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Rep. Larry Hall

Rep. Larry Hall named Cooper's veterans, military secretary

RALEIGH (AP) - The Democratic minority leader in the North Carolina House for the previous two legislative sessions will leave the General Assembly to join Gov. Roy Cooper's administration as secretary of veterans and military affairs.

Rep. Larry Hall of Durham was by Cooper's side Jan. 13 when the governor named him the department's next leader and Dr. Mandy Cohen the state health and human services secretary.

Hall is a Durham attorney who served in the Marine Corps for 16 years. He joined the House in 2006 and became minority leader in 2013. He didn't seek the leadership job again last month.

Hall "will be working closely with people in Washington concerning our military bases and he will be working to make sure that North Carolina veterans are treated like they should be because of their courageous service on behalf of our country," Cooper said at an Executive Mansion news conference.

Hall, 61, said he understands the military's importance to North Carolina's economy and well-being. He grew up at Fort Bragg while his father served in the Army and was stationed at Camp Lejeune.

"I'm certainly glad to serve in another capacity here in North Carolina, and one of my great loves is the veteran population and the military population" in the state, Hall said.

The veterans and military affairs agency became a Cabinet-level department in 2015. Gov. Pat McCrory appointee Cornell Wilson was the department's first secretary.

Hall said later Jan. 13 that he would resign from the House early next week as he begins his new job. Durham County Democratic activists will meet to pick someone who will serve out the remainder of his term through the end of 2018.

Black lawmakers say Sessions unfit to be attorney general

By Mary Clare Jalonick

WASHINGTON (AP) - Black lawmakers said Jan. 11 that Sen. Jeff Sessions at times has shown hostility toward civil rights, making him unfit to be attorney general, as a 1986 letter from the widow of Martin Luther King Jr. surfaced strongly expressing opposition to the Alabama senator.

In the second day of confirmation hearings, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, Sessions' colleague, and Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., who was beaten when he marched for civil rights in the 1960s, warned that Sessions could move the country backward if confirmed as Donald Trump's top law enforcement official.

Booker said the "arc of the universe does not just naturally curve toward justice, we must bend it," and the country needs an attorney general who is determined to bend it.

"Senator Sessions' record does not speak to that desire, intention or will," Booker said, noting his opposition to overhauling the criminal justice system and his positions on other issues affecting minority groups.

Lewis told the Senate Judiciary Committee that the country needs "someone who's going to stand up, speak up and speak out for the people that need help, the people who have been discriminated against."

And Louisiana Rep. Cedric Richmond, the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, urged senators to reject Sessions' eventual nomination because he has "advanced an agenda that will do great harm" to African-Americans.

The lawmakers' criticism echoed Cornell Brooks, the head of the NAACP, who told the panel earlier in the day that the organization "firmly believes" Sessions is unfit to serve.

The Alabama Republican was rejected by the Judiciary panel in 1986 for a federal judgeship amid accusations that he had called a black attorney "boy" - which he denied - and the NAACP and ACLU "un-American."

Sessions on Jan. 10 called those accusations "damnable" and said he is "totally committed to maintaining the freedom and equality that this country has to provide to every citizen."

The lawmakers' testimony brought two days of confirmation hearings for Sessions to a close. He has solid support from the Senate's Republican majority and from some Democrats in conservative-leaning states, and is expected to easily win confirmation. But Democrats are using the hearings to try to show that Sessions - and Trump's administration - won't be committed to civil

rights, a chief priority of the Justice Department during the Obama administration.

On Jan. 10, the NAACP released a 1986 letter from Coretta Scott King, widow of the civil rights leader, in which she said that Sessions' actions as a federal prosecutor were "reprehensible" and that he used his office "in a shabby attempt to intimidate and frighten elderly black voters."

"Mr. Sessions has used the awesome power of his office to chill the free exercise of the vote by black citizens in the district he now seeks to serve as a federal judge," Mrs. King wrote. Mrs. King died in 2006.

Richmond complained during his testimony that putting the all-black panel at the end of the hearings was akin to being made to go to the "back of the bus," a reference to 1960s segregation laws. During his testimony, many members of the Congressional Black Caucus sat in the audience.

Not everyone on the panel criticized Sessions. Three men who had worked with Sessions in Alabama and Washington, all black, testified in support. Jesse Seroyer, a former U.S. marshal for the Middle District of Alabama, said Sessions is a "good honest person who is going to give all he has to make sure everyone is treated fairly under the law."

Discipline and Suspensions in Durham Public Schools: Past, Present and Future

Thursday, January 19

6: PM

Hayti Heritage Center

804 Old Fayetteville Street

Members of the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People and the Durham People's Alliance's Education Committees invite you to attend a presentation by the co-chairs of the Superintendent's Code of Student Conduct Task Force, Superior Court Judge Elaine O'Neal and Executive Director of Student Support Services Elizabeth Shearer. They will present on the work of the task force and the five-year implementation plan Durham Public Schools launched this past school year. The presentation will be followed by a panel consisting of the presenters, Superintendent Bert L'Homme and other key school and community actors in the education system.

This event is an exciting opportunity for the community to learn more about what has been done by our schools to stop the flow of children into our court systems and away from out-of-school suspensions. We hope to hear how Durham Public Schools plans to address racial disparities in school suspensions and how a more positive, supportive school climate can be fostered for all children. We as a community are invested in seeing all students succeed without regard to race, socio-economic status or station in life. Don't miss this powerful community gathering in support of our children!

President Obama Says Farewell, But Not Goodbye

By Mary L. Datcher (Chicago Defender/NNPA Member)

On Tuesday, the world set eyes on Chicago, and this time it wasn't about the discussion of the latest homicide stats or a family member being lost violently to gunfire. This time is all about President Barack Obama returning to the town where his political career was birthed nearly 20 years ago.

The moment the announcement was made public of the president's farewell speech, taking place in his hometown, the race was on and popping to snag a ticket to McCormick Place.

In a packed-out audience of 18,000, supporters waited as patiently as they did on Saturday, to again be a part of history. As he addressed a much smaller crowd than that fateful historical night of his presidential win on Nov. 4, 2008, in Grant Park, Tuesday night's address drew hordes of media outlets from around the world.

Showing his stance on the importance of standing on our nation's democracy, Obama said, "For 240 years, our nation's call to citizenship has given work and purpose to each new generation. It's what led patriots to choose republic over tyranny, pioneers to trek west, slaves to brave that makeshift railroad to freedom. It's what pulled immigrants and refugees across oceans and the Rio Grande, pushed women to reach for the ballot, powered workers to organize," he said. "It's why GIs gave their lives at Omaha Beach and Iwo Jima; Iraq and Afghanistan - and why men and women from Selma to Stonewall were prepared to give theirs as well."

Economic Revival

Not losing a beat, Obama drives home the reboot of the economy under his administration as the nation teetered on the worst recession since the Great Depression upon entering the Oval office.

"If I had told you eight years ago that America would reverse a great recession, reboot our auto industry, and unleash the longest stretch of job creation in our history... If I had told you that we would open up a new chapter with the Cuban people, shut down Iran's nuclear weapons program without firing a shot, and take out the mastermind of 9/11... If I had told you that we would win marriage equality, and secure the right to health insurance for another 20 million of our fellow citizens - you might have said our sights were set a little too high." The audience cheers and a quiet calm looms over the audience, waiting for his next words.

"But we're not where we need to be. All of us have more work to do. After all, if every economic issue is framed as a struggle between a hardworking white middle class and underserving minorities, then workers of all shades will be left fighting for scraps while the wealthy withdraw further into their private enclaves. If we decline to invest in the children of immigrants, just because they don't look like us, we diminish the prospects of our own children - because those brown



First Lady Michelle Obama (center) and Malia Obama join President Barack Obama on stage after his farewell speech at McCormick Place in Chicago, Ill. (Tito Garcia/Chicago Defender/Real Times Media)