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Understanding The NC NAACP Lawsuit Against Voter ID

By Cash Michaels
Editor for NCBPA

The plaintiffs' pre-trial brief in the voter identification lawsuit being heard in federal court in Winston-Salem this week, alleges that Republican lawmakers amended the strict 2013 voter ID law last summer just prior to the first federal trial because "...the State recognized that ...there was no evidence of in-person voter fraud in North Carolina, thus undermining the purported justification for the law."

The lawsuit goes on to charge that "...the statute stood to impose enormous and disproportionate burdens on minorities once it went into effect in violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and the 14th and 15th Amendments of the Constitution."

That lawsuit, *NC NAACP v. Gov. Pat McCrory*, challenges the Republican governor and the GOP-led state Legislature over passage of the 2013 voter photo identification law, which originally only required a government-issued photo ID to vote in the state. It also seeks to stop implementation before the upcoming March 15th primaries.

Because of last minute changes to the law last June, voters will be required to show a government-issued photo identification at the polls to cast a ballot, unless they have a "reasonable impediment declaration" for not having one, which didn't exist before. In that case, they would be required to fill out a form, then show some form of identification like a utility bill, verifying their name and address, in order to then cast a provisional or substitute ballot.

What has not widely been reported is that that declaration can be challenged by another voter in that county, and the county board of elections can disallow the provisional ballot cast as a result if it determines the excuse for not having a photo ID to be false.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs - the NC NAACP, the League of Women Voters of North Carolina, and the US Justice Dept. - maintain in their brief that, "The rationale for North Carolina originally enacting a photo ID requirement was to deter in-person voter fraud. But allowing those without such ID to vote simply by signing a 'reasonable impediment' affidavit would seem to undermine that justification, particularly against an evidentiary background of no in-person voter fraud in North Carolina and the increased tax dollars that North Carolina taxpayers will need to spend implementing this law. Against that background, one must question what North Carolina's real motivation is in continuing to insist on imposing a photo ID law at all."

The brief goes on to allege that the reasonable impediment requirement effectively creates a barrier for African-Americans and Hispanics to constitutionally exercise their right to vote, because they're more likely than whites not to have a government-issued identification, like a driver's license. That, plaintiffs' attorneys say, is a violation of Section 2 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which prohibits the state from "imposing or

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N.C. A&T student Angelica Willis

NC student's computer teaching draws White House praise

GREENSBORO (AP) - The White House is honoring a North Carolina college student for spearheading a group in Guilford County that is developing a computer science-based program for at-risk youth.

The White House issued a statement Jan. 21 saying North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University undergraduate Angelica Willis is being honored next week. The computer science student is behind an initiative developing an entrepreneurship and design space in Greensboro.

Willis is one of nine people from across the country being honored by the White House for their leadership in expanding access to computer science education. Next week's program will feature remarks by President Obama's senior adviser Valerie Jarrett, Acting Education Secretary John King and others.

Willis is also a student ambassador through the White House Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) All-Stars program.

Excellence is a Mantra for A&T's Angelica Willis

N.C. A&T State Public Information

Junior computer science major Angelica Willis made a decision to leave North Carolina A&T State University and the entire world in a better condition than she found it.

"That may seem sort of morbid, however, I believe that it is our duty as human beings to take advantage of the most opportunities, do the most good, and inspire as many people as possible in the finite number of years we all have on this planet," she said.

Willis is maintaining a perfect 4.0 grade point average and finds her motivation through being an innovator.

"There is a saying, 'Excellence is not a skill. It is an attitude.' I wholeheartedly agree," she said. "I am an innovator because I strive for excellence in all aspects of my life."

A second generation Aggie, Willis has paved her road to excellence with multiple scholarships and honors. In 2014, Willis was one of 100 winners of the Buick Achievers National Scholarship. The 4-years scholarship pays for tuition, fees, room, board, books and other expenses. She has also received funding from the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Foundation, the Great Lakes National Scholarship Award and the Burger King Corporation.

This year, she was named a White House HBCU All-Star, a University Innovation Fellow at Stanford and an Apple HBCU Scholar. A group project she leads placed second in the Ford HBCU Community Challenge.

"I want to eventually impact the world through innovation and it is up to me to prepare myself academically, so when the opportunity presents itself, I will be ready," Willis said.

Academic excellence is nothing new for Willis. What was new for her as a freshman was a structured learning environment. From first grade through high school, Willis was a homeschool student.

"Most students come from a highly structured high school to the lower structured college environment, but my homeschool program was nowhere near as structured as traditional high school," she said.

"I embraced the increase in academic challenge that A&T provided and thrived early on because, as a homeschooled student, I had been taught by my mother to leverage every possible resource, inside and outside the classroom, in order to learn new material."

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President Barack Obama, with First Lady Michelle Obama, reacts to getting beat at Rock, Paper, Scissors during a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service event at Leckie Elementary School in Washington, D.C., Jan. 18. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

Mayor Chris Rey On Why He's Running For Us Senate

By Cash Michaels
Editor for NCBPA

Editor's note - There is a large number of African-American candidates running for office in North Carolina during the 2016 election, certainly one of the largest ever. During this campaign season, we will focus on several of the campaigns so that our readers know more about them.

Spring Lake Mayor Chris Rey sees what the impact of Washington, D.C. policies have on families and citizens in his town every day. That's why he wants to become North Carolina's next U.S. senator, so that he can go to Congress, and be a voice for those families, and advocate for policies that help them move forward, he says.

There's a specific perspective that's missing from Washington, DC," says Mayor Rey, one of four Democratic candidates competing in the March 15th US senatorial primary to face Republican incumbent Sen. Richard Burr in the Nov. 8th general election.

Rey says that many of the senators there currently may indeed be committed to fighting for the little guy, but they don't know what it means to live paycheck-to-paycheck, or be threatened with the prospect of having their utilities turned off. He says he can dutifully represent that perspective there, because average North Carolinians deserve a fighter.

"I get it, because I see it every day as a mayor," he says.

Rey was first elected mayor in 2011 after defeating a 30-year incumbent that many said was unbeatable. But "with a new vision," Rey won the seat with 76 percent of the vote. And he won reelection unopposed.

Mayor Rey takes pride in leading Spring Lake ahead of the national curve, making one of the first municipalities after he was elected to adopt the "Ban the Box" policy, which allows fair consideration of ex-felons who apply for jobs during the initial application process without revealing their criminal history until a later interview. Rey is also proud of the fact that Spring Lake was one of the first municipalities to secure body cameras for its police officers, something very much in the news now amid many controversial police shootings nationwide.

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No parole for KKK leader who killed black teen with crossbow

CHARLOTTE (AP) - North Carolina officials have denied parole for a former Ku Klux Klan leader convicted of using a crossbow and a razor-tipped arrow to kill a black teenager three days after Christmas in 1992.

The Charlotte Observer reports the N.C. Parole Commission denied parole for 56-year-old Russell Hinson, who was convicted in 1993 of killing 16-year-old Felicia Houston. Department of Public Safety spokesman Keith Acree said Tuesday that the commission made its decision last week and Hinson had been notified why parole was denied.

Court records show Houston was walking down the sidewalk at a Monroe apartment complex with two cousins when she was shot through the chest.

An all-white jury deadlocked over whether Hinson should get the death penalty, and he was sentenced to life in prison.

Justices extend bar on automatic life terms for teenagers

Republican Appointee Clarence Thomas Votes to Keep Life Terms
By Mark Sherman

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Supreme Court ruled Monday that people serving life terms for murders they committed as teenagers must have a chance to seek their freedom, a decision that could affect more than 1,000 inmates.

The justices voted 6-3 to extend a ruling from 2012 that struck down automatic life terms with no chance of parole for teenage killers. Now, even those who were convicted long ago must be considered for parole or given a new sentence.

The court ruled in the case of Henry Montgomery, who has been in prison more than 50 years, since he killed a sheriff's deputy as a 17-year-old in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1963.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing the majority opinion, said that "prisoners like Montgomery must be given the opportunity to show their crime did not reflect irreparable corruption; and if it did not, their hope for some years of life outside prison walls must be restored."

Kennedy said states do not have to go so far as to resentence people serving life terms. Instead, the states can offer parole hearings with no guarantee of release.

Louisiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania have more than 1,000 people serving life sentences for murders they committed before their 18th birthday, according to Michigan's Supreme Court filing in Montgomery's case. They are among the few states that have refused to extend the Supreme Court's ruling from 2012.

Monday's decision does not expressly foreclose judges from sentencing teenagers to a lifetime in prison. But the Supreme Court has previously said such sentences should be rare, and only for the most heinous crimes.

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