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GOP Warned To Be Fair In Redistricting

by Cash Michaels
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What kind of legislative voting district maps will the Republican leadership of the NC

General Assembly come up with by Sept. 1st, and what's behind a new House bill designed to redistrict state judges? Those are two of the pressing questions hovering over state lawmakers as many gathered for the third Joint Select Committee on Redistricting today to further consider criteria for new voting maps ordered by a three-judge US District Court panel two weeks ago.

Democrats, and members of the general public, during a legislative hearing last week, made it clear that they want an above-board process, free of racial (as ordered by the US

Supreme Court and partisan gerrymandering. Today's committee meeting was scheduled to focus adopting the criteria to determine what the revamped maps should look like once redrawn.

Democrats are concerned about the process because GOP legislative leaders have rehired

Thomas Hofeller, who drew the 2011 maps that the US High Court recently ruled were illegal because 28 North Carolina districts were racially gerrymandered. "That doesn't do much to restore people's trust in the process," said Senate Minority Leader Dan Blue.

At an August 2nd press conference, Sen. Ben Clark (D-Cumberland), offered criteria that he and Senate Democratic leadership felt should definitely be considered in the mix, including partisan advantage in redrawing the districts; no splitting of voting districts (except when necessary to comply with zero deviation population requirements; and ensuring the none of the nine Senate districts and 19 House districts deemed as unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court shall have a total black voting age population higher than that which existed in those enacted NC legislative districts that were in effect in 2010.



Sen. Ben Clark (D-Cumberland) is in the front, Senate Minority Leader Dan Blue (D-Wake) is behind him. (Photo by Cash Michaels/CashWorks Media)

Justice denies broad move against college affirmative action

By SADIE GURMAN and MARIA DANILOVA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Justice Department said Wednesday it had no broad plans to investigate whether college and university admission programs discriminate against students based on race, seeking to defray worries that a job posting signaled an effort to reverse course on affirmative action.

News reports of the posting inflamed advocacy groups that believed it would lead to legal action against universities for not admitting white students over minorities with similar qualifications.

But a day after The New York Times reported the department was seeking current attorneys interested in "investigations and possible litigation related to intentional race-based discrimination in college and university admissions," the Justice Department said the job ad was related to just one complaint.

"The posting sought volunteers to investigate one administrative complaint filed by a coalition of 64 Asian-American associations in May 2015 that the prior administration left unresolved," spokeswoman Sarah Isgur Flores said. The groups sued Harvard University, saying that school and other Ivy League institutions are using racial quotas to admit students other than high-scoring Asians. Isgur Flores said the Justice Department had received no broader guidance related to university admissions in general and "is committed to protecting all Americans from all forms of illegal race-based discrimination."

The memo caused much hand-wringing Wednesday, with questions reaching the White House, where spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said she doesn't know whether President Donald Trump believes that white college applicants are victims of discrimination.

Advocacy groups have been closely watching how Attorney General Jeff Sessions has worked to reshuffle the priorities of the Civil Rights Division, which is not unusual when administrations change. Some groups assumed the job ad marked a continuation of the Trump administration's shift away from its Democratic predecessor in the areas of gay rights, voting rights and investigations of troubled police departments.

Anurima Bhargava, who was head of the Civil Rights Division's Educational Opportunities Section during the Obama administration, said any move to investigate affirmative action policies would be a "fear and intimidation tactic" because the Supreme Court has upheld such admissions programs.

"My very strong sense is that it's nothing other than politics," she said.

But Roger Clegg, a civil rights official during the Reagan era who now runs the conservative Center for Equal Opportunity, said it was an encouraging sign.

"Anytime a university discriminates on the basis of race it ought to creep people out, and it doesn't make any difference who's being discriminated against on the basis of race," Clegg said. "I'm delighted that the Trump administration is doing this."

Clegg said conservatives were displeased with what they saw as the Obama administration's support for race-based admissions by universities.

The Supreme Court last year upheld a University of Texas program that considers race, among other factors, in admissions, offering a narrow victory for affirmative action. A white Texan who was denied admission to the university sued, but the high court said the Texas plan complied with earlier court rulings that let colleges consider race in an effort to bolster diversity.

At America's elite private colleges, many of which have drawn criticism over race-conscious admission policies, incoming classes have become increasingly diverse in recent years.

Minority students made up more than 40 percent of the freshman classes at nearly all Ivy League schools in 2015, according to the most recent federal data, while only two topped that mark in 2010. At Columbia University, about half of the incoming class in 2015 was made up of minority students, the data show.

Similarly, top public universities have also become more diverse. At some University of California campuses, for example, nonwhite students made up more than 60 percent of the incoming class in 2015.

Newspaper: 51 unsupervised jail inmates died over 5 years

RALEIGH (AP) - A newspaper investigation shows that 51 inmates died in North Carolina county jails over five years when they were left unsupervised for longer than state regulations allow.

The News & Observer of Raleigh analyzed state records and found that the deaths were in 38 different jails, in urban and rural areas. The deaths occurred over the five-year period through 2016.

Under state regulations, detention officers are required to check on jail inmates at least twice an hour. If inmates are mentally ill or suicidal, checks must be done four times an hour. Those checks are to be documented.

Inmates considered a suicide risk must be in cells clear of items that could be used to kill themselves.

In 2013, Durham County inmate Terry Demetrius Lee, 21, hanged himself on window bars after he had been left alone in a cell for nearly six hours, the newspaper reported, citing electronic records of officers' rounds.

A state investigation found that Lee had a history of mental illness and should have been watched more frequently. The detention officer who was supposed to observe Lee was fired.

Sheriffs and jail administrators told the newspaper that keeping inmates safe is a high priority.

"We're not insensitive people," said Durham County Sheriff Mike Andrews. "We all have families and we all have loved ones and have had those we know that have been incarcerated. So I don't want anything to happen to anybody, and neither do the men and women who work here in this facility."

The sheriff said that he's taken measures to make cells safer in the past five years, including removing window bars of the type that Lee used to hang himself.

An expert on jail and prison security who has served as a court-appointed monitor, Jeffrey Schwartz, said the number of deaths indicates a potentially larger problem in jail supervision.

When detention officers don't follow supervision regulations, he said, "they are putting inmates at risk, and it's a life or death matter."

North Carolina's 113 jails, which are overseen by sheriffs, house about 24,000 inmates at any given time.

It's up to sheriffs to determine proper staffing levels for the jails. Some sheriffs have asked their county commissions for more money to pay detention officers, or better-designed jails.

State officials say there's not a statewide standard for jail staffing levels. But state investigations have shown that some jails were understaffed or overcrowded.

North Carolina lawmaker faces opposition in naming bill

AP) - A North Carolina lawmaker has met opposition in an attempt to name a federal courthouse for a black attorney.

The News & Observer of Raleigh reports Democratic Rep. G.K. Butterfield introduced a bill seeking to name the federal courthouse in Durham for his late mentor, John Hervey Wheeler. But Butterfield said Republican Reps. George Holding and Robert Pittenger won't back his bill because he wouldn't sign a bill to name another federal building in North Carolina after U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms.

Spokesman Stephen Billy said Pittenger deferred comment to Holding because "the building of interest" to honor Helms is in Holding's district. Holding's spokesman didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment on Tuesday.

Wheeler was a lawyer who challenged educational segregation in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. He also headed The Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People.

Butterfield's bill, HR 3460, was introduced in the U.S. House last Thursday and was referred to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, chaired by U.S. Rep. Bill Shuster, R-Pa. If the committee votes in favor of the bill, it would move to the House floor for a vote. A favorable vote would send the bill to the Senate.

Congress looks for all of a state's representatives to support such legislation, Butterfield said, and without full support, passage may be a challenge.

"Mr. Helms was an international figure who was highly controversial and John Wheeler was a state figure, who was a state leader, who was not controversial."

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