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NC Republicans see positives with voter restrictions; NAACP critical

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — With all the legal wrangling and vocal protests about North Carolina's new election changes, you'd think legislators who helped pass the wide-reaching 2013 law might keep quiet about that support as General Assembly elections approach. Actually, they're actively taking credit for the law — or at least it's most publicized provision. In mailers and on a television ad early in the fall campaign, a handful of North Carolina Senate Republicans seeking re-election are highlighting their votes for a bill that will soon require people to show valid photo identification to vote in person. That's because the idea of voter ID remains popular and reinforces a promise many lawmakers made to pass it when they first got elected. "To stop fraud and guarantee fair and honest elections, Chad Barefoot passed voter ID," says a mailer authorized by Barefoot, a first-term Wake County Republican senator.

"Phil Berger didn't back down. He fought for our voter ID law," the narrator in the TV commercial for the Senate leader says. Their House GOP counterparts intend to trumpet voter ID leading to November, too.

The elections law approved by the GOP-led legislature and signed by Gov. Pat McCrory requires citizens to show one of several types of photo identification cards to vote by 2016. This year, voters only are being asked if they have an ID and told how to get one if they don't.

Critics say the GOP campaign materials, however, don't describe other changes contained in the law that took effect this year. The law reduced early voting from 17 days to ten, ended same-day registration during the early-voting period and prohibited counting votes cast in the wrong precinct. Straight-party voting also ended.

"They don't talk about all of the provisions that make it harder for North Carolina to participate in the election," said Sen. Josh Stein, D-Wake, the Senate's deputy minority leader.

These changes and the pending photo ID mandate have created a rallying cry for opponents of the Republican agenda at the General Assembly, anchoring the "Moral Monday" movement. It's also spawned four separate lawsuits — including three federal cases — that call the measure discriminatory to minority voters.

A panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals will meet in Charlotte this week to hear arguments on an injunction to prevent elements in the law already implemented in the May primary from being used in the fall election.

"Our lawyers are battling in the courts, and we believe ultimately we will be victorious," the Rev. William Barber, president of the state NAACP, one lawsuit plaintiff. "We're deeply concerned about the (voter) suppression that all these laws could cause."

Republicans disagree the broader voting law is discriminatory. They point to numbers from the May primary showing overall black turnout was higher compared to 2010.

Campaign materials on the election law are focusing on voter ID because it's "something that most of the electorate is familiar with" compared to the other rule changes, North Carolina Senate Republican Caucus director Ray Martin said.

"This is common sense, popular legislation and it is part of our record, and we intend on running for re-election on it in the fall," said Josh Thomas, director of the Republican House Caucus.

An Elon University Poll released last week found 68 percent of registered voters and 72 percent of all residents surveyed supporting the new law, as described using the voter ID requirement only.

Those levels of support have remained roughly at the same level in the Elon poll for the past two years. While incredibly favored by Republicans — none of the Elon polls reviewed had GOP support below 94 percent, unaffiliated voters also favored it 3-to-1. Even Democrats were split on it in last week's poll — 49 percent to 48 percent.

Elon poll director Kenneth Fernandez said it may be a smart strategy for Republicans to highlight voter ID to galvanize the GOP base and attract other voters.



Ms. Alexine Miller and Victoria Phillips were enjoying CenterFest on Saturday, Sept. 20. See more pictures on page 13.

Black women's group criticizes NFL

By Jesse J. Holland

WASHINGTON (AP) — A leading black women's group is calling the NFL's decision not to include any African-American women as consultants on domestic violence "unacceptable."

The Black Women's Roundtable, made up of female leaders who represent black women and girls, said it appreciated the league's Monday decision to bring in three domestic violence experts as consultants.

"However, your lack of inclusion of women of color, especially black women who are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence and sexual assault; and the fact that over 66% of the NFL players are made up of African-Americans, is unacceptable," the group said in a Tuesday letter. Civil rights activist Rev. Jesse Jackson has also criticized the NFL's decision to hire three white female domestic violence experts.

The NFL on Wednesday said its attempt to curb domestic violence goes beyond those consultants.

"These issues are too important to be the responsibility of only a small team of individuals and require a collaborative effort involving a very diverse group of people," NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said. "To be successful and make a real difference, the entire NFL will be responsible for the development and implementation of education, training and support programs."

McCarthy also pointed out that part of the NFL's leadership team addressing domestic violence includes the NFL's director of player engagement and education, Deana Garner, and the vice president of strategic development and operations in player engagement, Kim Fields. Both are black.

The Black Women's Roundtable said black women are the most likely group of women to experience domestic violence, and are nearly three times as likely to die as a result of domestic violence than white women.

The group has requested a meeting with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, who has been criticized for his handling of Ray Rice's domestic violence case.

Rice was originally handed a two-game suspension in July under the NFL's personal conduct policy after he was charged with assault for the Feb. 15 attack on his then-fiancee. He was indefinitely suspended after a video surfaced showing Rice punching Janay Palmer, now his wife.

The NFL players' union is now appealing Rice's indefinite suspension.

NC conservative group wants death penalty reviewed

RALEIGH (AP) — Some North Carolina political conservatives want state lawmakers to consider whether to replace the death penalty with life in prison without parole due to recently vacated murder cases.

The group North Carolina Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty said this week the General Assembly should re-evaluate capital punishment.

A judge two weeks ago ordered the release of half brothers — one the longest-serving death-row inmate and the other serving life in prison — after overturning their convictions related to an 11-year-old girl's slaying. The judge cited new DNA evidence.

Republicans at the legislature passed a law last year designed to resume capital punishment after years of legal delays.

The group's coordinator is Republican consultant Ballard Everett. Group members include current or former GOP chairmen in Nash, Wake and Durham counties.



Mrs. Peggy Delores Johnson Tapp, seated, was honored by the community Sept. 21. She is shown with her son, Claiborn Tapp, III. See story and photos on page 2.

Holder Interview: Feds launch policing bias study

By Eric Tucker

WASHINGTON (AP) — Broadening its push to improve police relations with minorities, the Justice Department has enlisted a team of criminal justice researchers to study racial bias in law enforcement in five American cities and recommend strategies to address the problem nationally, Attorney General Eric Holder said Tuesday.

The police shooting last month of an unarmed black 18-year-old in Ferguson, Missouri underscored the need for the long-planned initiative, Holder said in an interview with The Associated Press.

He said the three-year project could be a "silver lining" if it helps ease racial tensions and "pockets of distrust that show up between law enforcement and the communities that they serve."

"What I saw in Ferguson confirmed for me that the need for such an effort was pretty clear," Holder said.

The five cities have not yet been selected, but the researchers involved in the project say they're bringing a holistic approach that involves training police officers on issues of racial bias, data analysis and interviews with community members. They expect to review police behavior in the cities with the hope of building community trust and creating an evidence-based model that could be applied more broadly.

Though the project was in the works before Ferguson, the Aug. 9 shooting death of Michael Brown by white police officer Darren Wilson spotlighted longstanding concerns about diversity in policing. The Ferguson police force is overwhelmingly white even though the suburban St. Louis city is roughly 70 percent black. A 2013 report by the Missouri attorney general's office found that Ferguson police stopped and arrested black drivers nearly twice as often as white motorists, but were less likely to find contraband among the black drivers.

Holder, who visited Ferguson last month to meet with Brown's parents, community members and with investigators, said he was struck by the number of complaints he heard about traffic stops and the concerns from minorities about being treated unfairly during encounters with the police.

"The reality is that it certainly had a negative impact on people's view of the effectiveness and fairness of the police department," Holder said.

The Justice Department this month announced a civil rights investigation into the Ferguson police force. In the past five years, the department has launched about 20 similarly broad probes of police departments that have examined problems including use-of-force and racial bias. Holder has spoken repeatedly of his concerns of the disparate treatment of minorities by some in law enforcement, recently sharing personal anecdotes of a "humiliating" encounter with police.

In April, months after the acquittal of neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, the Justice Department announced that it was soliciting bids for a \$4.75 million racial bias project that would collect data on stops, searches, arrests and case outcomes.

On Thursday, in the next phase of the project, the department will announce that it is providing grants to a team of researchers from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, Yale University, UCLA and the Urban Institute.

"It represents, I think, an attempt for this administration to partner with researchers who are tired of tragedy being followed by embarrassment," said Phillip Atiba Goff, a UCLA professor who specializes in racial discrimination and bias and a researcher involved in the project.

David Kennedy, another team member and director of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay, called the project a "historic and tremendously exciting enterprise."

In their writings, the researchers have stressed the importance of giving minority communities a forum to air grievances about law enforcement. Their work seeks to identify and curb hidden racial biases in law enforcement that can inform a police officer's decision about whom to consider a likely suspect and when to fire a weapon. They also argue that communities are far more likely to respect their police departments if they view their authority as legitimate and fair.

In the past, the researchers have been invited to apply those principles to cities including Chicago, where they developed a program on race and reconciliation that has trained thousands of officers.

"Studies show that if people think that they are treated fairly by the police, that matters almost more than what the result is," Holder said. "If you get stopped for a traffic stop and feel that you are treated courteously and fairly, you are much more likely to accept the fact that you got a speeding ticket."

Separate from the investigation into the Ferguson police force, both the FBI and local authorities are investigating the circumstances of the shooting for potential criminal charges. Holder said the FBI-led investigation into the shooting was moving along with good cooperation from the community. He said he hoped the investigations would be concluded sooner rather than later.

"We would not be well served as a nation to have this drag out," Holder said of the investigation. "I would hope that the local investigation would be done thoroughly, would be done expeditiously in the same way that I'm insisting that this federal probe be done thoroughly and expeditiously."