

Political Grab Bag

By Steve Bagby, Sr., Political Action Committee Chair

BAGBY WINS SPECIAL ELECTION --

Well, a **Bagby** may have won an election . . . but it wasn't me! When I saw the headline, it impacted me to the degree that I thought it would be a fun "play on words" to include it in the Political Grab Bag. Actually, it was Democrat **Lamont Bagby** from Virginia who won a special election to fill the open Richmond-based Virginia state Senate seat. In fact, per a March 29, 2023 Associated Press news article (apnews.com/article/virginia-special-election-senate), Lamont Bagby won the election with about 90% of the vote. The seat was previously held by Democrat [Jennifer McClellan](#) who was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in a special election. Lamont Bagby is the chair of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC) and Jennifer McClellan was the vice-chair of the VLBC who will now, as the first Black woman elected to represent Virginia in the U.S. Congress, serve in the largest Congressional Black Caucus in history. (thevlbc.com/2023/02/22) As stated by the new state Senator Bagby: "To all those who joined us, and to those who didn't, know that this seat belongs to you and my door will always be open. Together, we are going to do great things for Virginia families — from lowering costs for hardworking Virginians and protecting workers' rights, to ensuring more accessible housing and **fortifying Democrats' brick wall against Republican attacks on reproductive rights, voting rights and public education, we will get it done.**" (apnews.com/article/virginia-special-election-senate) We applaud all those, **wherever located throughout the country**, who lead the charge for equality and fairness for all. From a Bagby to a Bagby . . . congratulations Bagby!

VOTING ABILITY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS BEING IMPACTED --

When our young people turn 18, one of the first things we tell them that they can do that they generally couldn't do before they turned 18 is register to vote. We speak with them to let them know how important the right to vote is and encourage them to register and exercise that right. However, the ease at which

they can exercise that right is under attack. There is a reason Lamont Bagby, the new state Senator in Virginia made reference to “fortifying Democrats’ brick wall against Republican attacks on . . . voting rights . . .” because Republican lawmakers in a number of states have been trying to enact new obstacles to voting for college students as they are alarmed over young people increasingly proving to be a force for Democrats at the ballot box. Per a March 29, 2023, online Yahoo news article (*news @yahoo.com*), the Republicans are making a concerted effort to impact the ability of college students to vote in various states across the country by limiting the type of identification a student can use to vote as well as other restrictive measures.

Per the article, **Georgia** has accepted student IDs only from public colleges and universities since 2006, so students at private institutions, including several historically Black colleges and universities, must use another form of identification. In **Ohio**, which has for years not accepted student IDs for voting, Republicans in January approved a broader photo ID requirement that also bars students from using university account statements or utility bills for voting purposes as they had in the past. In **Idaho**, Republicans used their power in March to ban student ID cards as a form of voter identification. Out of 17 states that generally require voter ID, Idaho will join **Texas** and only four others — **North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee** — that do not accept any student IDs, according to the Voting Rights Lab, a group that tracks legislation.

There have been other attempts to limit the ability of college students to vote. **New Hampshire** and **Virginia** tried to cordon off out-of-state students from voting in their campus towns and roll back preregistration for teenagers. In **Texas**, where 2019 legislation shuttered early voting sites on many college campuses, a new proposal tried to eliminate all college polling places. Legislators in Texas have also introduced similar legislation to eliminate polling places at primary and secondary schools. While some of these efforts have initially failed, the concern is that “[w]hen these ideas are first floated, people are aghast,” said Chad Dunn, the co-founder and legal director of the UCLA Voting Rights Project. But he cautioned “that the lawmakers who sponsor such bills tend to bring them back over and over again . . . then years later, these terrible ideas become law.”

These concerted efforts to thwart students’ ability to vote have been proposed based on alleged issues of potential fraud. However, per the article, even though “proponents of such restrictions often say they are needed to prevent voter fraud

. . . instances of fraud are rare.” Voting advocates see a different motive for these laws. “This is just the latest in a long line of attacks on young people’s right to vote . . .” said Claudia Yoli Ferla, the executive director of MOVE Texas Action Fund, a nonpartisan group that seeks to empower younger voters.

Republicans are concerned that turnout in recent election cycles has surged for young voters who were energized by issues like abortion, climate change and the Trump presidency. Now, with the 2024 presidential campaign underway, the battle over young voters has a heightened significance. While our voting laws in California are more inclusive for 18 year olds, we have to be aware of the restrictions that are being sought countrywide that can significantly impact the voting rights of young people in the upcoming Presidential Election. Although the Idaho law prohibiting the use of student IDs was challenged in state and federal courts after the bill was signed on March 15th, organizations throughout the country that follow legislative attempts to restrict voting rights need to remain vigilant in challenging these laws as the ability of our young people to access their right to vote is being impacted. These restrictive laws are having a negative effect on our students. As stated by a senior at Borah High School in Boise, Idaho, who testified against the Idaho bill in February: “[w]hen we’re taught from the very beginning, when we first start trying to participate, that voting is an expensive process, an arduous process, a process rife with barriers, we become disillusioned with that great dream of our democracy. We start to believe that our voices are not valued.” That feeling is just the opposite of what we should be teaching our children. We should be teaching them that their voices are valued and that they can have a positive impact on society by exercising their right to vote. Let us continue to encourage our young people to register to vote. A lot of us have young relatives or know of young people in various states throughout the country who are becoming of age to register to vote. Let us encourage them and empower them, and let them know that regardless of the stumbling blocks that some may try to put in their way to make it more difficult for them to exercise their right to vote, they should persevere in their efforts and not be thwarted by others, as in the words of the late Congressman, John E. Lewis: “. . . your vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have to create a more perfect union.” We must resist the efforts of all those who want to negatively impact one of the goals in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution which states: “We the People of the United States, **in Order to form a more perfect Union**, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to

ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Our youth must stay empowered to do the right thing and make an impact on society by letting their voices be heard and not letting anything prevent them from **ultimately** casting their votes.

MARK RIDLEY THOMAS -

For those of you who may have missed the L.A. Sentinel article, this is a reprint **in part** from an article in the L.A. Sentinel dated March 30, 2023 entitled **"This is a Sad Day In Our Community—Mark Ridley-Thomas Found Guilty on 7 Counts"** (*lasentinel.net*)

This article is being included because this is truly a sad outcome and having met and interfaced with Mark Ridley- Thomas, his wife Avis, as well as his sons, our hearts go out to the entire family as they all truly need our prayers.

"Suspended Los Angeles City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas was convicted today, March 30, of federal bribery and conspiracy charges, along with mail and wire fraud, stemming from his time serving on the county Board of Supervisors and accommodations provided to his son by a then-USC dean. He was convicted on single counts of bribery and conspiracy, along with one count of honest services mail fraud and four counts of honest services wire fraud. Jurors, who reached their verdict on their fifth day of deliberations, acquitted the Southland political giant of 12 other fraud counts.

The charges stemmed from what prosecutors called a quid pro quo arrangement between Ridley-Thomas and a former head of the USC School of Social Work, with the politician accused of steering county contracts toward the school in exchange for benefits provided to Ridley-Thomas' son, former Assemblyman Sebastian Ridley-Thomas. U.S. District Judge Dale Fischer set sentencing for Aug. 14. Ridley-Thomas has been suspended from the City Council since the indictment was announced.

Mr. Ridley-Thomas, has vehemently denied any wrongdoing. He did not testify in his own defense, but his attorneys argued throughout the trial that nothing he did amounted to a crime.

Prosecutors alleged that the longtime local politician, while serving as a county supervisor, “put his hand out” and accepted perks from USC to benefit his son, Sebastian. Federal prosecutors based their case on a long string of emails and letters to bolster allegations that Ridley-Thomas and the former dean of the USC School of Social Work, Marilyn Flynn, had a quid pro quo arrangement during 2017 and 2018 in which the then-dean arranged for Sebastian’s admission to USC, a full-tuition scholarship and a paid professorship in exchange for his father’s support for county proposals that would ostensibly shore up the school’s shoddy financial picture and save Flynn’s job. However, **defense attorney Daralyn Durie countered that nothing Ridley-Thomas did was illegal, and a series of defense witnesses contended that the “paper trail” was not what it seemed.**

Former Dean Flynn, 84, of Los Feliz, pleaded guilty in September to one count of bribery, admitting that she agreed to disguise and funnel \$100,000 from the then-supervisor to USC, then to United Ways of California, which ultimately passed the money on to a nonprofit run by Sebastian. The longtime dean of the USC School of Social Work, who departed in 2018, is scheduled to be sentenced June 26.

Although the government argued that Ridley-Thomas accepted help for Sebastian in exchange for his support of USC contracts, including a Telehealth program, that would’ve helped Flynn’s school financially, **Durie said the then-supervisor had already been in support of the proposals, so he could not have been bribed.** As for the contention that Ridley-Thomas participated in a secret scheme whereby Flynn funneled \$100,000 “seed money” from the politician’s campaign fund through the school to the Policy, Research & Practice Initiative, a nonprofit operated by Sebastian, who had recently stepped down from the California Assembly, **Durie argued that nothing the politician did was illegal.**

Ridley-Thomas’ support of the contracts that prosecutors claim would’ve helped remedy the troubled financial situation at Flynn’s school, had nothing to do with his son’s ambitions at USC, the defense attorney told jurors in her closing argument. Durie also alleged that one of the contracts amounted to less than

\$500,000 over five years — an amount so low it would not have helped remedy the financial problems at Flynn’s school.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Morse told the jury panel, however, that Ridley-Thomas made the alleged exchange to benefit his son, who had resigned from the Assembly amid an internal sexual harassment probe that was about to go public at the peak of the #MeToo movement. However, defense witnesses maintained that Sebastian suffered from a series of significant health issues that caused him to resign and look for other work. At the conclusion of her two-hour closing argument last Thursday, Durie asked the jury to acquit the defendant, and “return this man to his home and his work and his community.”

Jurors were not told that Flynn pleaded guilty in the case, and her plea agreement did not require her to testify at the Ridley-Thomas trial.

Ridley-Thomas is a giant figure in local politics, previously serving the Los Angeles City Council from 1991-2002, then serving in the California State Assembly and State Senate before he was elected to the powerful County Board of Supervisors in 2008, serving until 2020, when he returned to the City Council.

He has a doctorate in social ethics from USC and spent 10 years as executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Los Angeles, beginning in 1981. . .” (*lasentinel.net*)

Per a March 31, 2023, online NBC news article ([nbctv.com/news/local/mark-ridley-thomas-la-city-council-seat](https://www.nbctv.com/news/local/mark-ridley-thomas-la-city-council-seat)), **several of Mark Ridley-Thomas' City Council colleagues issued statements on the outcome of the trial:**

"I am deeply saddened that a career of extraordinary public service and achievement has been brought to a close in this way. Mr. Ridley-Thomas leaves behind an irrefutable legacy of leadership, activism and effective policymaking that have shaped our city, county and state," stated City Council President Paul Krekorian.

Councilmember Mike Bonin [said](#), "The Mark Ridley-Thomas I know is the tireless champion, the relentless advocate, the unstoppable force. The things he has achieved cannot be erased, and the fights he has won cannot be undone."

We believe that a statement via Twitter by Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson, which acknowledged the verdict and Mr. Ridley-Thomas' longstanding career and the contributions to the community he represented, helps to suggest that we should look at "the totality of the circumstances" when we factor on the outcome of the trial and the legacy of Mark Ridley-Thomas:

"When those in power [chose] to forget our community, Mark Ridley-Thomas centered and uplifted us," Harris-Dawson tweeted. **"We are called to acknowledge this history in the coming days as we navigate the next steps."**

Based on conversations others have had with those who closely followed the trial, the next steps may likely include an appeal.

GRAND JURY INDICTMENT OF DONALD TRUMP –

Former Republican President Trump has been indicted by a New York Grand Jury. According to various online news sources, **he is the first President, former or current, to ever be charged with a crime.** The exact charges against him are not known as the indictment remains under seal until he is arraigned. However, per several news sources, he is facing about 30 charges in New York related to document fraud connected to hush money he allegedly paid/directed to be paid to cover up affairs. *(April 1, 2023, online NBC news article. . . nbcnews.com/politics/Donald-trump).* What we do know about Trump is that he has been impeached twice, that he advanced the erroneous position that the 2020 Presidential election was fraudulent, and that he "fanned the flame" and encouraged his supporters to challenge the Electoral College process in certifying the Presidential election, which resulted in the "Capitol riots" when his supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol resulting in the death of several people, including a Capitol police officer. Of course this list is not exhaustive. There are a myriad of questionable things that Trump did during his Presidency. In fact, if you google his name, you will find several news articles relating to the negative things he did during and after his presidency. As it relates to the indictment, we will see how vigorously the New York state case against him will proceed. Unlike federal court

cases which tend to move more quickly, there are several pre-trial motions that can be made in state court proceedings that could lengthen the start date for the state trial. We will see what impact this indictment has on the 2024 Presidential race. Some say it will encourage protests and otherwise bolster his supporters, and others say it is just **further evidence** as to why he should not even be considered as a viable candidate for the 2024 Presidential Election. We will “stay tuned” to see what happens. Thus, to be continued

Thank you for reading!

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