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## 2 people charged in fatal shooting get suspended sentences

(AP) - Two people charged in the murder of a North Carolina man received suspended sentences Dec/ 5 after pleading guilty to reduced charges.

According to prosecutors, Kenneth Gibbs and Monet Wise had cooperated with investigators in the case against the gunman, Khalil Knight.

Bernabe Dubon, 62, was shot in June 2017 as he headed for a Durham store to send money to family members outside the U.S, news outlets reported. Prosecutors said Knight, Gibbs and Wise had been smoking marijuana, ran out of money and decided to rob a Hispanic person.

Dubon was a teacher and a principal in Honduras but worked as a carpenter in North Carolina.

Assistant District Attorney Kendra Montgomery-Blinn said the three saw Dubon and targeted him. Court records said Dubon fought back, then threw \$20 at Knight from the thousands of dollars in cash he had for his relatives.

Montgomery-Blinn said Knight shot Dubon twice. Police found him with gunshot wounds to the foot and pelvis.

Multiple charges were filed against Knight, Wise and Gibbs, including first-degree murder. In August, Knight pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to a maximum of 23 years in prison.

On Dec. 5, Wise and Gibbs pleaded guilty to attempted robbery with a dangerous weapon and conspiracy. Both of their sentences were suspended in lieu of two years of supervised probation.

WRAL reported that prosecutors offered a deal to the two defendants because they cooperated with investigators and are working to support their families.

The evidence showed Gibbs and Wise were part of planning the robbery, according to a statement from the District Attorney's Office.

"They never possessed a weapon. They were around the corner when shots were fired and were not aware until police told them, that someone had died," the statement said.

The DA's Office worked closely with Dubon's family "to reach a disposition in this case that was fair and in the interest of justice," the statement said.

The conditions of their probation include not contacting Knight or Dubon's family and participating in counseling and other programs.



College Heights Historic District installed. See story and photos on page 6.

## House passes bill to restore key parts of Voting Rights Act

By Matthew Daly  
WASHINGTON (AP) - The Democratic-controlled House approved a bill Dec. 6 that would restore key sections of the Voting Rights Act that once required officials in all or parts of 15 mostly Southern states to receive federal approval before making changes to the voting process.

The bill would amend the 1965 law to impose new obligations on states and local jurisdictions, essentially reversing a 2013 Supreme Court decision that tossed out a "pre-clearance" provision that determined which jurisdictions needed federal oversight of elections.

The bill was approved, 228-187. Veteran Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., an icon of the civil rights movement, announced the tally in a sign of the importance Democratic leaders place on the measure.

Just one Republican, Pennsylvania Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, joined Democrats in voting for the bill. It now goes to the Republican-controlled Senate, where it is unlikely to move forward.

Lewis and other supporters said the measure would help prevent voter suppression in the South and other areas by developing a process to require states and localities with a recent history of voting rights violations to pre-clear election changes with the Justice Department.

Strict voter registration requirements, polling place confusion and other obstacles faced by Georgia voters last year show why federal oversight of elections is still needed in places with a history of discrimination, supporters said. Problems also were reported in Florida, where elections officials came under withering criticism for their handling of a legally required recount in close races for governor and U.S. Senate.

"No right is more precious to our citizenship than the right of all Americans to be able to vote," said Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Ala., the bill's chief sponsor. "When Americans are not able to cast their ballots, their votes are silenced."

Elected officials "should be alarmed if any American who wants to cast a ballot is unable to cast a ballot," she said.

The White House opposes the bill, calling it an example of federal overreach. The Democratic-backed measure would give the federal government "too much authority over an even greater number of voting practices and decisions made by states and local governments without justifying the current needs for such policies," the White House said in a statement.

The Supreme Court has already ruled that similar restrictions imposed by Congress on states and localities are unconstitutional, the White House said.

Sewell said the 2013 Supreme Court ruling in *Shelby v. Holder* has led to renewed discrimination against minority voters in her state and throughout the South. Some of the laws were passed in the name of combating voter fraud, but Sewell said the real issue was voter suppression - not fraud.

The laws passed by Republican-leaning states were aimed at "suppressing the voice of certain Americans, and that's un-American," Sewell said on the House floor. Whether African Americans in Georgia or Native Americans in North Dakota, members of minority groups have continually faced barriers to voting, she said.

"This is a seminal piece of legislation that will restore, for the people, the right to vote," Sewell said, adding that Republicans and Democrats alike "should be making sure it's easier to vote, not harder to vote."

Rep. Rodney Davis, R-Illinois, said he agreed with that sentiment. "Every eligible American who wants to vote should be able to cast a ballot," he said, calling the Voting Rights Act "a great example of a bipartisan solution that is working today to protect Americans from voter discrimination."

## Black church believed to be oldest in US finishes repairs

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) - A 160-year-old church believed to be the oldest black church in the United States and built by enslaved Africans has been restored to a version of its former glory.

A fresh coat of paint covers the freshly carpeted First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, which also had its bell tower fixed, water damaged ceilings repaired and stucco replaced, the Savannah Morning News reported Dec. 7.

It cost nearly \$600,000 to repair numerous issues, the Rev. Thru-mond Tillman said. The church, a National Historic Landmark, was organized in 1773, according to the website, which says the church gained a pastor in 1775 and a congregation two years later. The sanctuary was completed in 1859.

Some historic pieces were left untouched during the restoration, such as the pews the church says are carved with West African Arabic script, one of the earliest forms of writing. The original sanctuary still is dotted with holes that were arranged in the shape of an African prayer symbol of life, death and rebirth, according to the church's website. It was those holes that allowed runaway slaves to breathe as they traveled along the Underground Railroad and stopped at the church, according to the newspaper.

The church would continue to play a central role in Savannah's black community, later acting as a meeting place for civil rights activists, including pastors who took part in sit-ins and marches.

Sheila Jackson's father, the Rev. Curtis J. Jackson, led the church between 1957 and 1961, during which she says she spotted the writing that she later identified as West African Arabic script. That moment of realization made her appreciate the church.

"First African is much more than a church building," said Jackson, who now lives in Atlanta. "It was built by slaves, it was part of the Underground Railroad, and it served as the foundation for the civil rights movement in Savannah. It tells the story of who we are as a people."

The congregation turns 242 on Thursday and is set to celebrate the birthday with four days of events, including a movie night and worship on Sunday morning.

## UNC students march, protest Confederate statue settlement

CHAPEL HILL (AP) - Protesters at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill marched to an administration building to criticize a legal settlement that will turn a toppled Confederate statue over to a group of Confederate descendants.

A judge approved the settlement last week in response to a lawsuit filed by the Sons of Confederate Veterans. The decision allows the group to "forever maintain possession of the monument," news outlets reported. The university system also will use non-state funds to endow a \$2.5 million trust for its preservation and possibly a facility to house it.

The university system said the settlement complies with a 2015 state law restricting the removal of Confederate monuments.

About 200 campus community members met Dec. 5 at the location where the monument once stood and marched from there while chanting and toting signs.

Leaders of black student groups at the protest expressed outrage and disappointment with the decision, *The News & Observer* reported. One student leader said the decision shows the university has "invested in white supremacy." Others called for would-be benefactors to cease donating to any university causes that don't support marginalized students.

Silent Sam stood in a main quad of the campus for more than a century until activists toppled it overnight in August 2018.



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