

Blame game follows NBA's removal of Charlotte All-Star game



Gov. McCrory

BY JONATHAN DREW AND ANNA GRONWOLD
ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — The NBA All-Star Game's exit from North Carolina because of a law limiting protections for LGBT people represents some of the worst publicity yet for Republican Gov. Pat McCrory's re-election campaign, even as he dismisses the move as political correctness gone too far.

The 2017 event's departure from Charlotte deprives the state of an estimated \$100 million economic impact and comes after the law prompted PayPal and Deutsche Bank to cancel plans to add hundreds of jobs. The law known best for its restrictions on transgender bathroom access looms large in an election season that includes one of the nation's most closely watched governor's races.

On Friday, McCrory told Charlotte radio station WFAE that the NBA's decision was "total P.C. B.S."

"It's an insult to our city. It's an insult to our state. And I think it sets a dangerous precedent of the corporate sports and entertainment elite basically asking for a quid pro quo on legislation or else they'll deny their service," he said.

Shortly after the NBA's announcement Thursday night, the governor, who promotes himself as pro-business, issued a statement lashing out at the sports and entertainment industries, the "liberal media" and his opponent in the fall race, the state's Democratic Attorney General Roy Cooper.

Cooper has refused to defend the law in court, while McCrory filed a federal lawsuit seeking to uphold it.

The law, enacted in March, requires transgender people to use restrooms in many public buildings that correspond to the sex on their birth certificates. It also excludes sexual orientation and gender identity from statewide antidiscrimination protections.

Republicans, including McCrory, are likely to maintain their rhetoric surrounding the law known as HB2, banking on conservative voters in rural areas who support the law, said Michael Bitzer, a political science professor at Catawba College.

"If you are seen as compromising or trying to find some way out of this, you will simply get hammered by your core base supporters," he said.

Still, Bitzer said that if more events pull out of the state, it will be hard for voters to ignore the law's impact. The NCAA, which has 2017 basketball tournament games scheduled in Greensboro, issued a policy shortly after the North Carolina law passed requiring host sites to demonstrate that they are "free of discrimination."

"When it comes to these kinds of events, maybe future NCAA basketball tournaments, I just have to wonder when that breaking point is over one's partisanship," Bitzer said.

Local tourism officials estimated that the NBA All-Star Game's economic impact would likely have ranked second in Charlotte's history, behind the \$164 million brought in by the 2012 Democratic National Convention. The annual exhibition basketball game showcasing the league's stars draws visitors from around the country and is held in a different city each year.

"It's definitely going to hit us pretty hard," said Morgan Conroy, marketing director for The Bottle Cap Group, which owns several bars and restaurants in Charlotte.

Cancellations of special events booked at the group's Slate Billiards and Oak Room for the week of the All-Star Game are expected to deprive the company of an estimated \$300,000 in sales, Conroy said. Conroy compared that amount to the \$20,000 to \$100,000 in sales at the company's venues on the day of a home NFL game.

Around the state, entertainers including Bruce Springsteen have canceled con-

certs to protest the law, while 68 businesses signed an amicus brief urging a federal judge to block the provision on bathroom access.

Lawyers for the companies - including General Electric Co., Microsoft Corp. and United Airlines Inc. - wrote that the law "is already damaging their ability to recruit and retain a diverse workforce and is imposing a substantial disincentive to investment and commerce in the State, directly impacting their bottom line."

Cooper's campaign was quick to criticize McCrory over the NBA's move, issuing a statement saying: "While the economic consequences of HB2 grow, Governor McCrory continues to pass the blame onto others while refusing to take any action to stop the bleeding."

State Sen. Jeff Jackson, a Democrat whose district includes part of Charlotte, put the blame for the NBA's move squarely on McCrory, saying the governor is "so closely tied to the issue."

"There is a very good chance the All-Star Game just cost him the election," he said.

However, Republican strategist Dee Stewart said polling data suggests McCrory's position on the LGBT law won't hurt him because other issues are more important to voters.

"With so many issues on voters' minds today like national security, our economic recovery and the need to take care of our vets ... I don't believe that HB2 will sway many votes either way," said Stewart, who is not involved with McCrory's campaign.

How N.C. is reaching young black males about HIV/AIDS

BY CASH MICHAELS
FOR THE CHRONICLE

If there is one demographic statistically most at risk for contracting the HIV virus, and subsequently the AIDS disease, it's young black males, ages 13-24. And the situation is "not improving."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, 73 percent of new diagnosed HIV cases are African-American men, 57 percent of whom are classified as gay or bisexual, and 39 percent of that group is between the ages of 13 to 24.

Alarming, a stunning 87 percent of new cases in that age range occurred between 2005 and 2014.

What can be done to reach this young demographic with effective HIV/AIDS education and prevention, especially when the lifestyle of young gay men is still considered taboo in the black community?

"This is something both alarming, and unfortunately, true," says State HIV/STD Director Jacquelyn Clymore with the Epidemiology Branch of the Division of Health, the N.C. Dept. of Health and Human Services, confirming the same HIV infection among that young black male demographic.

"We have a growingly disproportionate HIV epidemic among young [gay] men, and that is particularly true among young minorities, particularly African-Americans. It is alarming, and very, very concerning to all of us working with HIV and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases), and it is a health disparity that is not improving."

Clymore says there are a lot of "different reasons" for that, but that her department is mobilizing every resource it has to find answers. New HIV infections for black males 13 to 24 have seen a steady to quick rise in the state over the past five to ten years, she says.

And Clymore confirmed that many of North Carolina's more urban counties, led by Mecklenburg, Wake and Forsyth, have the lion's share of young black male HIV cases because it's easier for young black gay men to live in those more populated urban communities, as opposed to rural areas.

"It's where they can meet people, and avoid the stigma and judgment of being both HIV and gay," Director Clymore says.

Her department was awarded a CAPUS grant to address health inequities in

HIV in minority communities to overcome barriers in testing, in getting care, and staying in care.

The grant helped fund a men's clinic in Raleigh and Durham to help identify HIV carriers and get them the care that they needed, including new medications to help prevent any further spread of the HIV virus from one partner to the other. The are other programs to help with education and prevention that Clymore feels gives those battling the deadly disease more tools to fight with than they had even five years ago.

Many of the new prevention drugs, however, are expensive and not covered, so there is still a struggle to bring down the costs for those who need them.

Another program is called "Safe Places," which is being conducted in seven areas of the state run by young black men for young black men, working on HIV screening and education.

"We are encouraging young men to refer each other to these groups," Director Clymore said.

For more information or questions about any of the state's HIV/AIDS programs, contact Jacquelyn.Clymore@DHH.S.NC.gov.

Barber continued. "It is no longer acceptable in the state of North Carolina to play politics with the lives of black men and black women, and hope the civil rights community and our allies stand by quietly. We must all cry out against this injustice committed in our names. United, we can bring about a lasting change."

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NAACP
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innocent men, Dontae and Calvin, until they are set free and their convictions vacated.

"This miscarriage of justice must end and courageous leadership must emerge."

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