that God would "not let this happen," referring to the bill. She spoke clutching a Bible as fellow demonstrators laid hands on her shoulders, calling on the Almighty to allow her and others "to be free to live, be healthy, well and safe."

Carroll was arrested by Capitol police a few minutes later, along with eight other demonstrators, according to police. Faith leaders arrested with her included activist the Rev. William Barber II, president of Repairers of the Breach; the Rev. Della Owens, pastor of Saint James Christian Church in Wilson, North Carolina, and Barber's wife; and the Rev. Franklin Golden of Durham Presbyterian Church in North Carolina.

Most of them, including Carroll, were placed in handcuffs as they were led away by police.

In an email, a Capitol police spokesperson said the nine people arrested were charged with "crowding, obstructing and incommoding."

It was the third time since April 28 that faith-led "Moral Monday" protesters were arrested while protesting the One Big Beautiful Bill Act" House Republicans passed last month that is currently being debated in the Senate. Republican leaders that include House Speaker Mike Johnson and Russell Vought, office of management and budget director, have said people either won't lose Medicaid coverage under the bill or will only lose it if "they choose to do so."

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But last month, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office concluded the bill will reduce federal Medicaid spending by $723 billion and ultimately increase the number of uninsured people by 7.6 million.

That discrepancy was brought up repeatedly at the Moral Monday rally on June 2, organized by Repairers of the Breach outside the U.S. Supreme Court building. Taking place before the arrests, activists and faith leaders from Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions decried the GOP-led budget and potential Medicaid cuts.

"They don't want us to talk about the particular people who will die," Barber told the crowd. "They say they're cutting waste, fraud and abuse. So what they're saying is, it's wasteful to lift people, it's fraudulent to help people live, and it's abusive to make sure people have health care. Well, the truth is, it's a waste not to do it — it's fraudulent not to do it, and it's a form of political abuse."

Barber also commented on remarks made by Sen. Joni Ernst, an Iowa Republican, during a recent town hall. After an attendee shouted that the budget bill will lead to deaths, Ernst replied, "We all are going to die."

Ernst, a Lutheran, later doubled down on her comments, posting a video to social media in which she sarcastically mocked her detractors and invited people to embrace "my Lord and savior Jesus Christ" in order to have "eternal and everlasting life."

"(Ernst) said something about wanting to introduce people to Jesus," Barber told the crowd June 2. "Well, let me introduce you to Jesus: The Jesus I know never charged a leper a co-pay."



Demonstrators display signs at a Moral Mondays rally outside the U.S. Supreme Court, Monday, June 2, 2025, in Washington. (RNS/Jack Jenkins)

Disability rights activist Sloan Meek, who is also a worship leader, addressed the crowd using an automated voice device.

"Without Medicaid support in my home and my community, I will be forced into a nursing home to spend the rest of my life in a hospital bed until I die," Meek said.

Carroll also addressed the crowd.

"I want the people that are trying to take this away from us to put yourself in our seats and understand what we have to go through as people with disabilities," she said. "It is not easy waking up with our bodies in pain."

She added: "When we have a procedure that needs to be done, how will that be paid for?"



Suvya Carroll speaks during a Moral Mondays rally outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington June 2. She and eight others were later arrested. (RNS/Jack Jenkins)

The Rev. Tony Larson, co-moderator of Presbyterian Church (USA), a denomination that sponsors the Moral Mondays effort, also led a prayer.

"We ask that through this gathering, we might wake people up to the immorality of this bill, that we might help our leaders remember that they have a special obligation to the poor and the least among us," Larson said.

Sponsors of the event included the National Council of Jewish Women, Masjid Muhammad, the National Council of Churches, Fellowship of Reconciliation, the AME Zion Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, Indivisible and the National Urban League.

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The protest comes days after news broke that Barber is facing a legal battle with his ex-wife, Rebecca Barber, who has asked a judge to investigate whether the pastor used funds from Repairers of the Breach, the nonprofit he founded, to make alimony payments. Barber has denied the allegations, and representatives for Repairers of the Breach have said they believe the allegations to be baseless. The group has launched an internal investigation into the matter.

Demonstrators at the rally seemed unmoved by Barber's legal situation. One speaker, the Rev. Brian Thompson, bishop of the AME Zion Church's Mid-Atlantic District, made a joking reference to controversy surrounding Barber, saying someone had warned him not to be associated with the pastor. But the AME Zion bishop appeared to dismiss the suggestion, adding that the broader cause is a moral one that transcends any one individual.

"I ain't standing with Bishop Barber — I'm standing with Jesus," Thompson said.