

NAACP leader arrested after disruption in House gallery

By

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(RALEIGH) -- It began as a disturbance during the State House session and escalated into a war of words between two men.

In the late stages of the Tuesday afternoon session, the business of the House was interrupted by chanting in the gallery from a group of protesters led by Rev. William Barber, state president of the NAACP. Barber and several of his civil rights associates were thrown out of the gallery by General Assembly Police and taken to an empty meeting room on the first floor of the Legislative Building.

House Speaker Thom Tillis, R-Mecklenburg, reacted to the outburst and the allegation that he wouldn't meet with Barber. Tillis said Barber canceled the only previously scheduled meeting. "He's not made a formal request of me or if there's another request out there I'm not aware of it," said Tillis. "But I can tell you his outburst today doesn't make me likely to do it anytime soon."

Later, as police were escorting Barber out of the building to a waiting car, Tillis was brought down the stairs near the same elevator - leading to another brief confrontation.

"When I get a respectful request, I'll be happy to meet with them – when they treat my House with respect," Tillis told one of the demonstrators.

"Mr. Speaker, we're paying for it. It's our House," Barber responded.

"That's right, it's our House," Tillis replied.

Barber was taken to the Wake County Jail. Tillis left the Legislative Building without further comment.

Listen to Speaker Tillis discuss the situation:

{audio}files/preroll.mp3;files/News_Audio/2011/052411_Tillis_reaction.mp3{/audio}

Listen to the group's outburst in the House gallery:

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