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The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

VOLUME 96 - NUMBER 14 DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2017 TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 50 CENTS

North Carolina future uncertain after 'Bathroom bill' reset

By Jonathan Drew and Martha Waggoner

RALEIGH (AP) - Tense negotiations over a deal to undo North Carolina's "bathroom bill" gave way March 31 to uncertainty. Will the compromise Gov. Roy Cooper signed March 30 quash the furor that made businesses, sporting events, conventions and entertainers pull out of the state in a yearlong economic backlash? State Democratic and Republican leaders say their compromise will restore North Carolina's reputation as a welcoming place to do business, and some business leaders applauded the deal. Others were doubtful. Some entertainment industry leaders were scornful, and LGBT advocates expressed outrage. House Bill 142, titled "AN ACT TO RESET" the law created by House Bill 2, is not, critics say, a true repeal.

Reached through back-room deal-making, it still exposes gay and transgender people to discrimination whenever they go to a hotel, restaurant, locker room or bathroom, rights advocates say. "I don't know why any of these people thought they could use the exact secret process and incompetence that got them into this problem to get them out of this problem," Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, said in an interview March 31. She complained that transgender people were left out of the negotiations.

HB142 has now eliminated HB2's requirement that transgender people use restrooms corresponding to the sex on their birth certificates in many public buildings. But the new law also makes clear that only state legislators - not local government or school officials - can make rules for public restrooms from now on.

HB2 also invalidated any local ordinances protecting gay or transgender people from discrimination in the workplace or in public accommodations. HB142 prohibits local governments from enacting any new such protections until December 2020.

The ACLU said it's continuing its legal battle on behalf of transgender residents.

"Many of the provisions of HB142 carry forward problematic portions of HB2," the group's North Carolina legal director Chris Brook said. He said provisions such as the moratorium on local anti-discrimination ordinances "mirror provisions we've already sued over."

The stakes are high. An Associated Press analysis this week found that House Bill 2 would cost the state more than \$3.76 billion in lost business over a dozen years. The tally was based on companies and events that already backed out, meaning that money won't likely return even with the 2016 law gone.

The response to the "reset" from business leaders was mixed, despite an optimistic tone struck by Cooper.

"Companies that I have talked to, companies that I have recruited, who were hesitant or refusing to bring businesses to our state before the passage of today's bill now are telling me: We are coming," the governor said after signing the bill.

The North Carolina Chamber of Commerce thanked Cooper and Republican legislative leaders "for coming together on a bipartisan basis to find a solution."

Bank of America, the largest North Carolina-based company, said in a news release: "We support this bipartisan measure to repeal HB2 and create the conditions for continued dialogue and progress."

But some companies responded negatively, such as the Durham-based advertising agency McKinney.

"As a national agency with a global creative reputation, our success depends upon attracting the very best talent and clients to Durham. This new bill continues to stand in the way of that," McKinney CEO Brad Brinegar said.

IBM, which has a large Raleigh-area operation, also expressed reservations.

"IBM opposed North Carolina's H.B.2 because it discriminates against people for being who they are. We welcome its repeal, but stronger local nondiscrimination laws should not be pre-empted," said the company's chief diversity officer, Lindsay-Rae McIntyre.

Among the high-profile cancellations was Bruce Springsteen, who backed out of a Greensboro concert because of House Bill 2. Asked about the new law, Springsteen guitarist Steven Van Zandt tweeted: "Hopefully the NCAA will see through this 'fake repeal,' to paraphrase our President. The AP can print that!"

Movie director Rob Reiner, an activist for equal rights and major supporter of Democratic candidates, urged colleagues to continue avoiding the state, tweeting: "Entertainment leaders: don't fall for this 'deal.' Doesn't repeal (hash)HB2."



Lynch To Receive Honorary Degree At Duke Commencement

Duke University will award seven honorary degrees at its commencement exercises on Sunday, May 14, Duke President Richard H. Brodhead announced Monday.

This year's recipients include Loretta Lynch, former U.S. attorney general.

Commencement, featuring an address by Duke alumnus David Rubenstein, a philanthropist and financier and the current chair of the university's Board of Trustees, begins at 9 a.m. at Wallace Wade Stadium and is open to the public.

Lynch served from 2015-17 as the 83rd Attorney General of the United States, the first African-American woman to serve in that role. She graduated from Durham High School and her parents still live in Durham. Lynch, who will also speak at Duke Law School's hooding ceremony during commencement weekend, previously served two separate stints as U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York. While in private practice, she performed extensive pro bono work for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.



A program of dance, music, poetry, scholarship, and song were on display on March 25 at Hayti Heritage Center. The program was co-produced by the Hayti Heritage Center and Soulworks/Andrea E. Woods-Valdez featured artists from the area. See story and photos on page 8.

Key findings from the AP-NORC poll on President Donald Trump

By Emily Swanson

WASHINGTON (AP) - Nearly 6 in 10 Americans disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as president, according to a new poll conducted by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research over five days before and after the collapse of a GOP proposal to replace former President Barack Obama's health care law.

Health care was the worst of seven issues for Trump tested in the poll, but half of Americans approve of his handling of the economy.

Key findings:

-Just 42 percent of Americans approve and 58 percent disapprove of how Trump is handling his job so far. Nearly 9 in 10 Democrats and more than 6 in 10 independents disapprove of Trump, while 8 in 10 Republicans approve of the job he's doing.

-Some 62 percent disapprove of how he's handling health care. His ratings are also underwater on handling foreign policy (58 percent disapprove), immigration (54 percent) the budget deficit (54 percent) and taxes (54 percent).

-Fifty percent of Americans approve of how Trump is handling the economy, about the same as the 48 percent who disapprove. Likewise, Trump's ratings on Supreme Court nominations are about even, 50 percent approve to 49 percent disapprove.

-Most Americans - 56 percent - describe the national economy as good, while 43 percent describe it as poor. A year ago, in April of 2016, just 42 percent described the economy as good in another AP-NORC poll.

-More than 6 in 10 say the country is headed in the wrong direction. But among Republicans, nearly two-thirds think it's heading in the right direction.

-Just a quarter of Americans approve of the job Congress is doing, while three-quarters disapprove. There's relatively little partisan divide in terms of distaste for Congress.

-More than 8 in 10 Americans call both health care and the economy very important issues. About 7 in 10 call taxes that important, while about 6 in 10 say the same of immigration, Supreme Court nominations, foreign policy and the budget deficit.

-Overall, 90 percent of blacks and 66 percent of Hispanics disapprove of the job Trump is doing, but whites divide more evenly, with 53 percent approving and 47 percent disapproving. Fifty-eight percent of whites without a college degree approve of the job he's doing.

The AP-NORC poll of 1,110 adults was conducted March 23-27 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.0 percentage points.

Interviews were conducted online and using landlines and cell-phones.



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