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EARLY VOTING ENDS OCT 7

A Voteless People Is A Hopeless People - L.E. Austin

Legislators: New districts should be OK'd for 2018 elections

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - New legislative district maps that North Carolina lawmakers approved last month eliminate any unlawful racial bias federal judges ruled was in previous maps and should be permitted for use in the 2018 elections, Republican legislators who helped draw them argued Sept. 22.

Lawyers for the GOP leaders filed a court brief disputing arguments from voters who successfully overturned the original General Assembly maps and who are now contending the new ones also must be redone because they still contain a dozen districts that are illegal and unconstitutional.

The three-judge panel last year threw out 19 House districts and nine Senate districts from 2011 after concluding that they had been illegally gerrymandered on the basis of race. Their conclusion was based on the failure of GOP leaders to justify using race as the predominant factor in drawing them. The panel ordered new maps to be drawn by Sept. 1.

In the new maps drawn this year, Republicans specifically left out the use of racial data when drawing new boundaries, their lawyers noted in the court brief.

"The constitutional deficiencies identified by this court have been completely remedied by the 2017 plans," attorney Phil Strach wrote, adding that Republican lawmakers used traditional redistricting principles to create fewer districts that cross county lines, fewer split districts, and more compact districts.

It's now up to the same judges to accept the new maps, order more changes, or get a third-party expert to redraw them. It's unclear when they'll rule. Candidate filing for the 2018 elections is in February.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs want the judges to redraw the 12 districts and surrounding boundaries with alternatives they offered to legislators last month. But Strach wrote those boundaries are full of partisan gerrymanders that put more pairs of Republicans in the same district, meaning one ultimately would not return to Raleigh.

"This court should decline the invitation to usurp the legitimate legislative authority of the elected representatives of the people of North Carolina and draw a map that is more favorable to the plaintiffs' political interests," he wrote in a 58-page brief.

The 2011 maps favored Republicans, helping them expand their majorities at the General Assembly and press their right-leaning agenda. By creating an excessive number of districts with black voting-age populations, GOP mapmakers made surrounding districts more white and Republican, critics of the maps said.

The maps created this year still appear to benefit Republicans when party preference is examined in recent statewide election results, even though the number of majority-black districts in them fell dramatically.

Attorneys for the voters who want the new maps redrawn allege that four districts remain racial gerrymanders by their irregular shapes and concentrations of black voters. Mapmakers, however, said districts generally followed municipal and precinct boundaries and those with majority-black populations were "naturally occurring."

The voters said the other eight districts that should be struck down violate the North Carolina Constitution - five because they were redrawn even though they didn't need to be, and three because they failed to minimize district boundaries crossing county lines.

Strach told the judges those arguments are without merit and for North Carolina state courts, not a federal court, to decide.

The voters' lawyers and their allies argued in court last week that legislative leaders disregarded input from a public hearing and more than 4,000 written or online comments.

In Friday's (Sept. 22) brief, Strach wrote that while the maps reflected some input, most feedback at public hearings consisted of political statements "or just outright name calling."

Judicial nominee: I'll follow North Carolina voter ID ruling

By GARY D. ROBERTSON

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) - A prominent legal defender of North Carolina voting restrictions ultimately struck down by a court as racially biased said Wednesday that his future decisions as a federal judge wouldn't ignore that ruling if he is confirmed to the bench.

Nominated by President Donald Trump in July to a U.S. District Court judgeship vacant for more than 11 years, Thomas Farr has been in the thick of voting rights litigation this decade. Farr and his law firm colleagues helped Republican legislators defend the 2013 state law that mandated photo identification to vote and reduced the number of early voting days.

The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals struck down these and other voting changes, finding they targeted African Americans "with almost surgical precision." Farr also defended in court the 2011 congressional and legislative redistricting maps, which judges also threw out for having illegal racial gerrymanders.

Farr is backed strongly by North Carolina's two Republican U.S. senators in the GOP-controlled Senate. Black congressional leaders said this week his nomination should be rejected.

Responding to questions from the Senate Judiciary Committee, Farr said he disagreed with the 4th Circuit panel that ruled GOP lawmakers intentionally discriminated against black voters with the voter ID law. Still, he said he would follow the ruling if he became a judge.



The Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People held its Mayoral Debate at the H.M. Michaux Education Building at NCCU Aug. 17. From left to right candidates are: Farad Ali, Steve Schewel, Pierce Freelon; Durham Committee Chair Omar Beasley; candidates, Ms. Shea Ramirez, Sylvester Williams and Tracy D. Drinker.

Candidates For Mayor Answer The Carolina Times Questions

(Part One)

By Cash Michaels
CashWorks Media

Tuesday, October 10th is mayoral primary for Durham, and, as always, *The Carolina Times* encourages all of our readers to vote.

Citizens will choose from among six candidates to serve as the Bull City's next presiding officer after current Mayor William Bell steps down after 16 years.

The top two primary winners will then face-off against each other in the general election on Tuesday, Nov. 7th, and that winner will be sworn into office in December.

The mayor serves a two-year term.

The six candidates in contention are Farad Ali, 50 - President/CEO of *The Institute* (<https://faradali4mayor.com>); Pierce Freelon, 33 - musician and founder of *Blackspace* (<https://www.freelonfordurham.com>); Shea Ramirez, 44 - owner of a tax preparer agency (<http://thepeoplesmayor.net>); Steven Schewel, 66 - Duke University visiting professor and at-large city councilman (<https://www.stevelfordurham.com/>); Rev. Sylvester Williams, 62 - pastor and retired financial analyst (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/103209079781459/>); and Tracy Drinker, 56 - retired police officer (<http://www.tracydrinkerformayor.com>).

Several weeks ago, *The Carolina Times* sent a five-part questionnaire to the campaigns of all six primary candidates, asking them to reply in writing no later than Friday Sept. 22nd. All of them responded, and we thank them for taking the time.

Though former candidate Michael Johnson's name will be on the ballot, he dropped out of the race weeks ago.

Here now are the first three questions that were asked, accompanied by some abbreviated answers from the five Durham mayoral candidates who replied.

In part-two next week, we'll publish the candidates' answers to the last two questions asked on the questionnaire.

1 - Durham is growing rapidly, with many people from around the country coming to live here. However, as with other growing cities, affordable housing for low and moderate-income people is a major issue.

If you are elected mayor, how will you lead the City Council in solving this problem?

- FARAD ALI** - Specifically, I will
- Develop housing and economic development policies for development that promote a culture of "inclusionary" policies, mixed-income, and racially balanced communities.
 - Develop housing strategies inclusive of the Housing Authority, County and City and all efforts approved by the citizens.
 - Working with the Housing Authority, I would revise current strategic plans of the City to meet the immediate affordable housing shortage plans of Durham's low-income citizens within 2 years and hold the City accountable for reaching the development goals.
 - Continue the penny tax initiative - and consider creative financing strategies such as a housing trust

fund to leverage/generate additional revenues.

• Determine the viability for public land use development along transit lines to incorporate affordable housing and mixed-use developments. We should make sure the goals of the City's strategic plan reflect community planning and zoning determination of affordable housing. There is an opportunity to build a better alignment of Public, Private and Non-Profit Partnership that provides a positive outcome for Durham residents to address affordable housing.

PIERCE FREELON - We have a range of tools to use to ensure affordable rental and homeownership opportunities:

- **Provide property tax relief** to low and medium-income homeowners to offsets skyrocketing property taxes through circuit breakers, using a multiple threshold formula which takes age, ability, and income into account.

- **Increase funding for public housing and the dedicated housing fund.** I applaud the recent increase from 1 cent, to 2 cents for every dollar of property tax, but we need to do more to meet the need.

- **Support and encourage public-private partnerships** in affordable housing by encouraging businesses who set up shop in Durham to hire local and subsidize expenses for employees.

- **Support the Durham Community Land Trust** - their efforts to support affordable housing are working, and we must support them.

- **Implement a tiny-house initiative** to create more pathways to homeownership for more people. There are smart-tiny-home solutions which can be built vertically for more density - we must be creative in our solutions.

SHEA RAMIREZ - Give residents a path to some type of ownership or savings to go toward home-ownership. Give builders and developers incentives to come in and assist with developing these areas with the residents having a path to ownership. Get residents involved with the upkeep of neighborhoods and ensure that the city does its part with trash pickup and maintaining roads and streets.

STEVE SCHEWEL - On City Council [as a current at-large city councilor], there is one issue that I work on *every single day*, and that issue is affordable housing. Everyone in Durham deserves to have a safe, decent, warm, affordable home.

With limited resources and limitless need, we must focus on the most critical goals. My highest goals are to (1) end family homelessness within the next few years ; (2) continue the strong City support for the Housing Authority (DHA) so that DHA can redevelop its aging housing communities and ensure the success of its voucher program—which together support the housing of 12,000 or our most vulnerable; (3) use publicly owned land downtown to leverage affordable housing; (4) develop an effective strategy involving density bonuses and tax abatement for inducing developers to contribute to our affordable housing; (5) help long-term

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