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BORN BY A RIVER



Latoya Ruby Frazier, recipient of the 2013 Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Prize, talks about her work during a walk through of her solo show Latoya Ruby Frazier: Born by a River which runs until June 22 at the Seattle Art Museum. Frazier's photography documents the deindustrialization of her hometown of Braddock, Penn. and its effect on her family and the town.

School Funding In Court

Lawmakers push back on court-mandated funding

By Mike Baker
The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — Washington state's highest court has exercised an unusual amount of power on education funding, and it's prompted some lawmakers to raise constitutional concerns.

Before last year's legislative session, the court ruled that the state wasn't meeting its obligation to amply pay for basic education. In response, the Legislature added about \$1 billion in school-related spending, and lawmakers widely agree they'll add more funding in coming years.

Earlier this month, the court went a step further, analyzing specific funding targets while telling lawmakers to come back with a new plan by the end of April.

Those specific demands have irked budget writers in the Legislature.

"They are way out of their lane," said Republican Sen. Michael Baumgartner.

Baumgartner expects lawmakers will continue adding "substantially new resources" to the state education system, but he said the court's position could erode the proper balance of power in Olympia. Baumgartner hopes lawmakers will ignore the court's latest demands, or he fears justices may exercise more power going forward.

"Everyone has to see how this could be abused," Baumgartner said.

Baumgartner has proposed a bill that would shrink the court from nine justices to five, acknowledging that it was partially an attempt to push back against the decision. But he also said it the change would provide significant budget savings — money that could be redirected to education.

Phil Talmadge, a lawyer who previously served in the Legislature and then the state Supreme Court, said the high court is acting in unprecedented ways on the education issue. And if there's no amicable resolution between the two sides, an escalating battle between lawmakers and justices could lead

Democrats Try Minority Voting Bill

But political realities show session is headed towards bipartisan stall

By Manuel Valdes
The Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — In another move to differentiate themselves from the Republican-controlled Senate, House Democrats are pushing forward a measure that aims to enhance minority voting rights.

The House is expected to vote next week on the measure called the Washington Voting Rights Act, which opens the possibility of court challenges to cities, counties and school districts to

push them to switch from at-large to district elections in areas where large minority groups are present.

The measure, like others in this short session, is expected to die in the Senate, a chamber controlled by a Republican-dominated coalition. This short legislative session is shaping into a bipartisan stall, where measures from opposite chambers aren't going anywhere.

At the heart of the measure is the history of elections in Central and Eastern Washington —

specifically Yakima County, where the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit last year against the city of Yakima. Forty-one percent of Yakima's 91,000 residents are Latino, but the city has never elected a Latino member to its at-large city council.

In 2011, council members refused to put an initiative on a special ballot requiring that each of the seven members represent a specific district, and Yakima voters defeated an initiative to change the system in

last year's primary. The ACLU filed a lawsuit in federal court under the federal Voting Rights Act, and the case is still pending.

The most recent example used by advocates is last fall's race for a position in Yakima's school board. A woman with a Latino name lost 60 percent to 40 percent to woman who was not campaigning and had dropped out of the race.

"This bill makes a lot of sense to folks living in Central and

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New Standards Sought in DNA Evidence

Currently, law enforcement can throw out material after conviction

By Rachel La Corte
The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — The destruction of DNA evidence in some criminal cases has prompted the introduction of measures in the state House and Senate that would impose an 18-month moratorium on such actions.

The bills, sponsored by Rep. Tina Orwall

and Sen. Jeannie Darneille, also would create a work group to recommend permanent, statewide standards for preserving DNA material. The group would present its recommendations to the Legislature and governor by Dec. 1.

Under current law, there is no requirement to preserve DNA evidence after a conviction, though defense attorneys can seek a court order to do so.

The Innocence Project Northwest at the University of Washington's Law School brought the idea to Orwall and Darneille after reviewing about 70 potential DNA cases between 2011 and 2013 and finding that in 25, including murder and rape prosecutions, biological evidence was destroyed in eight cases and lost in one.

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