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## Effects of changes on minorities at crux of NC voting trial

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - Changes to North Carolina's voting access rules finally go to trial this week, with a judge ultimately determining whether Republican legislators illegally diminished the opportunity for minorities to participate in the political process.

The U.S. Justice Department, voting and civil rights groups and individuals sued soon after the General Assembly approved an elections overhaul law in summer 2013. After interim arguments reached the U.S. Supreme Court last fall, the trial began July 13 and is expected to last two to three weeks, addressing the crux of the allegations.

Provisions being argued in a Winston-Salem federal courtroom reduced the number of days of early voting from 17 to 10, eliminated same-day registration during the early-vote period and prohibited the counting of Election Day ballots cast in the wrong precinct.

Attorneys representing those who sued contend the restrictions violate the federal Voting Rights Act and the U.S. Constitution by throwing up large electoral obstacles to minority voters historically subjected to racial bias and should be thrown out.

"We will show that the law is a calculated effort by politicians to manipulate the voting rules by targeting the very measures that African-Americans and Latino voters use at significantly higher rates than white voters," said Donita Judge, an attorney with the Advancement Project, which is representing the state NAACP in the lawsuits.

Attorneys for the state and Republican Gov. Pat McCrory, who signed the law, say there's no evidence the law will diminish the ability of black citizens to elect who they want representing them. None of the restrictions are barred by the Constitution, according to a brief previewing their case, and black voter participation increased during the 2014 elections - when changes were first implemented - compared to the 2010 elections.

"We are very confident our common-sense election laws will be upheld by the court," said Rep. David Lewis, R-Harnett, who helped shepherd the 2013 legislation.

The provision in the law setting a photo identification requirement to vote in person in 2016 won't be contested right now.

U.S. District Judge Thomas Schroeder set aside that part of the litigation after the Legislature last month changed the mandate so more people having trouble obtaining an ID can vote without one. State attorneys have now asked Schroeder to dismiss the voter ID complaints.

Plaintiffs' attorneys have 100 people on their witness list. One of them, Sandra Beatty of Greenville, a black double amputee and legally blind, Beatty said by deposition she tried to vote last October but found out later the ballot failed to count because she wasn't registered.

"It would be a blessing if I was able to do it the same day and vote the same day" through same-day registration due to her transportation challenges, Beatty testified. A state's attorney pointed out later in the deposition that registration can still be completed by mail.

Schroeder isn't expected to rule immediately after this month's arguments. Rick Hasen, a professor at the University of California-Irvine School of Law and election law expert, said the U.S. government and other groups who sued will face an uphill climb to win in trial court because the Voting Rights Act standard being cited is difficult to meet.

Still, Hasen called the 2013 North Carolina law "the single biggest rollback of voting rights in one package that we've seen" since the 1965 federal voting law.

The state law was approved just after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Voting Rights Act provision requiring the Justice Department to sign off on voting changes in several states before they could be enforced. Hasen said the case ultimately could lead to "preclearance" again for North Carolina and other states if courts determine their election laws were intentionally used to discriminate.

"So the stakes are very high here," Hasen said.



President Barack Obama will address the 106th NAACP Annual Convention in Philadelphia, PA on Tuesday, July 14, at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

"We are honored to welcome President Obama back to our NAACP national convention," stated NAACP Chairman Roslyn M. Brock. "Our members are looking forward to President Obama delivering a powerful message that reinforces our commitment to being champions for civil and human rights in the 21st century."

This is the second time Mr. Obama will address the NAACP's National Convention as President of the United States. The NAACP values the opportunity to hear from elected officials, government leaders and candidates for public office.

"President Barack Obama, having spoken eloquently of grace to a grieving nation in a moment of crisis in Charleston, will now address the social and economic challenges of our time in the hometown of American freedom - Philadelphia, stated NAACP President and CEO Cornell William Brooks. Thousands of NAACP leaders, delegates, activists, youths, and supporters will welcome him to the 106th Convention of the NAACP in a moment in which his voice and our voices so desperately need to be heard. President Obama has been on the forefront of transformative change from civil rights to human rights over his term and in recent days. We in the nation eagerly anticipate his vision and plans for the difficult work ahead."

This year's convention will run from July 11 - July 15 under the theme "Pursuing Liberty in the Face of Injustice." The NAACP will focus on building a broad based agenda around voting rights, criminal justice reform, health equity, economic opportunity and education equality ahead of the 2016 presidential election. Click here to see the schedule of events; click here to register for press credentials.

## House moves to ban Confederate flag in federal cemeteries

By Andrew Taylor

WASHINGTON (AP) - The House has voted to ban the display of Confederate flags at historic federal cemeteries in the deep South - a low-profile move that prompted a outcry from supporters of the flag.

Those supporters, including some Southern conservatives, were taken by surprise by the vote and the bill's chief sponsor July 8 night called for a revote on July 9 in which members would go on record on the display of the flag.

The vote to ban the display of the flag at the cemeteries came July 7 evening after a brief debate on a measure funding the National Park Service, which maintains 14 national cemeteries, most of which contain graves of Civil War soldiers.

The proposal by Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., added language to block the Park Service from allowing private groups to decorate the graves of Southern soldiers with Confederate flags in states that commemorate Confederate Memorial Day. The cemeteries affected are the Andersonville and Vicksburg cemeteries in Georgia and Mississippi.

"The American Civil War was fought, in Abraham Lincoln's words, to 'save the last best hope of Earth,'" Huffman said in a debate in which he was the only speaker. "We honor that history without celebrating the Confederate flag and all of the dreadful things that it symbolizes."

The flag ban was adopted by a voice vote. The Park Service funding bill is scheduled for a vote on July 9.

One lawmaker who protested the move was Rep. Steve Palazzo, R-Miss.

"I strongly oppose the inclusion of this amendment, which was slipped into the bill in the dead of night with no debate," he said in a statement. "Congress cannot simply write history and strip the Confederate flag from existence. Members of Congress from New York and California cannot wipe away 150 years of Southern history with eight-of-hand tactics."

Palazzo said he would fight to make sure "the language is not included in any bill signed into law."

Pressure has mounted to ban display of the flag on state and federal property in the wake of last month's tragic murders at a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina. The accused killer, Dylann Roof, posed with the Confederate flag in online photos and reportedly has told authorities that he wanted to start a race war.

Following the lead of GOP Gov. Nikki Haley, the South Carolina Senate has voted to move the flag from the Capitol grounds and the state House was taking up the measure July 8.

But House leaders have deferred action on a plan by Bennie Thompson, a black Democrat from Mississippi, to ban Confederate images such as that contained in the Mississippi flag from being displayed in the House complex. Numerous statues of Confederate figures such as Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederate States, are also on display in the Capitol.

## Charleston mayor: Emanuel AME to be focus of museum exhibit

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) - Charleston Mayor Joe Riley Jr. says the shooting deaths of nine people at a Charleston church last month underscore the need to build an African-American history museum in the city.

Riley told The Post and Courier of Charleston that he's doubling his fundraising efforts and hopes to bring in the \$75 million needed to build the museum by the time he leaves office in January.

"An act of racial hatred makes clear the need for this museum," Riley said. "It's needed so all of us will have the chance to understand."

Organizers have been working for 15 years to create the International African American History Museum at the location of a wharf on the Cooper River, where tens of thousands of enslaved Africans set foot in North America.

Organizers had always planned an exhibit on the role of black churches, Riley said. He said that exhibit will now include a focus on last month's tragedy and Emanuel AME.

Riley plans to bring in \$25 million each from private donors, the state, and the city and county to build the museum.

So far, Riley has brought in about \$2 million in private donations, he said. But he already has met with or soon will meet with about 20 corporations, foundations or individuals to make presentations for donations.

"I want the \$25 million pledged by the time I leave office Jan. 11," he said. "I know the \$25 million can be raised."