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GOP tries to dilute African-American vote

By Art Cook

You can call Virginia Republicans' plan to steamroll a new redistricting scheme through the General Assembly gerrymandering or sour grapes after they lost the commonwealth to President Obama.

Take your pick.

On Inauguration Day, Senate Republicans took advantage of the absence of Democrat Henry Marsh, a civil rights hero who was attending the ceremony, to pass a huge mid-decade redistricting bill. However, public pressure may cause Republicans to fold this time.

Marsh's absence gave the Republicans the opportunity they needed to pass the bill.

The Senate is split 20-20 between the parties and the bill would have failed on a tie vote had Marsh been able to vote. Republican Lt. Gov. Bill Bolling would have voted against the bill.

The new plan would have created a sixth majority minority district and put two incumbents in the same district.

The new minority district would have run from the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the James River.

The plan also weakens at least 12 incumbent Democratic senators by reducing the number of African-American voters in their districts.

"This was nothing more than what I call plantation politics," said Senator Donald McEachin, chairman of the Democratic caucus.

Republicans say adding a new majority minority district would prevent Virginia from being sued under the Voting Rights Act.

Senator Richard Saslaw, the Democratic mi-



nority leader, used an expletive to describe Republican concerns for Black voters. He said Republicans, in 2011, blocked efforts to create a new Congressional district with a high percentage of blacks.

Tweaking districts after the lines have been drawn is not new. A major overhaul of the legislative boundaries after lines have been redrawn is major.

Virginia Republican scheming didn't stop there. Like a few other states won by President Obama and whose legislatures are controlled by

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Republicans, legislators are considering a bill that would change how electoral votes are awarded by

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the state in Presidential elections.

Currently, the top voter getting earns all of Virginia's 13 electoral votes. That's not good enough for spoilsports in the Republican controlled legislature.

Republicans want to change it so that electoral votes are awarded based on the top vote getter in congressional districts. Virginia's plan goes one step further.

The two at-large electoral votes would be awarded to the candidate who won the most electoral votes. Guess who that was in 2012?

If the GOP plan had been in effect, Republican Mitt Romney would have won nine electoral votes to four for President Obama.

The good news is two GOP senators, Ralph Smith of Roanoke and Jill Holtzman Vogel of Winchester, have indicated they might vote against the bill.

"What if all states got to skewing it to their own advantage? Smith told the Roanoke Times.

Let's not forget another scheme working through the State Capitol. Delegate. D.W. Marshall, R-Danville, wants to stop schools from be-

ing used as voting precincts.

Marshall's logic is that his bill would keep children safe from someone planting weapons inside of a school on Election Day. The State Board of Elections said Marshall's bill "could have a substantial impact on localities."

Almost 50 percent of the polling places in Virginia are in schools, and in some localities a vast majority of polling places are located in schools. Localities would need to rent space from private facilities to conduct elections.

Another bill introduced by Marshall would make it easier for voters 65 and older to vote absentee without an excuse.

Virginia currently requires voters to have a specific reason, that is approved by the State Board of Elections, in order to vote absentee. There are no early voting provisions in Virginia.

What is interesting in Virginia is that voters 65 and older voted for Romney 54 percent to 46 for President Obama.



Art Cook writes for People's World.

Attention Walmart: good jobs in - guns out

PW Editorial

In Detroit recently on a day of whipping winds, with temperatures barely above zero, a wide cross section of the faith, labor, and social justice community protested Walmart's attempt to build a store in this city near the Detroit border by holding a candlelight vigil against "bringing guns in and sending jobs out."

Celebrating both the Presidential Inauguration and Dr. King's birthday day made it a "monumental day," said Metro Detroit AFL-CIO President Chris Michalak. Demonstrators also thought it a fitting day to press forward on an issue of utmost importance to both leaders: the ending of gun violence.

In a city marked by high unemployment and murder rates, this was a welcome development. City leaders understood that Walmart offers a solution to neither gun violence nor decent wages.

Highland Park NAACP President and Rainbow PUSH Detroit coordinator Pastor D. Alexander Bullock said Dr. King was a victim of gun violence but he also died in Memphis fighting for the rights of workers. He noted Walmart fails on both accounts.

"Walmart does not bring jobs in; Walmart takes jobs out. Working for a limited wage is not a good job," said Bullock.

He also pointed out that Walmart is one of the nation's leading retailers of guns and that 300,000 signatures had recently been delivered to a Walmart store near the Connecticut Sandy Hook Elementary School asking the retailer to stop selling military style rifles and ammunition.

Father Norman Thomas, Pastor Sacred Heart and St. Elizabeth Churches called upon the Archdiocese of Detroit (who is selling the property to Walmart) to "take a race to high ground" by not going forward with the sale.

He then said Walmart too could lead a race to "high ground" if it wanted to because it is both "the largest corporation and the largest employer in the world."

Michalak noted that momentum is building to stop Walmart from building in the city. "We are winning this fight," he said.

He encouraged Southfield and other concerned residents to attend the January 28th Southfield City Council meeting.

Community labor and faith leaders in Detroit, showed courage and foresight.

Continuing efforts to stop Walmart from bring low wage jobs and guns are occurring all across the country. They deserve each and every support.

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Idle No More: Native movement sweeps Canada and U.S.

By Albert Bender

Idle No More is a Native protest movement that arose in Canada and is now engulfing that country and the U.S. Native communities from coast to coast in the U.S. have embraced this upheaval. Throughout our country, rallies of hundreds to thousands have performed traditional round dances flash mobs in support of INM, to the beat of drumming, singing and chanting, in malls and other public venues. Some of these activities have taken place without incident and some have not.

In certain parts of the country, most infamously Colorado and Minnesota, Native people have been barred from malls and even arrested for just “looking Native American.” This is an unspeakable outrage. Police were quoted as telling mall security, “If they look Native American, tell them to leave.” This is 1960s Mississippi-style racist police action directed against American Indian people for simply trying to assemble and exercise free speech in support of INM. Why isn’t there a national uproar? Native people of the U.S. are realizing that the civil rights progress of the 1960s in many respects bypassed Indigenous citizens.

The INM movement, started by four Indigenous women in November last year and now sweeping the Western Hemisphere at warp speed, was in response to the Canadian government’s Omnibus Bill C-45 that would further strip reservations of lands and also environmental protections. This infamous legislation was passed on December 14, after Assembly of First Nations (AFN) representatives were even barred from government meetings on the bill.

This led to a series of rallies and protests and a hunger strike by Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence demanding a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper and the Governor General on Aboriginal rights. Chief Spence is camping out in a tepee on an ice-covered island in the Ottawa River across from Parliament Hill, Canada’s seat of government.

In the meantime, the movement has sparked countless demonstrations and direct actions, including blockades of railways, roads and border crossings in Canada and rallies and flash mobs



from coast to coast in the U.S. Suffice it to say that INM has morphed into the most massive Native American Indian movement in history. The movement is not new, but is the latest manifestation of centuries-old Native resistance to the exploitation, marginalization and continuous daily discrimination experienced by Indian citizens. Indeed, Native people have never forgotten that all of Canada and the U.S., two of the wealthiest nations in the world, is treaty land and that these two nations achieved their economic heights by using the land and resources of Indigenous nations that was for the most part illegally acquired.

On January 16 this year, INM held a national Day of Action that brought Canadian roads, railways and border crossings to a standstill with blockades. The blockades, though predominantly Indigenous, were often supported by non-Native participation.

In the latter 20th century the American Indian Movement and other freedom-seeking organizations ushered in a tremendous upsurge of Native activism resulting in the 1970 Mayflower takeover, the 1973 Trail of Broken Treaties, the 1973 Wounded Knee occupation and other defiant actions. Similarly the Idle No More movement may well bring about an even greater upheaval in the struggle for global justice for all oppressed peoples.

This is not just an Indian issue. The movement is reaching out to all justice-minded citizens to participate in INM, because the issues that are being fought for affect all the people of this earth.

Native people have been barred from malls and even arrested for just “looking Native American.”

Janitors, guards getting hit

By Minneapolis Labor Review

Negotiators for Twin Cities janitorial contractors and security contractors are seeking deep contract concessions from SEIU Local 26. Both the janitorial contract, which covers 5,200 workers, and the security contract, which covers 1,300 workers, expired.

To inform the public, the union marched today through downtown Minneapolis skyways to highlight the workers' struggle for a fair contract. Hundreds of SEIU Local 26's janitors and security officers had marched through the skyways on Dec. 17, calling on the 1 percent to support living wage jobs.

The janitorial contractors seek wage cuts for more than half their workers, Local 26 reported. The contractors' proposal includes moving all suburban janitors to part-time status.

Three years ago, union janitors won minor wage increases. With the latest proposal, even full-time janitors will need to rely on public assistance, the union warned.

The security contractors, meanwhile, have not yet offered a wage and benefit proposal. However, they have proposed contract language changes that the union says would wipe out worker gains achieved over the past decade.

"The proposals from the employers are moving the workers backward and locking them into poverty, rather than helping them move forward," said Javier Morillo-Alicea, president of SEIU Local 26.

"I'm fighting for my family, green jobs, and the 99 percent," said Katra Arale, a Somali immigrant who works as a janitor at the Hennepin County Government Center in Minneapolis. Arale was one of hundreds of Local 26 janitors and security officers who marched with community allies through the downtown Minneapolis skyways on Dec. 17.

Their message: "We aren't just fighting for janitors and security officers, we're fighting for the whole community."

Obama adelanta propuesta sobre inmigración en Las Vegas

Por Prensa Latina

El presidente Barack Obama dará a conocer hoy durante una comparecencia en Las Vegas, Nevada, su propuesta para reformar las leyes migratorias de Estados Unidos.

Desde su primer periodo en la Casa Blanca, el mandatario demócrata trata de llevar adelante el tema pero, la negativa republicana a legislar sobre este escabroso asunto y servir en bandeja una victoria, impidió todo progreso en el Congreso.

Según la Casa Blanca, entre las ideas de Obama está introducir acciones legales que incluyan vías para que muchos de los cerca de 11 millones de inmigrantes sin papeles obtengan la ciudadanía, algo que levanta oposición en las filas contrarias que consideran que eso representaría una amnistía.

Desde sus iniciales aproximaciones al problema migratorio, el presidente prometió arreglar un sistema que considera quebrado y necesitado de leyes amplias e integrales que lo recompongan.

Durante una reunión el viernes último con el Caucus Hispano del Congreso, el mandatario señaló que el cambio de las leyes sería su primera prioridad en su cuatrienio final al frente de los destinos del país.

La derrota en las urnas de los republicanos, al parecer, está llevando un cambio a sus filas y muchos de sus líderes consideran necesario atraer a los latinos a su redil si aspiran a retomar la Casa Blanca en el 2016.

Un estudio reciente de la cadena CNN encontró que el 53 por ciento de las personas consultadas apoyan que los inmigrantes ilegales obtengan la ciudadanía aunque un 43 por ciento insiste en la deportación como solu-

ción.

Medidas para asegurar y hacer efectivos mayores controles en la frontera, la garantía para trabajadores agrícolas, la solución del problema de los hijos de inmigrantes nacidos en el país, entre otras, pudieran estar entre las acciones impulsadas por el Gobierno, estiman expertos.

Coincidiendo con la primera aparición de Obama fuera de Washington después de su reelección, un grupo bipartidista de senadores aireó la víspera una serie de principios para una amplia reforma del sistema de inmigración, incluyendo un camino a la ciudadanía estadounidense.

Tal parece, según señalan medios como The New York Times, que hay avances en un acuerdo para alcanzar medidas que ayuden en la seguridad de las fronteras y garantías de que los extranjeros salgan del país cuando su visa expire.

El senador John McCain, republicano de Arizona y uno de los negociadores, considera que existe una nueva disposición para un arreglo, sin embargo, adelantó que aún hay un largo camino por recorrer.

El congresista demócrata por Illinois, Luis Gutiérrez, expresó su satisfacción por la propuesta presentada por senadores de ambos partidos sobre una reforma migratoria integral, pero alertó que habrá una dura lucha sobre el tema.

El legislador, quien es miembro del Caucus Hispano en el Capitolio, señaló que si la iniciativa senatorial se hace realidad, se legalizará la situación de millones de inmigrantes, se evitará la separación de centenares de familias y miles de indocumentados podrán aspirar a la ciudadanía norteamericana.