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Suit Challenges Tift's Method of Elections

By JOHN McCLELLAN
Gazette City Editor

Six Tift County voters have announced plans to file suit in U.S. District Court in Valdosta challenging the county's at-large methods of electing members to the county commission and county board of education.

The suits, which were to be filed this afternoon, name as the defendants the Tift County Commission and Tift County Board of Education. Plaintiffs in the suit are Larry Mims, Homer Day, Wasdon Graydon, Sharon Bryant, Roosevelt Russell and Betty Anderson. Filing the suit were attorneys Emerson Henderson of Tifton and David Walbert of Atlanta.

The plaintiffs allege that the present at-large system of voting discriminates against black voters in Tift County. The suit asks the court to enjoin the county from holding future elections under the at-large plan and to establish election districts to choose members of the two bodies.

The present plan violates Amendments 1, 13, 14 and 15 of the United States Constitution, the plaintiffs allege.

Henderson said the system excludes blacks from meaningful participation in the electoral process in Tift County.

Mims said no black has ever been elected to public office in Tift County, although several have run. Two of the plaintiffs in the case have been

unsuccessful candidates with Mims defeated for a seat on the school board and Mrs. Bryant running unsuccessfully for the county commission, both in 1980.

Black residents have not received the type of government service they are entitled to under the at-large system," Mims said. "It is impossible and unrealistic for blacks to get elected in Tift County."

The only remedy, the plaintiffs said, was to take the matter to court.

Although some members of the task force pushing consolidation had reportedly tried to persuade the plaintiffs to delay the court action until the consolidation process was completed, the plaintiffs said that should not be a factor in their decision.

"By their own admission, the consolidation issue could take several years to be resolved," Day said.

Graydon said black residents had tried to work with elected officials to get the system changed and that he had even served on a task force that studied the county election process and presented several plans for the commission's consideration. However, he said the commission had never acted on any of those recommendations.

The suit is being filed as a class action matter on behalf of all black citizens in Tift County, according to the plaintiffs.

The plaintiffs are optimistic about the outcome.

"We are not entering into this suit haphazardly or ill-prepared," Day

said. "We will gain participation in the total electoral process through this action."

"We are very optimistic in light of recent court cases," Henderson said. He said Burke County was the last county to successfully initiate a suit and that blacks have been elected there by the district method.

Currently, five members are elected to the county commission and seven members to the school board. Although candidates run from districts, they are elected countywide. The suit seeks to have members of the boards elected by district, increasing the chances for blacks to be elected.

A similar suit was filed in 1977 against the City of Tifton. The city's at-large voting system was upheld in federal court.

Storm Sweeps into Georgia

By DAVID PUTNAL
Gazette Staff Writer

A winter storm swept into

City Edition Today

Today is Thursday, Jan. 20, the 41st day of 1983, with 345 days left. The moon is between its first and first quarter. Those born on this date are under the sign of Aries.

Thought for Today — Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) said: "Do what you can in your heart to be right, for criticism is always there."

Weather outlook for the next 24 hours calls for rather cool temperatures and rain chances ranging from 0 to 60 percent. The lows around 40. The highs Friday, 40. The sun sets today at 5:58 p.m. and rises Friday at 7:31 a.m. Details on Page 5-A.

Signs for the moon are:

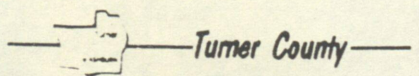


day of 1985, with 34 days remaining. The moon is between its new phase and first quarter. Those born on this date are under the sign of Capricorn.

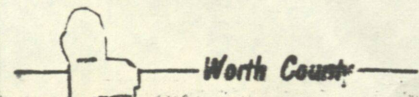
The Thought for Today — Artemus Ward (1727-1800) said: "Let us be happy and live within our means, even if we have to borrow the money to do it with."

The weather outlook for the next 24 hours calls for a 60 percent chance of rain along with continued cold and windy conditions. The lows tonight, in the upper 30s. The highs Saturday, around 50. The sun sets today at 5:59 p.m. and rises Saturday at 7:31 a.m. More details on Page 3-A.

The phases for the moon are:



ASHBURN — The churches of the Turner County Baptist Association have scheduled a World Missions Conference for Jan. 30 through Feb. 6. Services will be held in participating churches with a different missionary speaker for each service.



five years during a meeting Thursday night of the Tift County Board of Education.

The school board established the priorities under a new state law that determines which projects will receive capital outlay funds. Local school systems must go down the priority list unless an emergency develops that require funds to be spent elsewhere.

Board members were in agreement on most priority areas

because all three schools have needs for additional classrooms. School Superintendent Ed McCray said classroom needs are the only restriction placed on priority setting by the state.

The G. O. Bailey project would involve 10 additional classrooms while Northside would need six more classrooms, along with construction of a media center and music room. J. T. Reddick would need two classrooms built, along with a media

School, which was placed fifth on the list.

Sixth on the list was Tift County High School, primarily because of the need for a new library-media center. The Southern Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation report last fall said a new facility for the library would have to be built within 10 years or the school could risk the loss of its accreditation.

However, McCray told the board that the state probably would permit the library to be constructed ahead

have new classrooms built and the school expanded later this year. Tift County Junior High School, which ranked eighth, is a newer school and has less needs than many of the older buildings.

A need was established in the study for a new kitchen and lunchroom at Annie Belle Clark.

Virtually all of the schools in the system have some renovation work included in their studies, primarily involved in making them more energy efficient. School officials said

any of the projects on the priority list. However, he said the list is needed so that state funds can be received for any planned renovation project. Local funds would have to be used to match state monies.

The superintendent also emphasized that this was not a final document and that it could be changed anytime until a state facilities study panel reviews the system's needs. McCray said it was a tentative setting of priorities.



Tift Voting Process Challenged

A group of black citizens in Tift County filed suit this morning in U.S. District Court in Valdosta against the Tift County Commission and Tift County Board of Education, claiming the at-large method to elect members to those bodies discriminates against blacks. The suit asks that all future elections be halted until a district

voting plan is put into effect. Tifton attorney Emerson Henderson (second from right) filed the suit on behalf of plaintiffs (from left) Homer Day, Larry Mims and Wasdon Graydon. Other plaintiffs in the case are Sharon Bryant, Betty Anderson and Roosevelt Russell. (Gazette Photo by Herb Pilcher)

Tiftarea Weathers Rain, Ice

From Staff, Wire Reports

A winter storm that left many sections of Georgia disabled today apparently has passed through the Tiftarea without causing major damage.

Rain was expected to fall throughout the afternoon, but temperatures were predicted to rise, eliminating the possibility of dangerous ice on roads and trees.

The most serious problems caused by the storm occurred Thursday when ice-laden tree limbs fell on electrical lines and caused power outages in some areas.

According to Don Marchant of Colquitt Electrical Membership Corporation, about 150 homes in Berrien County were without power for two hours Thursday morning after limbs fell on electrical lines.

Robert Boyd of Georgia Power Co. said that the cities of Ashburn and Chula were without electricity for about 20 minutes Thursday after a tree fell on a major transmission line north of Ashburn.

workers labored to restore power outages that plunged several thousand people into darkness several Georgia cities overnight.

The National Weather Service said its winter storm warning would remain in effect this morning north of a line from LaGrange to Griffin, just north of Augusta. The warning will remain in effect throughout the day in the north Georgia mountains where an accumulation of 2 to 4 inches of snow was expected.

Temperatures were expected warm somewhat today from as low as mid-20s Thursday night, but for the most part, they were not expected to rise much, if any, above freezing, the weather service said.

Freezing rain was expected change to rain in some parts of north and central Georgia, forecasters said.

"Roads are very hazardous through most of north and central Georgia," the weather service said, warning drivers to restrict travel unless absolutely necessary.