

Report: Documents Suggest Counties Didn't Allege Voter Fraud by NGP

By Gloria Tatum, Senior Staff Writer, The Atlanta Progressive News (October 13, 2014)

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(APN) ATLANTA -- Georgia Secretary of State (SOS) Brian Kemp's Office has said that his investigation of the New Georgia Project's (NGP) mass voter registration drive across Georgia this year, 2014, began because of complaints received by several Georgia counties regarding alleged voter fraud on the part of NGP.

However, the SOS office's response to an open records request by a research librarian, Marjorie Snook, suggests that the voter fraud allegations did not, in fact, originate with Georgia counties, according to a report appearing in the Daily Kos website, a progressive blog.

(The post appears to have modified since it originally appears; however, APN has a screenshot of the original post.)

"On September 19th, I submitted a Georgia Open Records Act request for all complaints of voter fraud filed with the Secretary of State's Office in 2014," Snook wrote on Daily Kos.

A copy of the SOS office's initial response, dated September 26, is posted to Daily Kos. Originally, the office declined to release the records, stating they were subject to an exemption to disclosure under the Georgia Open Records Act for pending investigations.

Snook wrote back, insisting they were not exempt. According to Snook's post, the SOS office then responded with documents.

"There were 6 complaints before September 9th (one additional one that was not filed until after the SoS filed their subpoena)," Snook wrote.

"Two were complaints from people who showed up at the polls for the primary and found themselves not registered," Snook wrote.

"One was a complaint that Pike county had erroneously districted voters," Snook wrote.

"There was one complaint about a single individual who tried to register as part of an ID theft scheme, and one stated there had been some felons that voted in the past elections (nothing to do with voter registration drives)," Snook wrote.

"There was one, single complaint that appeared to address the New Georgia Project, from the Butts County Election Director received way back on May 13th," Snook wrote, citing:

"Complainant reported that individuals were canvassing voters and telling voters they were

required to reregister to vote. Wanted people and parolees were allegedly participating in the registration drive."

Reached by APN on today, October 13, 2014, Snook declined to release the documents at this time.

APN made a similar request to Kemp's office, via Jared Thomas, press secretary, on Friday, October 10, and has not yet received a response.

APN also sent an email and left a voice message for Thomas, requesting clarification, on today, but has not yet received a response. However, today is Columbus Day, so the SOS office is closed in observance thereof.

As previously reported by APN, the lawsuit was filed on Friday, October 10, 2014, in Fulton County Superior Court against Kemp and five county boards of election on behalf of Third Sector Development, the parent organization of the New Georgia Project (NGP) the National Conference of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Georgia State Conference of the NAACP.

The complaint for writ of mandamus--a copy of which has been obtained by APN--has assigned to Superior Court Judge Christopher Brasher, to require the SOS and county boards of elections to promptly process some 40,000 voter registration applications so citizens can vote in the midterm elections.

Early voting starts today, October 13, and continues through November 05, 2014.

The writ that is sought in the complaint is for the court to compel immediate action, which could be to provide more staff to the counties to process the applications or add more people in the SOS office.

"What we are getting now is silence or denial and those are not adequate responses," State Rep. Stacey Abrams (D-Atlanta) said, during a press conference held yesterday, October 12, outside of Ebenezer Church with Rep. Abrams and Reverend Dr. Raphael Warnock, to address the lawsuit and the urgent problem of over 40,000 Georgians that they say have registered to vote, but who are still not on the voter rolls.

"We are concerned that if this is not resolved quickly and through legal means, forty thousand plus voters in the State of Georgia will be disenfranchised," Rep. Abrams said.

As reported earlier by APN, Jared Thomas in Kemp's office denied that his office had any knowledge of the 40,000 alleged missing applications, but said they were well-aware of the allegations.

Prior to filing the lawsuit NGP asked for a meeting with the SOS office in order to avoid litigation and they refused twice.

"We had no time to meet with this group that would not provide us with specific claims, we felt it was just generalities...we did not feel it would be a productive use of our time," Thomas said, as reported earlier by APN.

Kemp has claimed he launched the investigation because of numerous complaints that came to his office from several Georgia counties. He then sent out a letter to 159 counties telling them to watch out for NGP. Next, his office issued a very broad subpoena for NGP to turn over everything they had to the SOS.

"This signals a disconnect between the role he should be playing. The same urgency that was placed in issuing the subpoena [to NGP] should be given to registering the new voters and getting them on the role immediately," Rep. Abrams said.

"We have seen a pattern of disingenuous activity from the SOS. When he announced he was investigating NGP, on whether or not there was fraud, he simultaneously said he believed there was fraud," Rev. Warnock said.

Many of the people that NGP registered are first time voters between the ages of 18 and 35, the group says, expressing concerns that these citizens are finding it difficult to vote and are confused about their status.

"It is an extreme irony, that the SOS is focused on these dozens [of alleged fraud applications] when there are tens of thousands of applications that are not on the rolls or the pending list," Rev. Warnock said.

"We are not talking about the possibility of voter suppression or the potential of disenfranchisement - hundreds have already been disenfranchised. Many were supposed to vote in the May [2014] Primary and here it is October and they are still not on the rolls," Rev. Warnock said.

"We should not have to file a lawsuit in the United States of America for people to be able to exercise their franchise... but if this is what it takes to move democracy down the road, so be it," Rev. Warnock said.

(END/2014)