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Teachers union chief: School choice rooted in segregation

By Maria Danilova
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The head of one of the country's leading teachers' unions charged Thursday that school choice, a key policy agenda of the Trump administration, is rooted in segregation and racism.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, the nation's second largest teachers' group, said that decades ago school choice was used by officials in the South to resist desegregation.

Weingarten has been a fierce opponent of President Donald Trump's efforts to expand charter and private school voucher programs around the country. In her speech, she called Education Secretary Betsy DeVos a "public school denier."

"Make no mistake: This use of privatization, coupled with disinvestment, are only slightly more polite cousins of segregation," Weingarten said.

Weingarten cited the example of Prince Edward County, Virginia, which after the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954, tried to bypass desegregation efforts by closing down every public school and opening private schools that were off-limits to black children.

"And they did it using public money," she said. "Decades ago, the term 'choice' was used to cloak overt racism."

The comments prompted immediate criticism from school choice groups. Jeanne Allen, CEO of the Center for Education Reform, called for Weingarten's resignation.

Allen said that comparing education reform advocates to racists and segregationists "is not just ill-advised hyperbole, it is a deeply offensive, highly inflammatory insult to all the parents and people - of all races, backgrounds and regions - who have worked to bring options, opportunities and reforms to an education system that has failed them for generations."

"Weingarten's allies should disavow these comments, and America's teachers should look into their hearts, consider whether this is the type of language and leadership they want as being representative of their views and voice, and consider inviting Weingarten's resignation."

During an unrelated event in Denver, DeVos took a swipe at her opponents. She said her school choice advocacy "has led to some excitement on the left."

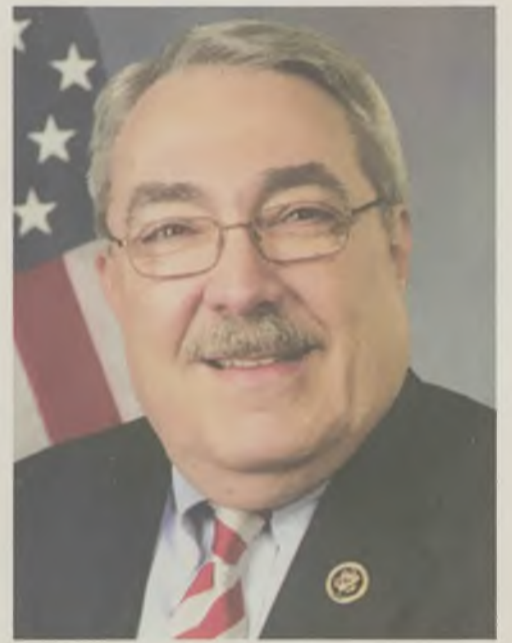
"But I consider the 'excitement' a badge of honor, and so should you," DeVos said, according to remarks released by the department. "Our opponents, the defenders of the status quo, only protest those capable of implementing real change. You represent real change."

Education Department spokeswoman Liz Hill said school choice helps level the playing field by letting students escape failing schools.

"Research shows school choice programs most benefit families from lower socio-economic backgrounds," she said in a statement. "The notion of 'privatization' is simply a scare tactic from those who are invested in defending the status quo at all costs."



Rev. William Barber



Cong. K. Butterfield

Barber, Butterfield Blast Trump Nomination Of NCGOP Attorney

By Cash Michaels
Contributing writer

Rev. Dr. William Barber, president of the NCNAACP, is alarmed that Pres. Trump is nominating a prominent Republican attorney to the federal bench for the Eastern District who fought to uphold North Carolina's racial gerrymandered redistricting maps and 2013 voter suppression laws.

According to a federal appellate court last year, those laws targeted African-American voters with almost "...surgical precision," while the US Supreme Court recently ruled the maps to be "unconstitutional."

Attorney Thomas Farr, best known for representing Republican legislative leaders in court is up for the lifetime seat, and Rev. Barber called that "dangerous."

"Farr has been the lead attorney on racist voter suppression," Rev. Barber said in an interview Tuesday. "He's wasted millions of North Carolinian's dollars (defending against NCNAACP lawsuits)."

The civil rights leader vowed to go before the Senate Judiciary Committee to testify against Farr's confirmation.

Farr is a labor and constitutional law litigator with Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak and Stewart law firm in Raleigh.

Congressman G. K. Butterfield (D-12-NC) also made it clear in a statement last week that he opposes the Farr nomination.

"I'm disappointed that President Trump nominated a lawyer who has been at the forefront of defending the North Carolina Republican legislature as it has repeatedly engaged in political gerrymandering of state legislative and congressional district boundaries, and has passed regressive voting laws that had the intended effect of diluting the voting rights of minority groups," Rep. Butterfield said in a statement.

"The counties in the Eastern District have a substantial African American population (27%), but the Court does not reflect that diversity. The Court should include African American judges and this appointment simply maintains the status quo in a district with a large population of African American citizens."

"President Obama attempted to integrate this Court by nominating two African American females for this position (federal prosecutor Jennifer May-Parker and former NC Supreme Court Justice Patricia Timmons-Goodson), but their nominations were blocked by a Republican Senator (Richard Burr)."

Butterfield concluded, "I urge the United States Senate to carefully scrutinize the record of Thomas Farr and determine if he can impartially serve as a judge in cases involving voting and civil rights."

The judicial seat in question has been open for the past eleven years. The Eastern District covers 44 counties in North Carolina, from Raleigh in Wake County, to the coast. The seat has been vacant since 2005 - the longest federal judicial vacancy in the nation.

"There has never been an African-American to sit on that court," Rev. Barber says. "It looks like the civil rights movement never happened."

Farr has the backing of both Republican US senators Richard Burr and Thom Tillis. Both, who say that Farr is "well qualified," are expected to push hard for Farr's confirmation in the US Senate.

Farr has been down this road before, having been nominated by Pres. George W. Bush in 2006 and 2007, but the Senate Judiciary Committee never took up his nomination.

Farr has defended both the Republican-led NC legislature's 2011 redistricting maps, and voter ID restrictions, both later thrown out by the federal courts.

Rev. John Mendez and Emmanuel Baptist Church in Winston-Salem were plaintiffs in the NCNAACP lawsuit against the 2013 voter ID laws. He did not return two calls for comment to his church Tuesday prior to press time.

Attorney Irving Joyner, chair of the NC NAACP Legal Redress Committee, said of Trump's nomination of atty. Farr, "A pure simple case of stacking the judicial deck against voting rights and political participation by African Americans and other racial minorities."

"Stacking" the federal judiciary with Republican judges is just one way critics like Joyner say Pres. Trump is attempting to prepare to win re-election in 2020. Others also see the president's controversial "Election Integrity Commission" as another attempt to control the voting in 2020 in a many states as possible to his liking.

However, at press time, at least 45 states have balked at the commission's request for personal information about voters registered to vote, fearing that information will be misused by the Trump Administration. A series of complaints and lawsuits have forced the commission to stop its data collection.

Farr is expected to be heading up the legal team representing Republican legislative leaders on Thursday, July 27th when a federal three-judge panel for the US Middle District reconvenes to hear arguments about when legislative voting districts will be redrawn, and when (if possible) special elections could be held this year before November, based on those maps.

A spokesperson for Congressman Butterfield's office said Friday afternoon that so far, no date has been announced for attorney Farr's confirmation hearing to begin.



Atty. Thomas Farr

CCU Police

Department to

Commemorate

National Night Out



The North Carolina Central University (NCCU) Police Department, Durham Police Department and Durham Housing Authority are coming together to celebrate the 34th Annual National Night Out — America's Night Out Against Crime — on Tuesday, Aug. 1, from 3 to 7 p.m., in the McDougald Terrace and Cornwallis Road communities near NCCU.

National Night Out is part of a national community building campaign designed to heighten crime prevention awareness and generate support for local anti-crime programs. The annual event is also intended to strengthen neighborhood/police partnerships, and let criminals know residents are organized and fighting back.

"National Night Out is a great event to interact with community members to promote community involvement and safer neighborhoods," said Connie M. Bullock, NCCU interim police chief and director of Public Safety. "The event provides an opportunity to build relationships between residents and police officers and help the public learn more about crime prevention and law enforcement."

The partnering organizations will promote police-community alliances in areas including crime prevention, drug and violence prevention, public safety and neighborhood unity. The rallies will take place at Burton Park, 1100 Sima Ave., and Cornwallis Road Community, 3000 Weaver St. NCCU students are volunteering for the National Night Out activities, which are free and open to the public.

Sponsors of the Durham events include Sodexo, Target and World Overcomers Christian Church. Community partners and vendors include the Durham County Health Department, Project Safe Neighborhoods, Alliance Behavioral Health, NAMI National Alliance on Mental Health, Durham Technical Community College, Men of Vision and the Durham Crisis Response Center, all of which will have representatives on site.

For more information regarding National Night Out at McDougald Terrace, please contact Detective Bryant Hernandez at bbernandez@nccu.edu or 919-530-7365. For information on National Night Out at Cornwallis Road, please contact Detective Cheryl Geiger at cgeiger@nccu.edu or 919-530-6814.