

NAACP NEWS

Newsletter of Alexandria, VA Branch #7043

Summer 2011

Gov. McDonnell vetoes redistricting bill

Gov. Bob McDonnell vetoed a bill April 15 to redraw the state's legislative districts, setting up a showdown between Republicans and Democrats that could interfere with the fall elections.

In a letter explaining the veto, McDonnell said he is comfortable with the map produced by the Republican-controlled House of Delegates but not the Democrat-controlled Senate plan.

McDonnell described the Senate plan as "the kind of partisan gerrymandering that Virginians have asked that we leave in the past." He added that he's concerned it may violate state and federal law and subject the state to a costly lawsuit.

Specifically, McDonnell said the proposed Senate districts are not compact as required by law and are split among too many localities.

Democrats have a 22-18 majority in the Senate. That narrow advantage means it is unlikely that they can muster the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto.

If the Senate can't override the veto, legislators will have to submit a new plan. Such a delay has the potential to throw off scheduled legislative elections this fall, when all 140 seats in the General Assembly will be on the ballot.

In his letter, McDonnell urged lawmakers to resume their work "so that the election can proceed as currently scheduled."

Virginia adjusts its legislative boundaries every 10 years to reflect population changes after

the census. Plans are reviewed by the federal government to ensure they don't infringe on minority voting rights.

McDonnell's veto was welcome news to the Virginia Redistricting Coalition, a group that has pushed for a bipartisan approach to reapportionment.

Coalition chairman C. Douglas Smith urged lawmakers to "develop a redistricting plan that serves all Virginians" and cautioned them not to use the veto as an opportunity for a "political end run to create delays or gain partisan advantage."

Senate Majority Leader Richard Saslaw insisted the Senate plan is legally defensible, despite the governor's claim.

"He knows this bill is constitutional," Saslaw, D-Fairfax County, said. "What he didn't like is that we didn't surrender to 'Republicans.'"

Saslaw said Democrats made several concessions to individual GOP senators who had concerns about the geography of their proposed districts. He vowed that his caucus won't change a single "period or comma" in the bill.

"Republicans would not have voted for this plan in the Senate unless we were willing to commit suicide," he said.

Just as the House plan does, the Senate map combines some sitting legislators into shared districts.

Maps for House and Senate districts were approved as one bill, a strategic move by Senate Democrats in an attempt to limit McDonnell's options for altering their plan.

McDonnell and other Republicans have criticized the Senate plan while alternately

holding up the House map as one with bipartisan support as evidenced by its wider margin of approval.

The Senate plan passed on a 22-18 party-line vote. The House proposal passed 86-8.

The eagerly anticipated maps for the Virginia House of Delegates and state Senate were released in early April, easing fears among many in Alexandria that Republicans in Richmond would try to make mischief. The only member of the Alexandria delegation who no longer lives in his district is Del. Adam Ebbin (D-49), whose Cora Kelly precinct has been moved to the 45th House District. But Ebbin has already announced that he won't be running for reelection in the House because he's seeking a spot in the state Senate.

On the House side, Alexandria will have two delegates instead of three. Englin would represent all of Del Ray and Arlandria, although he'll lose Jefferson Manor in Fairfax county. Del. Charniele Herring (D-46) would pick up Chinquapin and MacArthur precincts, although she would lose the Skyline - the lone Fairfax County precinct in her district.

On the Senate side, the city will have three senators instead of two. The district currently presented by Sen. George Barker (D-39) would pick up five precincts on the city's West End. That will leave Sen. Dick Saslaw (D-35) with the middle part of the city. And the seat currently held by Sen. Patsy Ticer (D-3), who is retiring after her current term is up, would keep the east end although it will lose some of Arlington and pick up some Mount Vernon precincts.

In a press release issued by the Virginia State Conference NAACP on redistricting, it stated "the Virginia State Conference NAACP would like the Virginia General Assembly to keep the 12-House of Delegates districts that exist and the 5-State Senate districts that exist in 2011. These are black majority districts. We do not believe the population shifts justify an increase in the number of black majority districts but if the numbers do justify any additions that

the General Assembly will attempt to create another black majority district or at minimum a strong influence district.

We also support the creation of a second black majority Congressional District to add to the current black majority third District currently occupied by the Honorable Robert Scott. The 2010 U. S. Census numbers indicate that a second black majority district is achievable. The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus has endorsed this concept and we support their request and add our voices to those that are urging you to create it.

Some localities are working to be exempted from the provisions of the Voting Rights Act. The NAACP does not support those efforts and finds that localities tend to operate as they did during a time when African American citizens in the Virginia were subjected to diabolic acts of the dilution of African American voter strength."

On May 10, Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli sought pre-clearance for Virginia's legislative redistricting plan through a three-judge federal court.

The Voting Rights Act authorized the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia or the U.S. Justice Department to determine whether 16 states, including Virginia, have met nondiscrimination guidelines in drawing up new legislative districts.

Usually, Virginia goes through the Justice Department.

Cuccinelli also submitted the plan to the Justice Department, inviting them to give prompt administrative approval to it.

A spokesman for Cuccinelli said he decided to go to the three-judge court route because it was the quickest way to get the plans approved in time to meet legal requirements associated with holding elections this fall.

The submission is pushing against a tight deadline. Because of redistricting, the 2011 General Assembly changed the legislative primary nominating date to Aug. 23.

But, under state law, ballots to allow overseas voters to cast ballots must be mailed out 45 days before the primary. Added to the Justice Department's allowed time to respond, that makes 105 days. The filing May 10 was submitted 105 days before the primary. The primary date can be moved back by the State board of Elections.

Because Virginia falls under the federal Voting Rights Act, any election district changes in Virginia must be reviewed and approved by the Justice Department to see whether they lower the chances of blacks being elected.

Under the provisions of the act, Cuccinelli invited public comment. Comments can be directed to his office at 900 E. Main St., Richmond, VA 23219 or to the U.S. Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20530-0001.

The House Privileges and Elections Committee voted 16-2 on April 11 to approve a congressional district plan that protects all 11 incumbents.

The plan, authorized by Del. Bill Janis, R-Henrico, with the consent of the eight Republican and three Democratic congressmen, drew questioning from black delegates who thought Rep. Robert C. Scott's 3rd District had been packed with more African American residents than needed. Scott, a Democrat, has represented the district since 1992.

Under the plan, Scott gets more African American residents and Republican Rep. J. Randy Forbes of Chesapeake in the adjacent 4th District gets fewer.

The House of Delegates and Virginia Senate rejected each other's congressional district plans on June 9, leaving a six member committee of conference to work out the differences.

The House hopes the matter can be settled by mid-July, but senator4s indicated they were in no hurry.

"By the constitution we don't have to do anything until January," said Sen. Richard L. Saslaw, D-Fairfax, the Senate majority leader.

Congressional races are not until next year.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by John Taylor Chapman

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Our community is hurting and needs to have activity come from organizations like the NAACP. Our community needs us to have a presence and also wishes for us to have a function in their everyday lives. And I believe, as many of you do, that our branch can fulfill the role the community is asking us to do. But there are several things which all of us must realize if the public is to see the Alexandria Branch and the NAACP as being successful in fulfilling that role. While there are several, I will only touch on the first things which are: There needs to be an understanding of what the NAACP stands for and how people can help.

As it says in its vision statement, "The vision of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is to ensure a society in which all individuals have equal rights without discrimination based on race." We stand against any discrimination that is race-based. Though, blatant race-based discrimination is still present in our society, it is many times connected with discrimination based on socio-economic status, because there are still a great many in our community that live at or around the poverty level. Due to this fact, communities across the nation have seen the NAACP be active in issues that could be seen as nearer to the line that separates race-based discrimination from socio-economic discrimination. So here in Alexandria, do not be surprised when you hear of the branch being active in issues that are not overly racial, because one group is being affected adversely by policy, and the majority of those being affected fall into the minority category, it is the NAACP's duty to be involved and advocating for that

group. As we look to have a presence in issues that adversely affect our communities, my next point determines the success or failure of the branch and the NAACP.

“Membership is the blood that keeps the NAACP moving”. That was a tagline that many of us have heard many times before, and that is because it is so true. It is your membership in the Association that allows us to charter our chapter, populate meetings and events, and raise funds. Even in recent years, minimal membership has still allowed for the branch to carry out its necessary function. Our members are some of the most dedicated volunteers around; they can be seen at public meetings of city council and school board and involved in local boards and commissions. They can be seen online, promoting new initiatives focused on moving our communities forward or discussing issues with difference local government agencies.

But, with any organization, the number of active members determines how successful the organization is at achieving its mission. And while Alexandria is a progressive community that does not have issues of discrimination that many of our southern neighbors may have, there are still some instances where one may when considering if our local policies allow for equal opportunity. This branch has seen activity levels rise and fall over time, and this is one of those times when the activity level is going to rise. But how much it rises, depends solely on you. We need you to be present at our meetings, involved in our committees, and communicating with us about issues that members in our community are facing. Only with your help can this branch of the NAACP be successful. I encourage you to recommit to being involved in the branch, as we will be coming forward with a specific agenda that will address some of the areas that still give us pause.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

EDUCATION: Chair, Joyce Sanchez

The Education Committee meets regularly on the first Monday of each month to discuss any concern that arises in the Alexandria City Public Schools. The main topic over the past several months has been the transformation of T.C. Williams High School. T. C. Williams was earmarked last year by the federal government as a “persistently low-achieving school”. The label seemed to have stirred up immediate action to make improvements in how students are taught and possibly look at the expectations of how teachers view students, especially minority students.

To get a better understanding of the changes, Alexandria Branch President John Chapman contacted Principal Susanne Maxey to schedule or May general meeting at T. C. Williams. Ms. Maxey and two members of her staff gave an excellent PowerPoint presentation on the “State of the T.C. Transformation.” She had prepared a fourteen page document including: Administrative Reorganization, Recharging the Culture and Titan Pride, supporting Student Learning, Supporting Teacher Learning/Capacity, Revamping Instruction and road to Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP). T.C. Williams had never made AYP. On the positive note, Superintendent Morton Sherman stated in a recent news article in the Opinion Section: “Our students are competing and earning top honors in national competitions in science, foreign languages, music, math, language arts, and much more.”

The changes are extensive, especially in the Administrative Structure and the Climate of the School. It seems that Ms. Maxey has her focus on students, instilling positive behavior and providing the appropriate support where needed. Also, students are given an Individual Achievement Plan to assist them in achieving their individual academic goals...

Scholarship - This year, the branch awarded one education scholarship. The recipient of the 2011- 2012 school year education scholarship

award goes to Nia Pipes, a senior who plans to attend the University of Pittsburgh.

June meeting - At the next Education Committee Meeting, the subject discussed will be advocacy. The National's Advocacy Program includes the following Education Disparities that may exist and need to be addressed: Resource equity, teacher quality, special education, suspensions and expulsions, disparity in test results, drop rate, parent involvement, digital divide, class size, college bound curriculum, language assistance and the re-segregation trends.

The A.Y.P. from T .C. Williams addresses most of the above disparities. What about the other schools?

AFRO-ACADEMIC, CULTURAL, TECHNOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC OLYMPICS (ACT-SO): Jeanette Lightfoot, Advisor

Enjoy lunch or dinner at Baja Fresh, 3231 Duke St., Alexandria, all day on Friday, June 24, and help the NAACP ACT-SO program earn money to get our nine youth to the National ACT-SO Competition in Los Angles, CA this summer.

Present a fundraiser flyer when ordering and the NAACP ACT-SO program will receive 15 percent of the sale. The offer is good for take-out or dining in at the restaurant.

We will be in front of the restaurant to hand out flyers on June 24. For more information, or to obtain in advance, contact Jennifer Lightfoot at 703-963-6211.

ACT-SO competition was held April 23. The youth who will represent the Alexandria NAACP and Youth Council are: Kaylyn Charity - original poetry, Michael Hailu - microbiology and photography, Roscoe Lewis - drawing, Blenbornes Louis - instrumental contemporary, Beatrice Thomson - vocal contemporary, dramatics and playwriting, Angela Gomez - drawing, Ernest Grant -instrumental contemporary, Taki Kenney - playwriting, and Tamyra Lewis - dramatics.

YOUTH COUNCIL: Jennifer Lightfoot, Advisor; Markevia Hawkins, Co-Advisor.

On May 19 Roscoe Lewis and Jennifer Lightfoot submitted final evaluations for Charles Houston Public Art Project. They are members of the Stakeholders Advisory Group for the project...

Activities for June include recruiting members at local recreation center and educate about STDs/HIV/AIDS; attend VA State Youth Council meeting in Richmond on June 12.

MEMBERSHIP: Membership drive at African American Cultural Festival June 18 at Charles Houston Recreation Center and One Love Community Festival Aug 18 (Raindate: Aug 27) [Location To Be Determined].

HEALTH: Chair, Jacqueline S. Johnson

Our Health Fair which was held April 30 at Oakland Baptist Church kicked off our Project H.E.L.P. (Healthy Eating, Lifestyles and Physical Activity) initiative. The fair included local health organizations such as the Alexandria Health Department and the American Diabetes Association and other organizations such as the Lions Club and KI (Karing and Individuality) Services to provide outreach, education and prescreening for some chronic and communicable diseases. Activities included blood pressure checks, blood glucose and cholesterol testing, hearing and vision screenings, diet assessment and HIV/AIDS prevention...

The National Health Department of the NAACP on behalf of the coca-Cola Foundation has awarded the Alexandria NAACP with a \$2,000 grant as a result of the Project H.E.L.P. The branch was one of seven grant awardees in the DC metropolitan area. The award was given to those branches who submitted proposals that reflected healthy ideas for improving the lives of individuals within their community by providing or enhancing opportunities to engage in healthy eating, lifestyles, and physical activity to prevent chronic disease. These opportunities will be brought to the community in such upcoming

events as healthy food distribution (held May 28 at Cora Kelly Recreation Center), African American History Walking tours through Alexandria Colonial Tours and the Black History Museum in June 2011, healthy cooking workshop in conjunction with INOVA Hospital in July 2011 and healthy living workshop in conjunction in July 2011 with the Alexandria Health Department and healthy living workshops in conjunction with the City of Alexandria annual Youth Summit, September/October 2011.

HOUSING: Roy Priest, CEO of the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA) gave a briefing at our April 6 meeting. He was accompanied by Doug Owens, Director of ARHA.

POLITICAL ACTION: Two candidates for the upcoming seat that is being vacated by Sen. Patsy Ticer (D-30) gave presentations at our June 3 meeting. They were City Councilman Rob Krupicka and Libby Garvey.

LEGAL REDRESS: Chair, S. Howard Woodson, III, Esq.

Participated in a conference call with several people from Stafford and outside Virginia concerning of an autistic high school student who was convicted of assaulting a Stafford County police officer. He was sentenced to 10 ½ years in prison by a jury. The reason for the conference call was to help determine what, if anything, can be done for his actual sentencing in May and appeal...

Assisted a woman from Loudoun County in getting in touch with the Loudoun County NAACP branch. She is a teacher/administrator with the Loudoun County Public School System and believes she is the victim of race and sex discrimination.

ARMED SERVICES AND VETERANS AFFAIRS: Many veterans are frustrated that they wait a long time for the Veterans Affairs Department to adjudicate their disability benefits claims. VA has hired over 3,500 new employees to expedite claims processing. VA completed 977,000 claims in 2009, but took in, for the first

time, more than a million new ones. In 2010, VA completed 1 million claims, but received 1.2 million new ones. By the end of 2011, officials expect to receive 1.45 million claims - a double digit increase over the number of claims received in 2000. The VA plans to reduce its backlog by accepting online applications for initial disability benefits, initiating an innovation competition and launching more than 30 pilot programs and initiatives. Under a pilot program for the paperless Veterans Benefits Management System that VA plans to deploy in fiscal 2012, the first all-electronic claim was completed in just 47 days.

FINANCE: NAACP opened its Financial Freedom Center April 4 in an agreement with Wells Fargo & Co. to provide financial education and banking resources to consumers. The center is located at 1816 12th Street, NW, Washington, DC.

OTHER ACTIVITY: Branch President Chapman attended Operation H.O.P.E. meetings where he distributed membership applications. Operation H.O.P.E., Inc. is a non-profit service organization dedicated to provide underserved citizens of Alexandria alternative public services...Chapman also attended Capital Cause Industry Brunch in Washington, DC on April 16. Capital Cause is committed to hosting interactive, educationally centered programs.

CALENDAR

July 23-28th, Annual NAACP Convention in Los Angeles, CA Convention Center

Oct 16th - Annual Life Membership and Awards Banquet, Hilton Mark Center Hotel

Oct 27-30th, State Convention at Ramada Plaza Hotel Richmond West, 6624 W. Broad St



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