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Bennett College News Service

GREENSBORO – Shouting “Bennett Belles are Voting Belles,” about 125 Bennett College students marched to Reid Memorial C.M.E. Church Tuesday morning to cast their votes in the 2016 presidential election.

As they marched, many carrying signs and some with raised fists, the women were joined by Bennett College President Dr. Phyllis Worthy Dawkins, Democratic Senator Gladys A. Robinson of Greensboro, Evelyn P. Leathers, vice president for institutional advancement, and other campus leaders. Robinson is a Bennett College alumna.

Even though some of the students had already voted, they marched with their classmates on Tuesday in a show of solidarity. As the women walked to the church, several passersby honked their horns to show support.

“I’m marching because I want to make a difference,” said Jacquelyn Blake, 19, a freshman social work major from Winston-Salem. “This is my first time voting. I’m voting for Hillary Clinton for president because I believe she’s going to help change American society and make things better for everyone. I just don’t believe Mr. Trump is the right candidate, and as a female attending an all-female institution, I certainly am offended by the way he puts down women.”

The students shouted several chants during their walk to the Reid Memorial, which took about 15 minutes. Before they left campus, they held a brief rally in front of the Annie Merner Pfeiffer Chapel.

Student Government Association President Yahnick Barclay presided over the rally, using a megaphone to address those assembled. The first speaker was Robinson, who said the tradition of Bennett Belles marching to polls was in existence when she was a student at Bennett in the late 1960s.

“When I was a student here we always voted and we loved to vote,” Robinson said. “It’s so important to have you out here this morning because Bennett women are leaders, and voting is a sign of leadership.”

Dawkins, who marched with the students to the polls, reminded them that women didn’t have the right to vote in the United States until the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment on Aug. 18, 1920. She commended them for exercising their right to vote before leading them in the “Bennett Belles are voting Belles” chant.

Congressional candidate Bruce Davis also addressed the crowd, asking for their support.

The march and rally were organized by Bennett’s SGA, with assistance from campus groups Political Pace Setters, Democracy Matters, the NAACP and The North Carolina Student Association of Educators, led by Joyce Spruill.

Dr. Robert Williams, an associate professor of political science, has worked at Bennett for 12 years and said he always marches with the students to the polls. So does Dr. Gwendolyn Bookman, interim chairwoman of the Department of Political Science and Sociology, who's worked at Bennett for 14 years. Also on hand was Dr. Karla McLucas, a political science and sociology professor and the advisor to Bennett's NAACP chapter.

Sabrina Simpson, a junior education major from Chicago, is president of Bennett's NAACP chapter. She said this year's election is critical to the country's future.

"We really need to vote," Simpson said. "It's very serious. I think the voter ID law here in North Carolina was an attempt to silence our voices, to take them away."

Simpson participated in early voting but walked with her classmates on Tuesday to demonstrate the fact that Bennett students understand the importance of civic engagement.

That she and others marched despite having already voted also shows just how apropos Bennett's slogan is: "Education for your future. Sisterhood for life."