

Court against minority voting rights growing

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court ruled Monday that a part of the Voting Rights Act aimed at helping minorities elect their preferred candidates only applies in electoral districts where minorities make up more than half the population.

The decision could make it harder for some minority candidates to win election and for Southern Democrats, in particular, to draw friendly electoral boundaries after the 2010 Census.

The 5-4 decision, with the court's conservatives in the majority, came in the case of a North Carolina plan that sought to preserve the influence of African-American voters even though they made up just 39 percent of the population in a state legislative district.

While not a majority, the Black voters were numerous enough to effectively determine the outcome of elections, the state argued in urging the court to extend the civil rights law's provision to the district.

The state said the district should be protected by the section of the law that bars states from reducing the chance for minorities to

"elect representatives of their choice."

But Justice Anthony Kennedy, announcing the court's judgment, said the court had never extended the law to those so-called crossover districts and would not do so now.

The 50 percent rule "draws clear lines for courts and legislatures alike," Kennedy said in ruling against the North Carolina district. The decision has created controversy.

In 2007, the North Carolina Supreme Court had struck down the district, saying the Voting Rights Act applies only to districts with a numerical majority of minority voters.

The district also violated a provision of the state constitution keeping district boundaries from crossing county lines, the court said.

Kennedy said that, absent prohibitions like North Carolina's rule against crossing county lines, "states that wish to draw crossover districts are free to do so." But they are not required, he said.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito signed onto Kennedy's opinion. Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas agreed

with the outcome of the case.

The four liberal justices dissented. A district like the one in North Carolina should be protected by federal law "so long as a cohesive minority population is large enough to elect its chosen candidate when combined with a reliable number of crossover voters from an otherwise polarized majority," Justice

Workshop

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distributed at Wells Fargo home preservation workshops held across the country and at all 101 Urban League affiliate offices.

The workbook was officially launched during the Feb. 28 State of the Black Union address at the Los Angeles Convention Center, staged by Tavis Smiley. Wells Fargo served as the title sponsor for the event for the third consecutive year.

Earlier this year, Wells Fargo introduced "Leading the Way Home," a multifaceted initiative to stabilize housing, advance homeownership and revitalize neighborhoods in cities hit hard by foreclosure. In addition to providing financial literacy tools, Wells Fargo is

helping real estate agents, nonprofit housing organizations and city officials understand how to sell vacant and foreclosed properties to new owners.

The company also offers financing to new buyers of vacant properties, and provides loan education that reinforces sustainable homeownership.

The National Urban League has long held economic empowerment as one of its fundamental programs. Through the distribution of the workbooks, it will continue to provide homeowners at-risk of losing their residences with information to help them preserve and sustain homeownership.

This workbook complements the National Urban

League outreach efforts to help them stay in their homes, said Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League. The opportunity to own, and the ability to pursue and preserve homeownership, are core components of the Urban Leagues Opportunity Compact, and are deeply embedded in the Urban Leagues Economic Empowerment Agenda.

Over the past year and half, Wells Fargo has provided more than 706,000 foreclosure prevention solutions for at-risk homeowners, said Heiden. The workbook we are announcing today is yet one more way we can improve on our 94 percent contact rate to help custom-

ers who are two or more payments past due on their mortgage loans.

The Urban League assists more than 400,000 people a year with home ownership issues by providing important housing counseling and financial literacy services in an effort to improve the financial situation for minorities with respect securing homeownership, maintaining good credit and obtaining monetary savings.

This is another important step in Wells Fargo's continued efforts to better serve our diverse communities in which we live and work," said Heiden. "We want to help our customers succeed financially, and the foreclosure workbook is a great new tool to do just that."

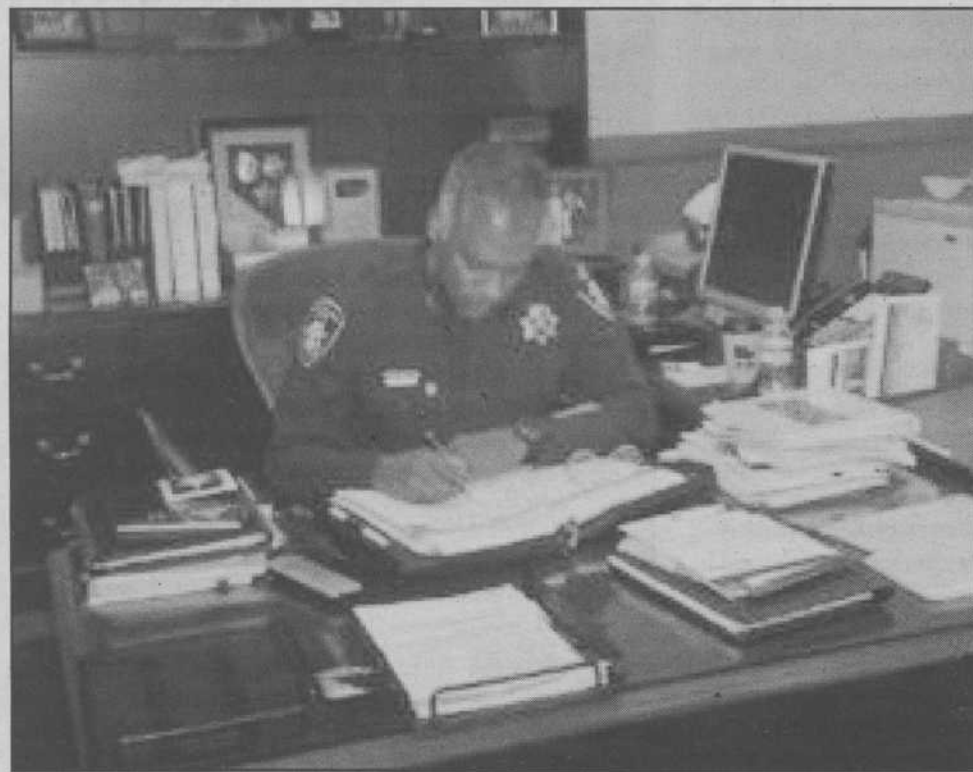
Jett

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could come together and voice their concerns, and in doing this, the department could extend a hand by focusing on what the residents had to say about their neighborhood, and what they felt Metro could do to better provide the level of protection and assistance they expected. The forum presented a clear understanding on both sides, and people saw that it helped to reduce and prevent crime in the neighborhoods."

As the Valley has boomed, Jett has seen Metro's jurisdiction expand, the workload increase and the pressure to fight and prevent crime heighten. "Thirty years ago we were able to have patrols in all neighborhoods at any time during the day or night. If a crime was reported, someone was on the scene within a matter of minutes. With the Valley's growth, it is important that we have working relationships with the communities."

Even the best cop-community relations can't prevent tragedies, Jett said, pointing to the Feb. 15, 2008, drive-by killing of 15-year-old Palo Verde High School student Chris Privett. Gerald



Sentinel-Voice photo by Martine Ramos

As a Las Vegas native, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Undersheriff Rod Jett has unique insight on the amount of work it takes to protect this rapidly growing Valley.

Davison, then 16, and Ezekiel Williams, then 19, were charged with murder in connection with the slaying.

"The community was very upset, because this shooting was done to an innocent young person by gang members, and it got a lot of attention," Jett said.

"The African-American

and Hispanic communities have stated that this has happened a number of times in their communities, but it took a White kid getting killed to spur the gang task force into action. It does not matter that it was the death of a White child. It brought to the forefront that gang activity was happening all over the area,

and it reaches across cultural, geographic, and economic boundaries. There are now more internal programs, such as the Police Alliance for Safe Schools (PASS), in place for preventing violence in and around schools. The Clark County School Police have been a tremendous asset in the community.

Schools are safe on a daily basis."

Campuses may be safe, per se, but Jett sees danger in educational inequity. The richer schools tend to do better than the poorer ones; the suburban campuses tend to get more resources than their inner-city counterparts. This imbalance can contribute to juvenile problems, which can fester into adulthood if unchecked.

Said Jett: "Schools need to be on equal footing in what level of education and support they can provide. There is clearly a disparity in buildings, textbooks, and teacher assignments. Resources need to be made available across the board. The prison system does not rehabilitate offenders to the extent that they can function back out in society. There needs to be neighborhood grassroots efforts for re-entry, and since there is not enough of that going on, people who may be rehabilitated reoffend instead."

Jett said the budget cuts forced upon Metro by the current economic crisis won't affect the department's ability to enforce the law. Officials will find ways to manage with

fewer resources, he said. He also encourages more minority youth to consider law enforcement careers, calling it a win-win for everyone. There are a number of jobs available, many away from the front lines such as in dispatching or forensics. "This is a way to impart positive change. We need people to take our place, to continue the dialog that affects change."

Prior to becoming undersheriff, Jett's experience ran the gamut: patrol, field training officer, SWAT team leader, gang unit, Internal Affairs, and human resources division commander. He would like to see more people, businesses, and schools join in the neighborhood partnerships.

Asked about his legacy, Jett said he hoped to make a difference in his community.

"If I hadn't made a difference, I would have wasted my time and squandered an opportunity, and that would make me feel worthless and disappointed. No matter what your job or position, it is wasted if you do not do something to make a difference to enhance fellow human beings."