

BOE tackles voting law changes

Voter ID requirements and pre-registration elimination among topics discussed

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Concerns about voter IDs, the end of teen pre-registration and plans for 2015 elections were discussed at the Board of Elections regular meeting on Thursday, May 21, at the Forsyth County Government Center.

During the public comment session, Phyllis Walker, a volunteer with Democracy North Carolina, the voting rights coalition, spoke. She regularly registers people to vote and informs them of the state's new requirement for a government-issued photo ID to vote in 2016. She said she recently went to a food pantry at St. Paul United Methodist Church to discuss the new requirements with their clients and found many with damaged or deteriorated IDs. She showed photocopies of drivers licenses that were kept together with tape, one of which the picture was so deteriorated it was barely recognizable.

"It would be a shame on Forsyth County and this board of election for someone to show up and someone not speak to that," she said. "And they get in line and wait and have someone say 'I can't recognize who you are.'"

She was concerned because it costs

money that many of them wouldn't have to replace their licenses. BOE Director Steve Hines said that DMV offers free IDs for voting purposes, but that's for those who don't have ID at all. Hines said they could reach out to the North Carolina Board of Elections for clarification on the issue.

Forsyth BOE Chair Ken Raymond said that he hoped outreach efforts by the state BOE and other groups would let voters get the proper identification they need for 2016.

Hines said the state BOE is doing a "pretty good job" educating voters on the voter ID requirement but he said his office will also be doing outreach by speaking to various local groups.

Hines himself will be speaking at meetings of Forsyth County Senior Democrats and to a conservative group in June. He encouraged groups to contact the BOE to schedule a speaking engagement.

"I think we can take care of our own in Forsyth County and we're going to try to do that," he said.

Raymond and BOE member Fleming El-Amin praised Hines for his initiative.

Also discussed was a change that did away with 16- and 17-year-olds ability to pre-register to vote, allowing them to vote when they turn 18. He called it "an election director's nightmare."

Hines said he had 140 local teens that had to be sent a state form letter reject-

ing their pre-registration.

"In my personal opinion, that's pitiful," he said. "It's hard enough to get young folks to register, and when you send them a letter that says 'Thanks for trying, but no thanks,' it sets a bad tone for them and, unfortunately we put that bad taste in their mouth."

The letter states they won't be 18 before the next election, which is untrue for some. Hines said there were even a couple that will be 18 in late October, which is before the election but after registration ends, meaning they'll have no chance to vote this year.

The board unanimously approved letting Hines draft and send the teens another letter explaining the change in the law and encouraging them to register.

The board made tentative plans for 2015 municipal elections in Bethania, Clemmons, Kernersville, Lewisville, Rural Hall, Tobaccoville and Walkertown. The board approved a recommendation by staff to open 19 precincts for this year's Nov. 3 election, with the ability to change those plans if a statewide bond referendum is on the ballot. If a statewide bond is on the ballot, all 101 precincts would need to be opened, said Hines. By state law, voters will be informed of precinct openings and changes at least 45 days before the election.

The board also discussed moving the polling location in Precinct 302, which was located in Hanes/Lowrance Middle School. The school was closed this year because of concerns of environmental contamination. The board discussed several options, including moving it to the North Side Shopping Center and to the N.C. Cooperative Extension office, just outside the precinct. El-Amin said he would check into St. Phillips Moravian Church as a potential site as well.

Hines also talked about the County's reaction to the BOE's 2015/2016 budget. He said the County Manager was recommending the entire budget to the County Commissioners, except equipment, which would be dealt with as "pay as you go." Hines said everything was still covered; the funds were just allocated in a different way for equipment because of uncertainty of what would be certified for use by the state BOE.

The state BOE will hold a hearing on voter ID procedures on Tuesday, June 9 from 5 to 7 p.m. on the fourth floor of the Forsyth County Government Center. The next Forsyth BOE meeting will be June 11th at 4 p.m. on the second floor of the Government Center. The BOE can be contacted at 336-703-2800.

Fight

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Gatewood assists the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, president of the N.C. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, based in Durham. Barber initially organized HKonJ, which held its first rally in 2007.

HKonJ is an affiliate of the Moral Monday movement. It was formed to protest actions by the N.C. General Assembly that affected civil rights and social justice and push reforming legislation.

According to its website, HKonJ is made up of members from the more than 125 North Carolina State Conference NAACP branches, youth councils, high school and college chapters from the four corners of the state and members and friends of over 160 other social justice organizations.

Gatewood told the audience at St. Philips on May 21: "We're an inclusive movement because we believe every human being deserves justice." He said the moral movement is a coalition of various races and interests who want justice.

"It's time for a moral movement," he said.

Gatewood used references from the Bible and stressed that the moral movement is rooted in the morality of Jesus Christ.

"If they can win off lies, we certainly ought to be able to win with truth," he said. "If they can win on the wrong side of history, the wrong side of God, then why can't we win with God?"

N.C. NAACP v. McCrory was filed after North Carolina passed a law in 2013 that the moral movement says is designed to disenfranchise African-American and other anti-racism voters.

The law covers several areas called repressive to voting rights, including: It requires voters to show government-issued ID cards, shortens early voting by a week; ends same-day registration; increases the number of poll observers who can challenge a voter's eligibility; and

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-Bishop Todd Fulton

eliminates preregistration for high school students. The law also ends the practice of voting for every candidate of a single party with a simple stroke, called straight-ticket voting.

May told the audience on May 21 that he had hesitations about "some of the movements going around today," but a friend told May that he trusted Barber. He said he is not following a movement per se. "Get on board with this. Follow me to freedom," May said. "But don't follow me because I know what I'm doing. There're people I trust." He said he trusts several individuals in the movement, including Barber, and he's following them.

"I trust these individuals, and that's who I'm following as I follow Christ," May said.

May called for a "people's campaign" in Winston-Salem next year, in which people can tell their stories regarding fighting injustice.

Bishop Todd Fulton, president of the Ministers' Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity, told the audience he grew up in Happy Hill Gardens, a community across the street from the St. Philips Heritage Center. He mentioned a slave who was affiliated with St. Philips, who, after he was freed, was one of the first former slaves to buy property in Happy Hills. Fulton said he moved from slavery to self-sufficiency.

"Moral Monday is a necessary moment. This emancipation day is a necessary moment," Fulton said, "but I want to put in your heart an even greater necessary moment. Right here in Forsyth County, in Winston-Salem, we are at the top of the list of food insecurity" meaning "kids are going to bed hungry at night."

Fulton says this is a great day to focus on not only what is happening outside Winston-Salem, but also in the city.

"We cannot sign up to the betrayal of silence" when Winston-Salem has kids are going to bed hungry.

Fulton later said that the ministers' conference is going to partner with the moral movement heading into July 13.

The Rev. Terrance Harris, who works with youth through the L.I.T. City initiative, said that his organization also will partner with the movement. He works with youth in marginalized communities of Winston-Salem, primarily through character education, mentoring, sports outreach and artistic expression.

"We want kids to flourish," Harris said. "Any organization that has that goal in mind, we want to partner [with them] for the common good."

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