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The Carolina Times

"THE TRUTH UNBRIDED"

VOLUME 91 - NUMBER 26

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, JULY 7, 2012

TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 30

U.S. Supreme Court Hands Obama a Huge Healthcare Victory

By George E. Curry
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) - With conservative Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr. providing a surprise supporting vote, the United States Supreme Court gave President Barack Obama a major victory June 21 by upholding the constitutionality of the Affordable Health Care Act.

In the most watched Supreme Court case since Bush v. Gore in 2000, the justices upheld the landmark healthcare law that requires all Americans except those objecting on religious grounds or facing financial hardship to obtain health insurance by 2014 or pay a financial penalty. The vote was 5-4, with Roberts joining the court's four liberals - Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, Stephen G. Breyer and Elena Kagan. Anthony M. Kennedy, usually the court's lone swing vote, sided with fellow conservatives Antonin Scalia, Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas.

The ruling grew out of three cases challenging the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act that were appealed to the Supreme Court - a suit by the National Federation of Independent Business against Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius and two cases involving HHS and the state of Florida.

The legislation was signed into law by President Obama on March 23, 2010. Most of its provisions will be phased in over the next two years. Among other things, the law prohibits insurance companies from denying coverage based on a pre-existing condition, allows children to remain on their parents' insurance plan until age 26, expands access to insurance to 30 million Americans, eliminates annual and lifetime coverage caps, creates insurance exchanges at the state level for individuals and small businesses, expands eligibility for Medicaid and requires insurance companies to cover certain preventive services without co-pays or deductibles.

In a televised speech from the White House, Obama said, "The highest court in the land has now spoken. We will continue to implement this law. And we'll work together to improve on it where we can. But what we won't do, what the country can't afford to do, is refight the political battles of two years ago or go back to the way things were. With today's announcement, it's time for us to move forward."

Even though the ruling represents a clear victory for President Obama as he faces re-election in less than five months, Republicans immediately vowed to repeal the measure in Congress. However, that appears unlikely for now. Although Republicans hold a majority in the House, Democrats hold an edge in the Senate.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said, "Today's decision makes one thing clear: Congress must act to repeal this misguided law. Obamacare has not only limited choices and increased health care costs for American families, it has made it harder for American businesses to hire."

But Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid disagreed. He said on the Senate floor, "No longer will Americans be a heart attack or a car crash away from bankruptcy. No longer will Americans live in fear of losing their health insurance because they lose their job." He added, "Our Supreme Court has spoken. The matter is settled. It's time for Republicans to stop fighting yesterday's battle."

That's exactly what's expected to happen in the Republican-dominated House.

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor [R-Va.] described the ruling as a "crushing blow" and declared, "During the week of July 9th, the House will once again repeal ObamaCare, clearing the way for patient-centered reforms that lower costs and increase choice."

The official name of the legislation is the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. But Republican critics have derisively referred to it as ObamaCare, a term major news organizations have quickly adopted.

President Obama has flipped the pejorative term on its head, saying, "I have no problem with people saying Obama cares. I do care."

Democrats and Republicans, all claiming to care about average Americans, are on opposite sides of the issue. The bill passed the Senate on December 24, 2009 by a vote of 60-39, with all Democrats and two Independents voting for it and all but one Republican voting against it. It passed the House on March 21, 2010 by a vote of 219-212, with 34 Democrats and all 178 Republicans voting against it.

According to an analysis by the Urban Institute, the number of uninsured African Americans under the age of 65 will drop from 7.4 million to 3.4 million as a result of the healthcare law, a decrease of 54.6 percent. But some problem areas remain.

In a detailed examination of the law, Health Affairs magazine concluded: "Of the estimated 26.4 million individuals projected to be uninsured after the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, those eligible for Medicaid and CHIP [the Children's Health Insurance Program] but who remain unenrolled, constitute the single largest group, at 35.7 percent. This eligible-but-unenrolled group includes 58.8 percent of the blacks who we estimate will remain uninsured under the Affordable Care Act, which is a higher proportion than found in the other racial and ethnic groups examined."

Ex-federal prosecutor who led historic case dies

BRANDON, Miss. (AP) - Jack Brooks Lacy Jr., who as an assistant U.S. attorney led the first federal murder prosecution in a civil rights-era killing, has died. He was 69.

Lacy died June 29 of a single bullet to the head, Rankin County Coroner Jimmy Roberts said. He said he would not have the autopsy report until Monday, but suspects suicide.

Lacy was known for his work in the 2003 conviction of former Ku Klux Klansman Ernest Avants for aiding and abetting the murder of black sharecropper Ben Chester White on federal property. Prosecutors said White, 67, was killed in the Homochitto National Forest in 1966 in an attempt to lure Martin Luther King Jr. to southwest Mississippi for assassination.

For the law to have an even greater impact, effective outreach programs must be used to reach those less likely to enroll in Medicaid, a state and federal partnership that provides medical coverage for needy families, pregnant women, children, the blind and the elderly, and CHIP, also a federal matching fund for states to provide health coverage to nearly 8 million children in families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid, but can't afford private coverage.

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Durham's own Miss Carter Elan Brown has earned the title of the 2012 National American Miss Junior Pre-Teen North Carolina at the state pageant held sat., June 20 at the Benson Convention Center in Winston-Salem. She is the 9-year-old daughter of Mrs. Amber and Vincent Brown. See story on page 9.

Attorney General Eric Holder Says Contempt Charges Politically Motivated

By George E. Curry
Editor-in-Chief
NNPA News Service

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The House of Representatives vote to hold Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. in contempt of Congress was "one of the most highly politicized and reckless congressional investigations in decades," according to Rep. Elijah E. Cummings [D-Md.].

"This is a sad day for our democracy," said Cummings, the ranking member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, the Republican-dominated panel that recommended the action against Holder. "Today's contempt vote against Attorney General Eric Holder is the culmination of one of the most highly politicized and reckless congressional investigations in decades."

The vote, which came just hours after the Supreme Court upheld the landmark Affordable Care Act, marked the first time a sitting cabinet member has been held in contempt of Congress.

Holder, the nation's first black attorney general, described the vote as a culmination of misguided and politically-motivated investigation. He said, "Today's vote may make for good political theater in the minds of some, but it is - at base - both a crass effort and a grave disservice to the American people."

With the outcome of the House vote never in doubt, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) boycotted the vote and was joined by Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi [D-Calif.]. More than 100 Democrats decided not to take part of the vote.

Emanuel Cleaver, II [D-Mo.], chairman of the CBC, said in a written statement: "Today, we see the great length to which some of my colleagues will go in an attempt to discredit the Attorney General - a member of President Obama's Administration - as we near the 2012 election. For over 15 months, Attorney General Eric Holder and the Department of Justice have cooperated with the Committee's inquiry. The Obama Administration is rightfully asserting executive privilege over the narrow subject of documents that remain at issue - the same process President Bush used six times during his presidency."

In 2008, a Democratic-controlled House held White House Counsel Harriet Myers and Chief of Staff Josh Bolten in criminal contempt for failing to turn over documents about the abrupt dismissal of seven U.S. attorneys. The House was investigating whether the prosecutors were dismissed to impede investigations of GOP lawmakers or because they declined to go after Democratic opponents of the administration. Neither Myers nor Bolten was prosecuted by the Bush Justice Department.

Seventeen Democrats - all endorsed by the National Rifle Association - voted with Republicans to pass a criminal contempt resolution against Holder by a vote of 255-67. Democrats supporting the measure were: Representatives Jason Altmire (Pa.), John Barrow (Ga.), Dan Boren (Okla.), Leonard Boswell (Iowa), Ben Chandler (Ky.), Mark Critz (Pa.), Joe Donnelly (Ind.), Kathy Hochul (N.Y.), Ron Kind (Wis.), Larry Kissell (N.C.), Jim Matheson (Utah), Mike McIntyre (N.C.), William Owens (N.Y.), Collin Peterson (Minn.), Nick Rahall (W.Va.), Mike Ross (Ark.) and Tim Walz (Minn.).

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John G. Roberts, Jr.



Clarence Thomas

YRC Worldwide pays \$11M to settle bias charges

By Sam Hananel

WASHINGTON (AP) - Trucking company YRC Worldwide Inc. will pay \$11 million to settle charges of race discrimination at its former facility in Chicago Ridge, Ill.

A federal judge in Chicago has granted preliminary approval to a consent decree between the company and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The EEOC accused a company subsidiary of subjecting black employees to a racially hostile work environment, including displays of hangman's nooses and racist graffiti. The settlement will go to as many as 324 employees who were part of two class-action cases.

YRC officials denied the charges and said isolated instances of misconduct did not reflect the real working environment. Spokeswoman Kelly Walls says the company headquartered in Overland Park, Kan., has not admitted any wrongdoing and settled the cases to avoid further legal costs.

Census shows Durham now NC's 4th-largest city

WINSTON-SALEM (AP) - Figures from the U.S. Census Bureau say Durham has squeaked past Winston-Salem by 867 people to become North Carolina's fourth-largest city.

The Winston-Salem Journal reports that the bureau said Winston-Salem grew 1.2 percent from 2010 to 2011. The city added 2,768 people to reach an estimated population of 232,385.

During the same period, Durham added 4,922 people, and its population stood at 233,252. Durham experienced a 2.2 percent growth.

This isn't the first time the two cities have swapped places. Durham edged out Winston-Salem in the 2000 Census by about 1,300 people. A round of annexations returned Winston-Salem to fourth place in 2007, although it took a challenge to the estimates for Winston-Salem to secure that spot.