TRANSCRIPT OF THE PROCEEDINGS

PUBLIC HEARING CONCLUSION - WELDON SATELLITE SITE

In Raleigh, North Carolina
Tuesday, August 22, 2017
Transcribed by Brad Worley

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(Transcriptionist's note: the following transcript is of proceedings held at the satellite hearing site following disconnection of the communications feed from the central Raleigh site.)

REP. J. BELL: For those who couldn't understand what was said, due to some of the technical difficulty and the length of time between sites, we're going to actually conduct our own public hearing here for the people that are here. We will go through the list that's already been signed up according the rules put forth by the Committee. The Sergeant-at-Arms from the House and Senate will also start recording devices. If you give us just a minute to make sure everything is on go, we will run through everybody. Same rules apply, maximum of three minutes, and then we will go through the list, and then the court reporters will transcribe after the -- the hearing.

(Discussion off record.)

REP. J. BELL: I have six people left to speak. We will go in the order as they signed up. I have speaker number 10, Kim Castle, will be up first, and then Tom Metzger -- I apologize if I do mess up your name. Tom Metzger will be second, and then we will have on Jennifer Smyth, Gwen Wilkins,
John Horton and Ernestine Goldsberry will this finish us up.

So the Sergeant-at-Arms will be sitting right here; he'll start when you're ready. You'll hold up one-minute when you have one minute left, then stop when your times up. So y'all, what I do ask is that you state your name -- state your full name for the record, first and last name for the record, and the microphones and everything are up here. So you stand right here.

MS. CASTLE: I stand here?

REP. J. BELL: Yup, right up here.

MS. CASTLE: Good evening; my name is Kim Castle. I'm the vice president of African American caucus of the Hertford County, North Carolina, Democratic Party. I just want to speak on behalf of all the constituents who -- and everyone who worked so hard and so endlessly and gave the hard-earned monies to elect our senators -- or our legislators just for us to find out that we would be receiving -- we are being forced to have legislators that we don't know. We had no idea in -- who they are, we -- we know absolutely nothing about them.

Our legislators said to Erica
Ingram Smith [sic], she worked so hard with us. We have a rapport with her, and just to know that she will be -- have -- she will be -- we will be [inaudible] this year. It's tragic, in of itself it's heartbreaking, it's basically speechless, and to me is strictly voter suppression, 'cause we gave so much of our time and -- you know, we -- it -- I mean myself personally, I have not slept, you know, certain nights, you know, with strategies trying to make sure, you know, that, you know, we -- we represent her and that we -- we make sure that she get a win, and now y'all are taking it away from us. Thank you.

REP. J. BELL: Tom Metzger will be the next speaker. Please step to the podium Pronounce your name correctly if I messed it up; I apologize, and you have up to three minutes. Thank you, sir.

MR. METZGER: My name is Tom Metzger, and I'm here as a citizen who loves his state and democratic processes.

North Carolina's motto is, to be and not to seem. Well, let's live up to that and not be a poser. Let's be a democracy based on the will of the people, not an oligarchy based on the will of a
privileged select few. The most essential element of a shift toward democracy in North Carolina is for the people to elect their representatives, not the way -- the other way around. Enough, enough, enough.

The current General Assembly, due to the history of gerrymandering, is not a duly-elected body, and is therefore not legitimate. They cannot serve. How could they expect us, we the people, to accept these new maps that represent more of the same blatant, partisan, racist behavior perpetrated by illegitimate, aspiring oligarchs? No. Unacceptable.

By the way, even a moderately socialized five-year-old doesn't try to give away by misbehavior by saying, he or she started it. Democrats' past misbehavior does not justify Republicans' current misbehavior. Any group of people, for instance, North Carolinians, can be expected to have different opinions and perspectives. When those differences are cynically exploited by those who abuse power to divide and conquer, we all lose -- all lose.

Better to wisely utilize the diversity of perspectives to come up with creative, workable
solutions that most folks can accept as fair. A purple state that's ruled from the far right is a recipe for trouble. Unfair, illegal gerrymandering is at the core of the problem. I call for fair, reasonable, nonpartisan districting. They won't erase our differences, nothing will or should, but it's my opinion that it is the right thing to do and will make things better for us all. Thank you very much.


MS. SMYTH: Gentlemen, I apologize. I missed the part where you introduced yourselves. I'd like to know who I'm speaking with, if you don't mind.

REP. J. BELL: I'm Representative John Bell.

MS. SMYTH: Okay.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: And I'm a staff -- I'm a Sergeant-at-Arms.

REP. J. BELL: And he's a Sergeant-at-Arms staff. So you also have Senator Don Davis, Representative Bobbie Richardson, and Senator Smith-Ingram here as well.

MS. SMYTH: Thank you.
REP. J. BELL: You have up to three minutes to speak, and please state your name for the record.

MS. SMYTH: All right. My name is Jennifer Smyth, and I live in a teeny, tiny, little corner of Bertie county, known as the town of Roxobel. I'm about a half an hour from Scotland Neck, which is in Halifax County. I'm about a half an hour from Jackson, which is in Northampton county. I'm about a half an hour from Ahoskie, which is in Hertford County, and which is where I'm proud to work for the last 12 years. And I'm about half an hour from my county seat in Windsor. That's my community of interest.

In order to get anything, to go anywhere, I've got to drive a half an hour, which, to those of you who spend a lot of time in Raleigh, it's going to sound like it's a whole lot, but really, it's -- it's as easy as getting on and off the beltline and going where you need to go.

It's a great place to live, to work and to learn, but that's my community of interest, right there: Northampton County, Halifax County, Hertford County, Bertie County. We have familial ties there, we have geographic ties, we have
Economies.

Bertie County shops at the Super Wal-Mart in Hertford County. There's a lot of our money going into Hertford County, and now we've been separated from Hertford County in both the House and the Senate redistricting plans, and there is not but one reason for that; Bertie County is 61 percent black. It's racism, pure and simple, and it's nothing but a blatant attempt to minimize and dilute the black vote in Northeastern North Carolina. We see you. We know who you are. We believed you the first time. So that's the House plan. Instead of having me with my community of interest, I'm now with Chowan County.

Let me tell you about Edenton right now. The most prominent realtor in Edenton is Sotheby's -- Sotheby's. They sell off antiques for rich folks. That's the most prominent realtor in my county -- 25 percent of the county is in poverty, and the way they've drawn this district, I'm going to be represented by a transplant from Virginia, a retiree who can afford to buy real estate in Edenton, and my black neighbors are going to be represented by a man who can afford to buy real estate in Edenton. And if I'm shaking, it's
cause I'm mad, and that's just the House map.

This Senate redistricting plan -- y'all think we don't know what you did? That man in Beaufort County doesn't know. That man in -- in Beaufort County has no idea he's a sacrificial lamb. That the Republican Party was willing to give up 15,000 GOP votes to make it look cute, when they double-bunked two black women. The same two black women that they went after in that 3 a.m budget bill, and y'all is going to tell me that's not racist -- I am not done.

REP. J. BELL: Ma'am -- ma'am your three minutes are up.


REP. J. BELL: Ma'am, your three minutes are up.

MS. SMTH: Go ahead and take me --

REP. J. BELL: Sergeant-at-Arms.

MS. SMTH: -- cause I'm not done.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Ma'am, thank you.

Thank you.

MS. SMTH: There a whole lot of white folks' tip-toe around the fact that this is racist, and I'm not having it.

(Interruption by applause.)
REP. J. BELL: Sergeant-at-Arms, please remove the people that are clapping. Ma'am. Sergeant-at-Arms, please remove the gentleman. Please remove the lady, thank you.

(Pause in proceedings.)

REP. J. BELL: Next speaker, Gwen Wilkins.

MS. WILKINS: Okay. My name is Gwen Wilkins; I'm from Nash County. Good evening. It is a fact we would not be here this evening if some lawmakers had not forced the hand of a federal court and made them rule that those very lawmakers that control the House and Senate gave too much emphasis to race when drawing our district lines, but here we are, and here I stand.

I am here to voice my concerns and disappointment with the way these district maps have been drawn, and I pray those concerns do not fall on deaf ears. I pray you all are keeping an open mind and have a genuine concern for the people you serve -- all of them and I pray your mind is not already made up.

I have a concern. I question how you, in good conscience, could schedule public hearings when you have just released the maps a day or two
before the hearing. The voters of this state have not had ample time to review them and you know it. You should be ashamed. You then schedule these hearings knowing full well many of us would have to leave work early or not be able to participate at all.

From what I could see of the newly drawn maps, you have certainly drawn them to favor one political group over another and have made some lawmakers' district almost impossible for them to return to. You should be ashamed. You may have been elected in a certain House or Senate district, but you serve all the people of North Carolina, or at least you are supposed to.

I am of the opinion your mind is already made up, though, and the public hearings going on across this state are just a farce to appease us, so you can satisfy the requirement of the federal court. If elected officials of any party have to result to partisan gerrymandering to win elections, I can only determine that they are doing so because they do not have the confidence or the self-esteem to win an election the old-fashioned way, that is, presenting their platform to and interacting with the voters. Partisan gerrymandering is a crutch.
Stand on your own merits rather than on leaning on wrongfully drawn districts to win a race.

Lastly, the lines you have drawn intentionally protect the supermajority of the political party already in power, rather than the people of this state. Sure, you used a few sacrificial lambs of your own party when redrawing the lines to make it appear that the lines were drawn fairly. Do you really think that voters are that naive? I urge Republican Senator Ralph Hise, Chief of the Redistricting Committee, to work with House and Senate colleagues from opposite sides of the political spectrum to draw lines that are reflective of a democracy North Carolina can be proud of. Thank you.

REP. J. BELL: Our next speaker is John Horton. Mr. Horton, please state your name for the record, and you have up to three minutes.

MR. HORTON: Thank you, sir. Good afternoon -- afternoon. It's evening now. Good evening. My name is John Horton. Life resident of Hertford County for 65 years, been active in the local politics, been elected to eight, four-year terms.

Gentleman, I'm not here to bash the
Republicans tonight, 'cause you all have been bashed and probably deserve it, but I'm here to appeal to your sense of political dignity. I've seen gerrymandering before. The Democrats tried that, it didn't work, to the satisfaction to a lot of the citizens. The Republicans tried that, it didn't work. Here we are again.

We're in the 21st century, and it is time that we move towards a computer-based model of redistricting. We're too intelligent not to be able to do that. I'd rather be angry over a computer and calling it a racist before I will call you one -- I will not call you one. You're representing all the citizens of Hertford County. Move where people can't say you got a personal interest, and the only way I see out of this, is a computer-based model with one of the variables in that model, not to split not one county. Thank you very much.

REP. J. BELL: Our last speaker is this evening, Eustice Goldsberry.

MS. GOLDSBERRY: Ernestine.

REP. J. BELL: Ernestine, excuse me. I apologize. Ernestine, please state your name for the record, and you have up to three minutes.
Thank you.

MS. GOLDSBERRY: My name is Ernestine Goldsberry, and I learned to vote — began voting in 1965, which I had to learn the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America, but by time it was time to vote, they had demolished it, because they had passed the Civil Rights Act.

I have been away from Northampton County for 50 years. I moved back here three years, and I thought it had changed, but I see, from what I see now, it has not. It says, look at us now. We’re back in the same predicament 50 years ago that you’re doing now. The same hatred, the same prejudice is here. There’s no need for to divide these counties like this and take them away. Take them away from the economics of the counties that are trying to bring businesses into the different counties and being the people -- the older people.

You got -- you have to think of someone but yourself, and I’m not going -- I’m not going, like, the gentlemen before me, I’m not going to call you prejudiced. Because you’ve -- every one of us know what’s in our hearts. You can believe it or not. I’m ashamed. I’m appalled to say that I came back to Northampton County, and it’s still
the same way. Fifty years have not prospered us, and that is a shame.

We're in the 21st century, and I'm not going to get up here and try to tell you what you should do, 'cause everybody in their hearts knows what's right and wrong, but this is choice that you make, and I'm ashamed to say I'm a North Carolina citizen, because the country is looking at us. Every time you turn the TV on, it's North Carolina this, North Carolina that, so I'm -- that's all I have to say. I'm just ashamed that I ever moved back here.

REP. J. BELL: Thank you, ma'am. Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes our -- and the people that have signed up for the public hearing. I want to thank Representative Bobbie Richardson, Senator Don Davis and Senator Smith-Ingram for attending. I'd thank our Sergeant-at-Arms, our -- our law enforcement here locally -- our General Assembly law enforcement. I want to thank the staff from the General Assembly, and I also want to thank Halifax Community College and the staff here at Halifax Community College.

If you'd like to -- to listen to other comments, I believe the -- the Committee hearing in
Raleigh, you can go through the North Carolina General Assembly website and log into the committee room there and finish hearing the comments, and all of this will be transcribed by the court reporters as soon as possible for the record. With that said, this committee hearing is closed. Thank you.

(End of proceedings.)
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF WAKE

CERTIFICATION OF TRANSCRIPT

This is to certify that the foregoing transcript of proceedings held on August 22, 2017, is a true and accurate transcript of the proceedings as transcribed by me or under my supervision. I further certify that I am not related to any party or attorney, nor do I have any interest whatsoever in the outcome of this action.

This 28th day of August, 2017.

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