

Date set for session to undo North Carolina 'bathroom bill'

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina leaders struck a deal Monday to kill the state law widely derided as the "bathroom bill," after it tarnished the state's reputation, cost it scores of jobs and contributed to the Republican governor's narrow loss.

Outgoing Gov. Pat McCrory announced he would call legislators back to the Capitol on Wednesday to repeal the law known as HB2, which excludes sexual orientation and gender identity from anti-discrimination protections. The law also requires transgender people to use restrooms corresponding with the sex on their birth certificate in many public buildings.

Undoing the law would be a step toward mending political divisions that remain raw well after Election Day. Just last week, lawmakers called a special session to strip Democratic Gov.-elect Cooper of some authority before he takes office next month.

The state's Republican leaders confirmed they're open to repealing HB2, but in a sign of lingering acrimony, they accused Cooper of taking too much credit for winning their cooperation.

The passage of HB2 in March thrust North Carolina into a national debate on transgender rights and harmed the state economically. The state missed out on new jobs as companies declined to expand in the state, while cancellations of concerts and conventions exacted a toll. The NBA moved its All-Star game to New Orleans, and in a huge symbolic blow to the college basketball-crazy state, the NCAA and ACC relocated events.

Monday's surprising events began in the morning when the Charlotte City Council voted to undo a local nondiscrimination law enacted in early 2016. That ordinance, Republicans legislators say, challenged social norms and spurred them to pass HB2.

"Senate Leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore assured



In this June 24 photo, North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper speaks during a forum in Charlotte, N.C. North Carolina legislators will repeal the contentious HB2 law that limited protections for LGBT people and led to an economic backlash, the state's incoming governor, Roy, said Monday.

AP Photo/Chuck Burton, File

me that as a result of Charlotte's vote, a special session will be called ... to repeal HB2 in full," Cooper said in a statement Monday morning. He initially said the session would be Tuesday.

McCrory said Democrats used the issue for political gain.

"This sudden reversal with little notice after the gubernatorial election sadly proves this entire issue, originated by the political left, was all about politics and winning the governor's race at the expense of Charlotte and the entire state of North Carolina," said McCrory, a former Charlotte mayor.

Berger and Moore issued a joint statement saying they would take up the repeal if McCrory calls them into session. They said the debate over transgender bathroom access started with Charlotte and was pushed by Cooper as "a political stunt to drive out-of-state money into the gover-

nor's race."

Republicans have defended the bathroom provisions as providing privacy and safety by keeping men out of women's restrooms. Opponents call it discriminatory.

The law was also seen as a referendum on McCrory, who became its national face. He lost by about 10,000 votes while fellow Republicans U.S. Sen. Richard Burr and President-elect Donald Trump comfortably won the state. McCrory was the first sitting North Carolina governor elected to a four-year term to lose re-election.

Charlotte City Council member Julie Eisel said she spoke to Cooper late Sunday night about the city repealing the ordinance to pave the way for getting rid of HB2.

"We needed to know that the governor-elect had confidence that there would be a special session arranged to take a vote on this," Eisel said.

Does a doctor's gender affect your chance of survival?

By LINDSEY TANNER
AP Medical Writer

CHICAGO — What if your doctor's gender could influence your chance of surviving a visit to the hospital?

A big study of older patients hospitalized for common illnesses raises that provocative possibility — and also lots of questions. Patients who got most of their care from women doctors were more likely to leave the hospital alive than those treated by men.

The differences were small — about 11 percent of patients treated mostly by women died within 30 days of entering the hospital, versus 11.5 percent of those treated by men. But the all-male research team estimated that there would be about 32,000 fewer deaths each year in the U.S. if male physicians performed at the same level as their female peers.

The study didn't probe why there might be these differences in survival. And Dr. Ashish Jha, the lead author, said the study doesn't mean patients should avoid him and all other male physicians.

But he said male doctors could take a cue from women doctors' tendencies that might contribute to better care. According to other research, women doctors are more likely than men to follow treatment guidelines, provide preventive care more often and communicate more with patients.

Jha said that it was important to better understand the reasons behind the differences, and to share that information with all physicians to improve care.

Jha, an internist and Harvard Medical School professor, said he has not spoken to his own patients about the study — yet.

"As a male physician, I have a stake in this," Jha said.

The study was published Monday in JAMA Internal Medicine.

The researchers looked at data involving more than 1.5 million hospitalizations for Medicare patients aged 65 and older between January 2011 and December 2014. Patients' illnesses included pneumonia, heart failure, intestinal bleeding, urinary infections and lung disease.

All were treated by general internists in the hospital. The researchers compared results in patients who got most or all of their care from women internists with those who got most or all of their care from men.

Most patients survived and were sent home within a month of treatment. But in addition to better survival chances, those treated by women doctors were slightly less likely to be re-admitted to the hospital within that first month.

On average, women doctors were in charge of fewer patients and some of their patients weren't as sick as those of male doctors, but the researchers considered those factors and still found a link between doctors' gender and patients' survival differences.

Dr. Lisa Schwartz of the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy & Clinical Practice said the study doesn't prove whether doctors' sex accounted for the results. "To make a stronger case, you'd need information on doctors' practices in the study," she said. For example, did women physicians give patients with pneumonia antibiotics sooner than men physicians — treatment that could potentially improve survival chances, she said.

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Dartmouth policy analyst Dr. H. Gilbert Welch called the results "intriguing" but preliminary and "not something for patients to act on."

ELECTORS: Trump expected to win 306 of the 538 Electoral College votes

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to the number of members in its Congressional delegation, and it is those electors who are chosen by the popular vote.

Generally, the winner of the popular vote in any state is awarded all of the state's electors. All of Oregon's seven votes went to Clinton.

Groups gathered in state capitols across the country Monday to urge Republican Party electors to not cast votes for Donald J. Trump, who was expected to win 306 of the 538 Electoral College votes, but lost the popular vote Nov. 8 by about 2 million votes. That effort was largely unsuccessful, with only two Texas electors bolting Trump. Four electors in Washington and four in the District of Columbia pledged to Clinton voted instead for other candidates.

Democrats and others on the left have since criticized the Electoral College system, saying it undermines the principle of one vote for each individual and that the system, laid out by the U.S. Constitution, is

antiquated.

In remarks before votes were cast, Oregon Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins said this year's election was "historic" and that the election process came under "unprecedented challenge and criticism."

"This has continued into the post-election period," Atkins said. "The nation has been roiled by a significantly greater debate than usual over the appropriateness of the Electoral College process in our modern age and over the obligations of those chosen as electors."

Atkins voiced confidence in the state's voting system and Oregon's election results.

Dixon said after the ceremony that he and the party intended to "get their foot in the door" to preserve the possibility of further inquiry when it came to possible Russian interference in the election, and to take a closer look at "legal issues involved" in the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection clause.

"I'm not a Constitutional scholar," Dixon said. "I don't know what the outcome

would be of any legal challenge, but it's simply, if we can preserve the record rather than remaining silent, and just say, state our objection, it may be a way to allow further inquiry ... it's nothing more than that at this stage."

Despite Trump's likely victory and the Democratic Party of Oregon's objections, Dixon said that he hoped that he and his fellow electors were "preserving democracy" by participating in the Electoral College process.

"... We're, hopefully, preserving democracy by following in the requirements of the Constitution, what we pledged to do," Dixon said. "I think there's a purpose in and of itself, to participate."

Protesters stood outside the Oregon Capitol before the ceremony holding signs and singing songs.

Martha Perkins, who came up to Salem for the protest from Corvallis, said she was aware that Oregon's electors pledged to vote for Hillary Clinton, but that she was there at the Capitol as an act of "national solidarity."

FUNDING: Same cutbacks were proposed in 2016

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Columbia Basin, according to Oregon State University.

Yet the President's budget would ax research programs at Pendleton looking into tillage methods that conserve moisture and reduce soil erosion, in order to shift money to what have been identified as higher priorities within the Agricultural Research Service. The same cutbacks were proposed in 2016, before growers and Oregon congressional leaders successfully lobbied to keep the station's funding intact.

Dan Long, station director, said there's been no appropriation yet for 2017, though in the meantime the center has been asked to curtail its spending by 50 percent.

"It could very well be a repeat of last year, where we remain intact again," Long said.

If not, significant budget cuts are in line at both Pendleton and the Agricul-

tural Research Station in Corvallis. The President's budget for the ARS calls for diverting more than \$13 million from ongoing research across the country to fund higher priority environmental stewardship projects, such as adapting crops to climate change.

Soil scientists Steward Wuest and Hero Gollany, as well as hydrologist John Williams, would all be affected by cuts at the Pendleton station, though Long said all three would be given different jobs within the agency.

Nathan Rea, of H.T. Rea Farming Corporation in Milton-Freewater, serves as chairman of the liaison committee for the ARS station. He said the committee is reaching out to Oregon congressional delegates, including Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden, Jeff Merkley and Republican Rep. Greg Walden, all of whom backed fully funding the station a year ago.

In addition, Rea said they

are working directly with scientists at the station to promote the work they do, and benefit to area farmers.

"Telling that story is where we need to do a better job at the national level, and with local growers as well," Rea said.

Speaking from experience, Rea said growers have benefited from the station's research into reduced-till farming, with an emphasis on soil water retention and improving efficiency.

"There's a lot more direct seeding, and minimum tillage," Rea said. "We're entering a new world with our precision agriculture."

Representatives for Sen. Wyden and Rep. Walden could not be reached Monday. A representative for Sen. Merkley said he knows the Pendleton ARS station is critical to Eastern Oregon, and will keep fighting for the funding it needs.

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POLITICS: Secretary of State will be the only executive state office held by a Republican

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the governor's legislative concept, the advocate would be appointed to a four-year term by the governor and be confirmed by the Oregon Senate.

The office of the advocate would be located in the office of the Department of Administrative Services, which would also provide administrative support.

One of the main responsibilities of the advocate would be mediating disputes between people requesting public records and state agencies.

The Governor's Office put the specific idea forward at a Dec. 15 meeting of the Attorney General's Public Records Law Reform Task Force.

The Governor's Office considered locating the advocate in the Secretary of State's Office, according to a recording of the meeting, during which Emily Matasar, a government accountability attorney, responded to questions about the location of the advocate.

"The decision to house the Public Records Advocate was made after questions were raised about an appointed position by the governor being housed in another independently elected official's office," Chris Pair, a spokesman for Brown, said in a statement.

In response to questions during the Dec. 15 Task

Force meeting, Matasar said "we struggled a bit with where to house it, and also to maintain independence."

She said that the position being subject to Senate confirmation was one way the role could be kept independent under the proposal.

"It serves a statewide function, so we just, it made sense to us to put it in DAS," Matasar said. "We started with the secretary of state but that didn't end up feeling like, there's political, you know, implications there as well, so DAS is where it ended up."

Come January, the Secretary of State's Office is the only executive state office that will be held by a Republican. Richardson, a former gubernatorial candidate and state legislator from Central Point, will be the first Republican in the office since 1985.

The Secretary of State's Office voiced criticism of Brown's proposal in early December, noting potential crossover between the duties of the advocate and archivist and other issues to consider in the draft legislation.

In a Dec. 5 letter to Ben Souede and Matasar, attorneys for Brown, Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins voiced criticism of the proposal.

Atkins explained that there may be some overlap, although inadvertent, between the duties of the proposed advocate and the State Archivist, who is

located in the Secretary of State's Office.

Atkins noted that the proposed law would give the advocate responsibility over records management and retention issues that were duties of the archivist.

"Please be assured that the Archivist would work closely in collaboration with the Advocate on matters related to public records," Atkins wrote. "However, given the long-standing expertise of the Archivist over the area of management and retention of records, we think it most appropriate to leave those responsibilities where they currently reside in existing law."

Atkins said the two employees could make a "useful team to promote transparency."

Atkins also sought confirmation of her understanding of the relationship between the Department of Administrative Services and the Advocate, saying that her office was concerned that "having DAS run the Advocate's office may not lead to useful results."

She pointed out that DAS "struggles at times with fulfilling public records requests and the Advocate may be called into service mediating disputes with DAS."

The legislative concept says that DAS would furnish office facilities and provide administrative support to the public records advocate.

DROPBOX: Flushing drugs down the toilet discouraged

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Syringes and illegal drugs will not be accepted.

Liz Marvin, board chair for the Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation, said prescription painkillers and other dangerous prescription medications are often stolen from medicine cabinets, so the sooner people can get rid of their unused portions of prescriptions, the better.

"It's really a public safety thing," she said.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, an average of 78 people per day die of an opioid overdose, including heroin and prescription painkillers. Last week President Barack Obama signed into law the 21st Century Cures

Act, which includes a pledge to distribute \$1 billion to the states to fund opioid abuse prevention and treatment programs.

Putnam said there are methods for safely disposing of drugs that she shares with her customers, but many people have said they feel better letting someone else handle it. For home disposal, the Food and Drug Administration recommends mixing the medications with an unpalatable substance like kitty litter or used coffee grounds and sealing them in a plastic bag before throwing them away.

The FDA's website has a list of drugs that are approved for flushing down the toilet, but the practice is generally discouraged because it can

contaminate the water supply and hurt the environment.

Each April and September the Drug Enforcement Agency hosts national drug take-back days, and the Hermiston Police Department and Pendleton Police Department also have dropboxes in their lobbies where pills and patches can be dropped off with no questions asked.

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