

# Voting law's repeal will be justice in N.C.

By BOB HALL

Maybe you think a photo ID requirement for voters makes common sense, but before you sneer at the U.S. Department of Justice for opposing North Carolina's new law, please consider these two points.

First, requiring a photo ID is a slogan, not a policy. The policy spells out the details.

What if the policy said your photograph must be less than one year old and the name on your ID must perfectly match your name on the voter registration roll, with a complete middle name? Many who agree with an ID requirement would call such a policy excessive and unreasonable.

Do you know what the actual policy adopted by the N.C. legislators says? I bet your own state legislator doesn't know, either. The slogan won support, but are you sure the policy is reasonable? In truth, it's quite extreme. If it was only as restrictive as, say, South Carolina's, the Department of Justice would not be challenging it.

Polls show that most North Carolinians think a voter who forgets or lacks the proper ID should be able to vote a sworn affidavit ballot, under penalty of a felony, and provide a Social Security or other identifying number that can be verified before the ballot is counted.

That's the kind of backup for honest voters that most states with a photo ID requirement include in their policies, but not North Carolina. In its details, the North Carolina policy is more restrictive than in virtually every other state in the nation. That's why it's being challenged.

Second, the popular support for the ID in North Carolina created a smoke screen behind which Republican legislators packed in a host of other election changes that favor their party, give more clout to wealthy donors, and hurt certain kinds of voters.

Many of those changes, such as repealing campaign disclosure requirements or cutting a week off early voting, would not have gained support on their own, even among rank-and-file Republicans. But the drama around the ID provided a convenient distraction to add provisions that will affect even more voters than the ID requirement.

Republican leaders had clear evidence that certain voting changes would harm African American and young African American and young voters more than white, middle-class voters, yet those are the provisions they chose to include in their legislation. They had no evidence of significant fraud caused by voter impersonation, early voting or out-of-precinct voting, yet they imposed new restrictions anyway.

They had more evidence of fraud by mail-in absentee voting, a method used by more Republicans than Democrats, yet the new law makes access to absentee ballots even easier through mass mailings and other techniques. So fraud or election integrity cannot explain why some voting methods were repealed while others were expanded.

The numbers reveal who will suffer most from the voting changes: African Americans were 22 percent of registered voters in 2012, but they cast 34 percent of the same-day registration ballots for new voters; 33 percent of the ballots cast in the first week of the early voting; 30 percent of the out-of-precinct ballots cast on Election Day; and 43 percent of the ballots cast on the now-eliminated first Sunday of early voting.

They are 34 percent of the registered voters who do not appear to have a DMV license or N.C. photo ID, but only 9 percent of the voters who use mail-in absentee ballots, the one method Republicans chose to expand.

North Carolina has a sad history of voter suppression, stemming from the Jim Crow laws adopted by Democrats more than 100 years ago that included the poll tax and literacy tests. The parties have reversed roles, but the ugliness of this new Monster Law is too similar.

The U.S. Justice Department has a duty to stop election practices that systematically disadvantage people of color in violation of the 14th and 15th amendments and Voting Rights Act. That's why it is challenging several of the most restrictive parts of North Carolina's law, not just the ID policy.

Let's hope Justice prevails.

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