

The Carolina Times

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62941

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

VOLUME 95 - NUMBER 12

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, MARCH 26, 2016

TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 50 CENTS

Republican Snyder blames Bureaucrats, EPA faults state In Flint water crisis

By Matthew Daly
WASHINGTON (AP) - Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder on March 17 blamed career bureaucrats in Washington and his own state for the Flint water-contamination crisis, while the head of the federal Environmental Protection Agency faulted him and other state officials.

At a contentious congressional hearing, the Republican governor repeatedly apologized for his role in the crisis, which occurred when state officials switched Flint's water supply to the Flint River two years ago to save money in the predominantly African-American city of 100,000 north of Detroit.

"Not a day or night goes by that this tragedy doesn't weigh on my mind - the questions I should have asked, the answers I should have demanded," Snyder said.

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy, for her part, faulted state officials, noting that the impoverished city was under state management when the city's water supply was switched in April 2014.

State officials did not require that the river water be treated for corrosion, and lead from aging pipes and fixtures leached into Flint homes and businesses. About 8,000 children under the age of 6 were potentially exposed to lead, and elevated lead levels have been found in at least 221 children and 104 adults in Flint. Lead contamination has been linked to learning disabilities and other problems.

"The crisis we're seeing was the result of a state-appointed emergency manager deciding that the city would stop purchasing treated drinking water and instead switch to an untreated source to save money," McCarthy said. "The state of Michigan approved that decision."

McCarthy acknowledged that the EPA should have been more aggressive in testing Flint's water and requiring changes, but she said the agency "couldn't get a straight answer" from state environmental officials about what was being done in Flint. McCarthy refused several requests by Republican lawmakers to apologize.

"It was not the EPA at the helm when this happened," she said.

The nearly four-hour hearing produced no major revelations, although Snyder for the first time acknowledged that a state law, which allows state-appointed officials to take control of troubled municipalities, failed in the case of Flint.

Several Democrats on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee called for Snyder to resign, while Utah Rep. Jason Chaffetz, the oversight panel's chairman, and other Republicans said McCarthy should step down.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said McCarthy understands how serious Flint's problems are, adding: "There's a strong case to make that the United States of America has never had a better administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency than Gina McCarthy."

Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, the panel's senior Democrat, said Snyder would likely face criminal charges if he were running a business - a dig at venture capitalist Snyder's off-repeated claim to run state government like a business.

Besides facing charges, Cummings said of a corporate CEO in Snyder's shoes, "the board of

directors would throw him out, and the shareholders would revolt."

Snyder told lawmakers that officials at the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality repeatedly assured him that water being piped in from the Flint River was safe, when in reality it had dangerous levels of lead.

But Cummings said the governor should have pushed back against state experts. The committee has obtained documents "showing that people all around the governor were sounding the alarms, but he either ignored them or didn't hear them," Cummings said.

Censure vote against North Carolina GOP's 1st black chairman

By Gary D. Robertson
RALEIGH (AP) - Less than a year after the North Carolina Republican Party's first black chairman was elected over an establishment candidate, a powerful committee has reprimanded him, restricted his duties and accused him of overstepping his authority.

The state GOP's Central Committee censured Hasan Harnett on March 20 with a "no confidence" resolution related to the party's upcoming convention and its computer system.

Harnett was elected chairman last June.

The resolution alleged that Harnett also wrongly acted on personnel decisions and on handling attempts to remove party leaders.

Harnett declined to comment. Central Committee member



Hasan Harnett

Daniel Rufty on March 21 called the resolution part of a "witch hunt" to destroy Harnett because the party establishment doesn't like his reforms.

But another committee member, Rep. David Lewis, says Harnett hasn't shown leadership capacity.

Spaulding says new PAC will focus on black voter issues

(AP) - Roy Cooper's unsuccessful rival in the Democratic primary for North Carolina governor wants to create a political action committee focusing on statewide and General Assembly candidates who promote issues important to black voters.

Ken Spaulding of Durham announced March 16 the PAC will endorse candidates from "a statewide perspective" and attempt to coordinate with African American newspapers and local nonpartisan black organizations. He says in a release the PAC also will attempt to work with Bernie Sanders supporters and communicate with other minority groups.

Spaulding got 31 percent of the vote while losing the nomination to Cooper, who will now take on Republican incumbent Pat McCrory in November.



SPAULDING

Spaulding began running for governor in summer 2013.

Study: Racial disparities in Durham police traffic stops

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, (AP) - A study of six years' worth of traffic stops by the Durham Police Department shows a driver was 12 percent more likely to be black when stopped during daylight hours.

The analysis of nearly 152,000 traffic stops was requested by the department and performed by RTI International. It also showed that among male drivers only, the odds that a driver was black were 20 percent higher when stopped during daylight than when stopped at night.

A statement from RTI said the study showed the difference in the numbers declined over the six-year analysis period. Black males were most over-represented from 2010 through 2013, but by 2014, the differences in the odds of the motorist being a black male in the daylight compared to darkness were indistinguishable.



Historic Stagville Foundation hosted a Women's History Month Lecture on Sat., March 19 with a lecture by Ms. Michelle Lanier, director of the N.C. African American Heritage Commission and the Traditions and Heritage Program of the N.C. Arts Council. Her talk focused on African American women who made a impact on the state and nation in the areas of arts, history, civic engagement and business. The program was at Historic Stagville, 5828 Old Oxford Hwy. From left to right are Ms. Beverly McNeill, Historic Stagville Foundation President; Ms. Michelle Lanier, speaker; and Ms. Stephanie Cobert, Historic Stagville Site Manager.

Republicans Split Congressional Districts On Campus of North Carolina A&T

Students complain about districts

GREENSBORO (AP) - Students at North Carolina A&T University are not happy with the new congressional districts.

The districts redrawn last month split the campus of the historically black school in Greensboro.

The old plan had the school in the 12th District represented by U.S. Rep. Alma Adams, a retired college professor and North Carolina A&T graduate.

The new plan drawn in an attempt to comply with a federal court order splits the campus between the 6th District and the 13th District.

The 6th District is represented by Greensboro Republican Mark Walker. The 13th District is currently represented by Raleigh Republican George Holding.

Nine dorms are in the 6th District, six dorms are in the 13th District.

Students tell the News & Record of Greensboro the new plan dilutes their voting impact.

Black women feel jilted by Obama with Supreme Court pick

By Jesse J. Holland

WASHINGTON (AP) - Black women's groups said March 16 they feel President Barack Obama jilted them by choosing someone other than a black woman as his newest nominee for the Supreme Court.

Obama chose federal appeals court Chief Judge Merrick Garland, a white man, to replace deceased Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. Garland is the third Supreme Court nominee of Obama's presidency. "The fact that he would once again look over black women for this specific appointment is an absolute slap in the face to his top supporters," said Avis A. Jones-DeWeever, founder of the Exceptional Leadership Institute for Women.

Minority voters have been the most devoted supporters of Obama's two presidential campaigns. Black women, in particular, had the highest turnout among all racial and ethnic groups in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, and they had hoped Obama would nominate a black woman to the high court.

Besides Garland, Obama's short list included federal appeals court judges Paul Watford, who is black and Sri Srinivasan, who would have been the court's first Asian-American and the first Hindu.

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Obama selected Garland "for one reason and one reason only, and that is simply that he believes that Chief Judge Garland is the best person in America to do the job."

But many may be disappointed Obama did not choose a "judge who can add to diversity on a court that still fails to represent the richness we see in our communities," said Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center.

"Having racial diversity, in particular, has always led to better outcomes that are more representative of our communities, especially given the demographics in this country," said Lakshmi Sridaran, director of national policy and advocacy for South Asian Americans Leading Together, an advocacy group.

Over his two terms in office, Obama has chosen black women for high-ranking positions in his administration: Attorney General Loretta Lynch and United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice.

The eight-member Supreme Court has three women - Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Obama's previous nominees, Sonia Sotomayor, who is Latina, and Elena Kagan, who is white. Justice Clarence Thomas nominated by President George H.W. Bush in 1991, is the court's only African-American.

Black women may feel especially rejected, considering their large turnout in 2008 (68 percent) and 2012 (70 percent). The vast majority of them, 96 percent, voted for Obama in 2012, according to exit poll data.

By selecting Garland, Obama "does not give the respect to his most ardent supporters," said Barbara Amwine, executive director of the Transformative Justice Coalition. "The passion you saw around Sotomayor you will not see around this pick," Amwine said.

Jones-DeWeever said black women might have been inspired to lobby the Senate daily to get a black female nominee confirmed, as they did during Lynch's confirmation process. But now, Jones-DeWeever said, "I'm not motivated to lift one finger to get his nomination through."