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REPUBLICAN OFFICIALS SEEK TO END SUNDAY VOTING IN BRUNSWICK COUNTY

Republican members of the Brunswick County Board of Elections (BOE) voted last night (Tuesday, 7-19) to end Sunday voting in the County for the upcoming November elections. The County offered one Sunday for early voting in 2018, and two in 2020.

Even though six persons spoke in favor of Sunday voting and no one spoke against it, the subsequent motion to have early voting include two Sundays (from 12 pm to 4 pm), in addition to two Saturdays (from 9 am to 3 pm), was opposed by the Republican BOE members. Neither championed even one day of Sunday voting.

Members Randy Pelton and Stuart Smith opposed the motion; the three Democratic members, Boyd Williamson, Paula Clarity and Ed Lewis, voted in favor. BOE rules require a unanimous vote to pass; otherwise, the two sides each send a proposed early voting schedule to the State Board of Elections, which makes a final decision.

“It’s hard to see this as anything but an attempt at voter suppression,” declared Shelley Allen, Acting Chairwoman of the Brunswick County Democratic (BCDP). She pointed to research presented by Bob Bannerman, also a BCDP member.

Bannerman told the Board that his data analysis showed on the two Sundays of early voting in 2020, 368 votes per hour were cast, compared to an average of 331 votes per hour on regular days. That makes a strong case for Sunday voting, he explained, and as the public becomes more aware of this option in Brunswick County, even more will take advantage of it.

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Also speaking on behalf of the Sunday voting were: Euliss Willis, Mayor of Navassa; James Knox, Mayor of Northwest; Barbara Burrell, representing the League of Women Voters; and Denise Donnelly (a member of the BCDP and the BC Democratic Women).

In her testimony urging passage of the measure, Allen noted that “Sunday voting is new to our county – it was first offered in 2018, then again in 2020. We had approximately 550 voters take advantage of the first Sunday voting in 2018. In 2020, the number rose to almost 3,700.”

“The ‘Souls to the Polls’ movement exemplifies the importance of Sunday voting... We need to continue offering and publicizing Sunday voting – as more people become aware of the option in Brunswick County, more will take advantage of it,” Allen said. “The goal in our democracy should always be to expand access to the polls for all eligible voters, and Sundays are the best option for some of our citizens.”

Republican Board member Smith expressed concern about the fatigue the additional hours of voting on two Sundays would cause election staff, suggesting it could lead to accidents, injuries, and mistakes. Board member Lewis asked BOE Director Sara LaVere if fatigue issues had caused any problems in the 2020 election, and she responded that she was not aware of any. Pelton, the other Republican Board member, offered no explanation for his opposition to continuing the expanded Sunday voting.

Board member Clarity also spoke in favor of offering voting on both Sundays, so that people who wanted to vote on Sundays would have two to choose from and there would be no confusion about on which Sunday they could vote.

Republican opposition to expanded voting days is similar to what happened in 2020 when Democrats supported Sunday voting and Republicans opposed it. In the end, the State Board of Elections adopted the Democratic plan that included Sunday voting. “The BCDP urges the State Board of Elections to once again support Sunday voting and reject this voter suppression effort in our County,” Allen concluded.

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