

2002 N.C. Primary Elections Off to Unusual Start

By LUCAS FENSKÉ
Assistant State & National Editor

Take a court case about legislative redistricting that is still undecided, add an uncertain primary date and throw in nine candidates running for a U.S. House seat that might not even appear on the ballot.

Let the mixture simmer for a few weeks – or months – and then serve the results to voters on Election Day, Nov. 5.

It might not be a recipe for election disaster, but campaign officials and pundits alike are calling it one of the odder situations in N.C. political history.

Ferrel Guillory, director of UNC's Program on Southern Politics, Media and Public Life, said this primary election is unusual because the date is up in the air.

"We've had elections delayed before – elections in June, elections in August," Guillory said. "But here we are, a week before the primaries were first scheduled, and the date's still uncertain."

Guillory said a long delay before the primary is held would hurt both parties in races statewide. "There is a great

effort by both parties to have the primaries before September, otherwise it makes the general election a real sprint – in campaign terms," he said.

The primaries were originally slated for May 7, until the N.C. Elections Commission decided March 12 to indefinitely postpone the elections because of two court cases and the extra cost of holding multiple primaries.

The first lawsuit, brought by the N.C. Republican Party and prominent Republican legislators, challenges the constitutionality of N.C. Senate and House districts in the N.C. Supreme Court.

The N.C. Supreme Court ruled Tuesday that the districts are unconstitutional. Unless the ruling is successfully appealed, legislators likely will have to redraw the districts this summer before the primaries can be held.

In the second case, the state of Utah appeared before the U.S. Supreme Court to contest the method used by the Census Bureau to account for residents who are not formally counted by the government.

If successful, Utah might win another seat in the U.S. House and cost North Carolina the 13th congressional district, which is based in part of the Triangle.

The U.S. Supreme Court has not issued a ruling.

Guillory said one of the other oddities about this year's election is the widespread impact the cases have had.

Even though only the U.S. House and N.C. legislative districts hinged on the judicial decisions, the primary delay has touched everything from town and county elections to the U.S. Senate race.

But officials say the impact is most pronounced in the newly created 13th U.S. House District, which faces the dual difficulty of a delayed primary and of disappearing from the electoral map if the U.S. Supreme Court rules in favor of Utah.

Joe Bonfiglio, communications director for Brad Miller's U.S. House campaign, said the delayed primaries make campaigning difficult.

"Our campaign and others are going ahead," he said. "But we've all slowed down a bit and are saving resources." Miller is a N.C. senator from Wake

County and one of six Democrats vying for the seat in the U.S. House.

Bonfiglio said all the campaigns have had a difficult time finding donors because the district's future is uncertain.

"The U.S. Supreme Court case has had donors say, 'You might not have a district to represent. Why should we give you money?'" Bonfiglio said.

He added that the situation made it difficult to develop a long-term campaign strategy because no one knew when the primaries could be held.

But a spokesman for Carolyn Grant, a Raleigh businesswoman and one of three Republicans running in the 13th District, said the delay is benefiting Grant's campaign.

Jerry Blackwelder, Grant's communications director, said the race is a game of wait-and-see.

"It's just a question of when the primary will be," he said, adding that Grant is using the additional time to tour the district and meet with residents.

Blackwelder said the delay likely will aid Grant's campaign. "There are sever-

al strong Democrats in the race," he said. "The longer they fight among themselves, the better off we are."

That air of uncertainty and a need to change election strategy also has hit at least one of the U.S. Senate campaigns.

Officials working on the campaign of Democratic candidate Erskine Bowles recently announced that they are temporarily suspending further funding for television advertisements because the primary date is still unknown.

Bowles, a White House chief of staff under President Clinton, has out-raised his nearest two Democratic competitors – Elaine Marshall, N.C. secretary of state, and Dan Blue, a representative from Wake County and former House speaker – by at least six to one.

But Bowles, who raised \$3.1 million in campaign funds, still trails behind leading Republican candidate Elizabeth Dole, a former president of the Red Cross and presidential Cabinet member, in both fund raising and voter polls.

Dole has raised \$5.3 million – fueled partly by endorsements from Sen. Jesse

Helms, R-N.C., and President Bush.

According to an Elon University poll conducted in early March, Dole also has a commanding lead in the race with 53 percent of people having a favorable opinion of her. Bowles comes in a distant second with 14 percent.

Guillory said a late primary would hurt the Democrats more in the Senate campaign since their candidates are generally less well-known than Dole, who is known for her brief presidential bid in 2000. "The Democrats need time to raise the profile of their nominee," he said.

Guillory added that Dole's dominant position in the Republican field is an asset now but a potential liability later in the election.

"Any time a party can get through a primary without their nominee getting roughed up is a good thing," Guillory said. "But if the lack of roughing up becomes an issue and there's more heat for not debating, then (Dole's) image could be hurt."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.

PETA

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In the letter to Potkay, Sweetland also requests a meeting between PETA representatives, including Turlington, and the NIH. But Sweetland said the NIH refused her request. Sweetland said she then suggested to NIH a second meeting with UNC, but she said she has not heard anything addressing that request. UNC officials first met with the NIH last week.

An NIH representative said Monday, "Things are moving forward, and we are acting on the basis of information already released by PETA," although he declined to comment specifically on PETA's request for meetings.

Tony Waldrop, vice chancellor for research and graduate studies, said he has not heard about any possible meetings with PETA and the NIH. He said the University is waiting on further word from the NIH before responding.

"The NIH will look at any new allegations received in the complaint, assemble things and will inform us of any action needed to be taken," Waldrop said. "We will take any complaint seriously."

The University Editor can be reached at udesk@unc.edu.

REDISTRICTING

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The dispute had already forced an indefinite delay in the state primaries originally scheduled for May 7.

UNC political science Professor Thad Beyle said it is difficult to tell when the primaries will be held. "Maybe they ought to have the primaries on Election Day and have a runoff of the first of December between the top two people," he said.

Tuesday's ruling effectively could do away with multi-member legislative districts in the state. But it would also require lawmakers to draw single-member dis-

TPAC

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year at a time.

She also said it is important to clearly define the role of the committee to avoid a repeat of this year's problems. "I feel that I owe you all an apology, that you got pulled into a set of tasks that you never should have gotten into," she told former TPAC members at the meeting.

Several of those members had ideas about how to avoid those tasks in the future. Willie Scroggs, senior associate

athletic director, suggested that someone from Chapel Hill Transit be a permanent member of the committee, an idea that several former TPAC members supported.

Betsy Faulkner, business manager at the School of Education, said she thinks Sutenfield should lengthen the one-year term for serving on the committee. "It seems it would be worthwhile to ask people to serve for a two- or three-year term, with a third of them coming up each year," she said.

Attendees disagreed on the type of person who should be the chairman of

112 districts. The Senate map divided 51 counties to establish 46 districts.

Republican legislators claim Democrats ignored the constitutional provision to give themselves a boost in elections.

"The elections will no longer be rigged. We are going to have fair and competitive elections," said Senate Minority Leader Patrick Ballantine, R-New Hanover.

Beyle said the legislature will be under pressure to draft a new redistricting plan before it reconvenes May 28. One advantage the members of the legislature have is that they will not have other legislation to consider. "If they got called back into a special session now, that's what they'd be working on."

the committee. While some nominated DPS Director Derek Poarch, others supported the appointment of a neutral third party.

But Sutenfield warned that it might be hard to find anyone willing to take the job.

Despite the difficulties she will have to overcome in redefining the role of TPAC, Sutenfield said she is pleased with the ideas she heard at the meeting. "I thought it was very successful."

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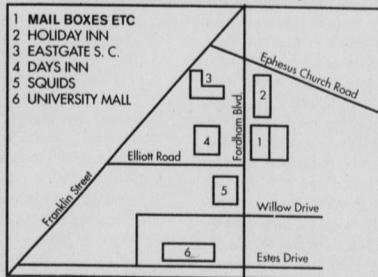
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