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# The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDED

VOLUME 96 - NUMBER 8

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2017

TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 50 CENTS

## Racial bias alleged in N. Carolina county's election method

By Gary D. Robertson  
RALEIGH (AP) - A national civil rights organization sued Feb. 13 on behalf of black voters in a rural North Carolina county, alleging how local officials are elected constitutes racial discrimination.

The federal lawsuit, one of many filed recently by North Carolina black voters or their allies alleging Voting Rights Act violations, seeks to eliminate the method by which the five commissioners are elected in Jones County, 100 miles southeast of Raleigh.

A federal appeals court struck down a 2013 law approved by the Republican-controlled legislature, requiring photo identification to vote, reducing the number of early voting days and eliminating same-day registration during early voting. A trial judge is now weighing whether Greensboro council districts were redrawn improperly by state lawmakers for racial and political reasons.

Boards and officials in Jones County, with a population of 10,000, are defendants in Monday's (Feb. 13) lawsuit.

Nearly one-third of county residents are African American. They constitute a cohesive voting bloc, but a black candidate hasn't been elected to the county commission since 1994, and the at-large election method is to blame, according to the lawsuit filed for four voters in part by the Washington-based Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

"Voting discrimination is alive and well in North Carolina," committee executive director Kristen Clarke said in a conference call announcing the lawsuit. "This case makes clear the real barriers to democracy that we continue to see today."

The commission races are county-wide, with each voter choosing up to five candidates in party primaries and the general election. The top five vote-getters win. While black candidates have been supported strongly by the African American voters, "bloc voting" by other members of the electorate consistently defeat them, the lawsuit says.

Democrats comprise the largest party by registration in the county at just over 50 percent. In 2010 and 2014, a black Democrat advanced to the general election, but "white voters overwhelmingly did not support the African-American nominee," leading to an all-white commission of four Democrats and one Republican. The next commission election is in 2018.

"Countywide elections in Jones County show

a clear pattern of racially-polarized voting," the lawsuit says, alleging the voting system dilutes the black vote in Jones County, which would be a Voting Rights Act violation.

Jimmie Hicks, an attorney representing Jones County, said the county was reviewing the lawsuit but declined further comment.

Black voters petitioned the commission in 2014 to change the voting system so commissioners are elected in specific districts, but it hasn't been addressed, according to the lawsuit. The voters who sued say at least one district could be majority-black.

"We don't have a voice in the direction of the county," plaintiff Lindora Toudle, a lifelong Jones County resident, said in the conference call. "They don't have to listen to us and as result, nothing changes."

The litigation cited last July's ruling by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals throwing out the General Assembly's wide-ranging 2013 voting law. The ruling, which state officials have appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, quoted another Supreme Court opinion involving North Carolina redistricting that cautioned "racial discrimination and racially polarized voting are not ancient history."

### Death row inmate resented amid discrimination allegations

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) - A judge has resented an inmate on North Carolina's death row amid allegations that prosecutors discriminated on the basis of race during jury selection.

The Charlotte Observer reports the N.C. Center for Death Penalty Litigation said prosecutors purposefully excluded the only qualified black juror from the 1997 jury that decided the sentence for 39-year-old Phillip Antwan Davis.

In a news release sent Monday, the center said prosecutors had attended a training session where they learned how to give excuses for striking jurors. It said such excuses were used to hide the intent of keeping blacks off the jury. It's illegal to strike jurors based on race.



MICHAEL JOHNSON

### Black lawmakers dismayed by Trump's invite to black reporter

By Erica Werner

WASHINGTON (AP) - Members of the Congressional Black Caucus expressed bafflement and dismay Feb. 16 after President Donald Trump asked a black reporter to set up a meeting with them.

Rep. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina said there is "an element of disrespect" in Trump's comment to journalist April Ryan, asking her whether she was friends with CBC members and could convene a get-together.

"He's not going to ask any other reporter to do that for any other group, so why did he do that to her? I think that was pretty instructive to me," said Clyburn, a veteran lawmaker and member of the House Democratic leadership.

When asked whether Trump was implying that all black people know each other, Clyburn said, "I don't know what his implications were but that's my interpretation."

The chairman of the CBC, Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-La., issued a statement late Feb. 16 saying the White House reached out to schedule a meeting with the 49-member organization and discussions were underway about a possible date.

Ryan is a longtime White House reporter and Washington bureau chief for American Urban Radio Networks. She asked Trump at his East Room press conference on Thursday whether he planned to include the CBC "in your conversations with your urban agenda, your inner-city agenda."

The president responded by asking Ryan whether the CBC are "friends of yours" and remarking, "I tell you what, do you want to set up the meeting?"

Ryan herself responded over Twitter: "I am a journalist not a convener! But thank you for answering my questions."

And the CBC noted over Twitter that the group sent Trump a letter in January outlining areas where they could work together, "but you never wrote us back. Sad!" The organization later issued a statement saying they were in talks with the White House about a possible meeting.

Richmond's statement said it was remarkable that Trump had not responded to their letter.

"President Trump has been in office for almost a month and the Congressional Black Caucus - which at a historic 49 members is almost a fourth of the House Democratic Caucus and represents millions of African-Americans - did not hear from the White House until we introduced ourselves on Twitter after the White House press conference today."

Rep. Joyce Beatty of Ohio said: "We have a rich history, we have some almost 50 members of the Congressional Black Caucus. We're not new. What a president should say is, yes, it's already on my agenda to talk to them."

Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minn., called Trump's remarks another "abuse of protocol."

"Donald Trump knows how to call Cedric Richmond, our chair, and that is what he should do. And then we'll (the CBC) sit together and see if it's in our interest" to meet with Trump, Ellison said.

Trump specifically mentioned a meeting with Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., and said the lawmaker canceled because it would be bad for him politically. Cummings, in response, said, "I have no idea why President Trump would make up a story about me like he did today."

Associated Press writers Stephen Ohlemacher and Richard Lardner contributed.

### NCCU Trustee Michael Johnson Provides \$1 Million Endowment for NCCU School of Business

North Carolina Central University Board of Trustees member Michael P. Johnson made a \$250,000 gift to the School of Business that became the catalyst for establishing a new \$1 million endowment.

Johnson's original donation was matched by a gift from the University of North Carolina General Administration. An additional match was received by the U.S. Department of Education's Title III Part B program - creating the \$1 million total endowment.

"Trustee Johnson's gift has created energy - and synergy - at NCCU, where we provide our students a high quality education and produce leaders who are equipped to compete in the global marketplace," said NCCU Interim Chancellor Johnson O. Akinleye.

"The positive impact from this gift will be felt by our students in this decade and for many decades to come. Our goal is to continue growing the university endowment and the generosity of Mr. Johnson enables NCCU to do just that," said NCCU Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement Dr. Harriet Frink Davis.

The Michael P. Johnson Endowment will boost NCCU's growing School of Business just as plans are underway to construct a new state-of-the-art facility for the school on campus. Johnson said his determination to assist students attending NCCU stems from personal experience.

"NCCU not only provided me with a great education, but with a vision of what I could achieve," said Johnson, a football recruit from East St. Louis, Ill., who graduated with a degree in business administration in 1969 before launching a successful career in corporate leadership.

"I had never seen a black business person in corporate America until I came to N.C. Central," Johnson says. "While in school, I encountered many role models who helped clear the way for me to follow my vision." His first job was at RCA Corporation.

Johnson, who now lives in Tulsa, Okla., has been a longtime supporter of the university, often assisting with key academic initiatives and student scholarship needs. He rose through the ranks at companies such as Lockheed Martin, Amoco Corp., and The Williams Companies. In 2008, he founded J&A Group LLC, a management and business-consulting firm. He also has served on several corporate boards, including CenterPoint Energy, Buffalo Wild Wings and Quiktrip Corp. Johnson was awarded NCCU's Distinguished Alumni honor at the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference basketball finals in spring 2016.

### Watchdog: Number of anti-Muslim hate groups on the rise

By Jesse J. Holland

WASHINGTON (AP) - The number of anti-Muslim hate groups in the United States has nearly tripled since 2015, due in part to radical Islamic attacks and the incendiary rhetoric of last year's presidential campaign, the Southern Poverty Law Center says.

The number of anti-Muslim groups increased from 34 in 2015 to 101 in 2016, the SPLC said in a report released Feb. 15. The number of hate groups overall tracked by the watchdog group also increased to 917 last year from 892 the previous year, the report said.

"2016 was an unprecedented year for hate," said Mark Potok, a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The report blamed the increase in part on "incendiary rhetoric" from the campaign of now-President Donald Trump, which included threats to ban Muslim immigrants and "mandate a registry of Muslims in America." It also cited as factors "the unrelenting propaganda of a growing circle of well-paid ideologues" - well-paid employees of anti-Muslim groups, the group said - and radical Islamist attacks such as the June 2016 massacre at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

The SPLC's findings come as anti-Muslim posters were discovered this week at a mosque in Bossier City, Louisiana, and on the campuses of the University of Texas and Rutgers University.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations wants campus officials to assure the safety of Muslim students and to investigate the mosque posters as a hate crime. "It is clear that these signs, which were used to vandalize a house of worship, are part of a nationwide campaign by racists and Islamophobes to intimidate the American Muslim community," spokesman Ibrahim Hooper said.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, a non-profit organization based in Montgomery, Alabama, monitors the activities of hate groups and other extremists across the country. The SPLC defines hate groups as those that vilify entire groups of people based on immutable characteristics such as race or ethnicity.

"Patriot" or anti-government groups are on the downswing, according to the report. "The groups had skyrocketed from a low of 149 in 2008 to a high of 1,360 in 2012, in large part as a reaction to the November 2008 election of Barack Obama," the report said.