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# The Carolina Times

"THE TRUTH UNBRIDED"

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Members of St. Joseph AME Church Girl Scout Troop 711 on a float in this year's Durham Christmas Parade.

## New voter ID law immediately challenged in North Carolina court

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - The North Carolina law detailing a new voter photo identification requirement got challenged in court Dec. 19 mere moments after the Republican-led General Assembly completed the override of Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's veto of the measure.

Six voters filed the lawsuit in Wake County court less than 15 minutes after the state House finished the override in a mostly party-line 72-40 vote. The Senate already voted to override Dec. 18.

The photo ID law implements a constitutional amendment approved in a referendum last month that mandates photo identification to vote in person, with exceptions allowed. Still, the plaintiffs contend the law violates the state constitution and should be blocked, saying it retains requirements within a 2013 photo ID law that federal judges struck down.

The voters - five black residents and one described as biracial - say the restrictions will harm African-American and American Indian residents disproportionately and unduly burden the right to vote. It also creates a financial cost to voting in the form of lost work times and the need to secure transportation to obtain an ID, the lawsuit said.

"The General Assembly has simply reproduced the court-identified racially discriminatory intent it manifested a mere five years ago when it enacted a very similar voter ID requirement," according to the plaintiffs' lawyers. Some of the attorneys work for an organization that helped challenge the 2013 law. That litigation took nearly four years to resolve.

Before and after the lawsuit was filed Dec. 19, Republican lawmakers said the implementing legislation carries out what 55 percent of voters who supported the referendum in November wanted. GOP legislators rejected Cooper's veto message that the bill was a "sinister and cynical" attempt to suppress the voting rights of minorities, the poor and the elderly. Rather, they said, it was designed to discourage voter fraud and increase the public's confidence in elections.

"You have betrayed the majority of the hard-working, honest people of North Carolina who put this provision into our constitution," Rep. Jimmy Dixon, a Duplin County Republican, referring to Cooper. "You should hang your head in shame."

The measure expands the number of qualifying IDs that could be used when voting compared to the 2013 law, including the creation of a new free voter photo

card produced by county elections board.

Student IDs for public and private colleges and universities and community colleges, as well as employee ID cards for state and local governments, would now qualify if they meet certain security thresholds. People having trouble obtaining an ID could fill out forms at the polling site, and their ballots likely would be counted, too, supporters said. The law also directs state election officials to determine how to comply the ID rules to people seeking to vote with mail-in absentee ballots.

House Democrats said the measure is inherently unfair and responds to incidences of confirmed voter impersonation that are few to non-existent.

"The only reason that you can give (for the law) is to suppress the vote," said Rep. Mickey Michaux, a Durham County Democrat and civil rights activist during the 1950s and 1960s. The 88-year-old Michaux is retiring from the House this month after 40 years.

The law would largely take effect when municipal elections occur next fall. Wednesday's (Dec. 19) lawsuit also asks that a three-judge panel of state judges prevent the law from being enforced during the litigation. Any appeals would go to the state Supreme Court.

## Anchor fired for race comments gets new broadcasting job

PITTSBURGH (AP) - A Pittsburgh newscaster who was previously fired for comments deemed racially insensitive about a shooting has a new job in broadcasting.

KDKA-AM News Radio 1020 announced Dec. 20 that it hired former WTAE-TV anchor Wendy Bell as part of its on-air team for 2019. Bell will serve as a mid-day host alongside Marty Griffin.

Bell said in a statement that she is looking forward to the job.

WTAE-TV fired Bell in 2016 after she made comments on Facebook about a shooting of five people in a Pittsburgh suburb, speculating the gunmen were black men with multiple siblings and from multiple fathers.

She later filed a lawsuit against the station, alleging the station violated her civil rights by firing her. The lawsuit was settled earlier this year, and terms were not disclosed.

## State grants Enfield native historical marker; Editor and publisher Louis Austin

*Austin used newspaper to fight in the long Black freedom struggle*

North Carolina will help the town of Enfield recognize one of its native sons in the summer.

The late Louis Austin, who served from 1927-1971 as editor-in-chief and publisher of the Durham-based publication, Carolina Times, will be honored in a historical marker ceremony likely in May or June, according to Ansley Wegner, the administrator of the state's Highway Historical Marker Program.

"The marker will be ordered around March and should be delivered to DOT (Department of Transportation) in June," she said in an e-mail.

Rodney D. Pierce, an 8th grade Social Studies and Civics & Economics teacher at William R. Davie Middle STEM Academy, applied for the marker in November and was notified this week that the application had been approved.

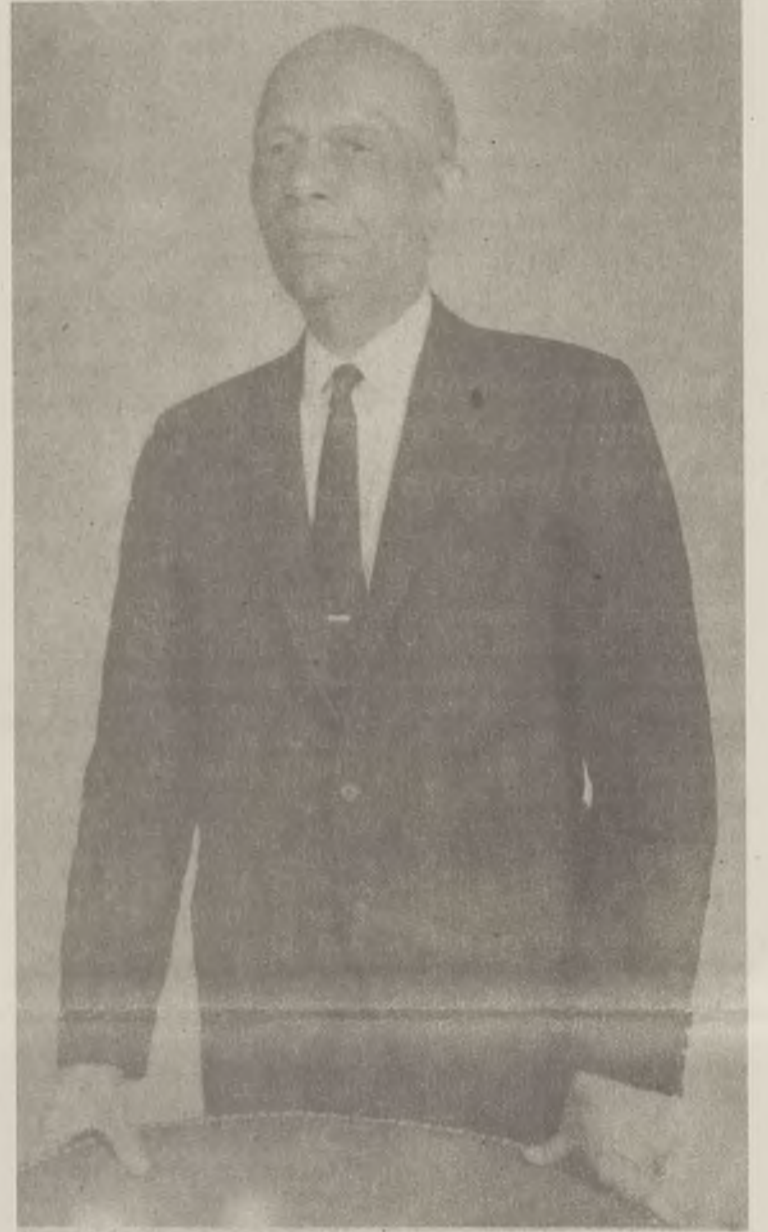
Pierce learned about Austin while leading a group of the Halifax County Schools District's secondary history teachers in creating a curriculum centered around the Tillery History House. During a professional development session, he met Will Goldsmith, a Ph.D. candidate at Duke University and former Teach for America instructor at Northwest Halifax, who had Austin's biography, Louis Austin and the Carolina Times, sitting on a table spread out with other books.

"During the course of personal research I've done on Black history in the county, particularly around what we call the long Black freedom struggle or the long civil rights movement, the Carolina Times had been an invaluable resource," said Pierce. "So it immediately caught my eye. While discussing the book with Will, he told me Mr. Austin was from Enfield. I was blown away."

"When I started researching Austin, I learned that in 2017 the city of Durham, where he really made his mark with the newspaper, dedicated a history grove to him that's located in Solite Park. I found out last week that he has his own exhibit at the Museum of Durham History. If I didn't know who Louis Austin was, I was sure my students didn't, and there's nothing here in the county recognizing him and his achievements. I wanted to change that."

Born in 1898, Austin came of age at the nadir of the Jim Crow era and became a transformative leader of the long Black freedom struggle in the state. His father William, who ran a farm and barbershop in Enfield where he cut the hair of White customers, taught him at an early age to stand up for his rights. Austin finished high school at the historic Joseph K. Brick School just outside of the town and completed college at N.C. Central University (then the National Training School).

He purchased the then Standard Advertiser in 1927 and changed the name to The Carolina Times. From that year to Austin's death in 1971, he operated what became the preeminent Black newspaper in the state, using the power of



EDITOR PUBLISHER LOUIS E. AUSTIN

the press to voice the anger of Black Carolinians, and to turn that anger into action. His career as a journalist and activist during the Great Depression, World War II, and the postwar civil rights movement helped pioneer radical tactics including anti-segregation lawsuits, boycotts of segregated movie theaters and White-owned stores that refused to hire Black workers, and African-American voting rights campaigns based on political participation in the Democratic Party. While lobbying for integration of public schools, he also used his platform to advocate for equal pay for Black teachers and equal funding of Black schools, denounced police brutality, demanded equal employment opportunity for African Americans and legal action as a recourse for equity in education. Austin was elected a justice of the peace in 1934 in Durham and co-founded the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs (today the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People).

In May, Pierce contacted Dr. Jerry Gershenhorn, the author of Austin's biography and a history professor at Austin's alma mater, N.C. Central University, for assistance. Gershenhorn put him in touch with Austin's grandson, Kenneth Edmonds, who still publishes the paper today, to get the blessing of the family to pursue the marker. The Carolina Times is the only Black-owned and operated newspaper in Durham.

Edmonds wrote Pierce a letter supporting the effort, and he used it to secure resolutions and letters of support from the Halifax County Commissioners, Enfield Town Commissioners and Halifax County state legislators Milton "Toby" Fitch (Senate) and Michael Wray (House of Representatives) to accompany the application. Gershenhorn also provided two academic papers he wrote on Austin.

"(Pierce) provided excellent resources and justification for both his historical significance and for placing the marker in Enfield, rather than Durham," said Wegner. "The committee of 10 history professors, 8 of whom were present, voted unanimously to approve the marker. Austin was recognized for his importance as a journalist and advocate of social justice and civil rights. (His) marker will be the 48th North Carolina Highway Historical Marker in Halifax County."

The approved inscription will read: LOUIS AUSTIN 1898-1971 African American editor. Published Durham-based Carolina Times, 1927-71. An advocate of social justice and civil rights. Was born in Enfield.

## Interim chancellor made permanent at Elizabeth City State

ELIZABETH CITY (AP) - The interim leader credited with improvements at a historically black campus that's part of the University of North Carolina system has been named permanent chancellor.

The News & Observer reports the UNC Board of Governors on Dec. 14 elected Karrie Dixon from a slate of three finalists for the Elizabeth City State University job.

She's held the interim chancellor job since April.

In 2016, UNC President Margaret Spellings established a working group to address enrollment declines and budget cuts. ECSU is now one of three universities designated as an NC Promise school, with in-state annual tuition at \$1,000. The program's launch this fall led to a 19 percent enrollment increase. The university also received a \$20 million U.S. Department of Agriculture loan to revamp residence halls and restructure debt.