

U.S. Congresswoman

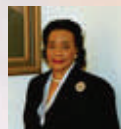
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What You Should Know About the Voting Rights Act

July 2006



H.R. 9, the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006, strengthens expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act and extends them for 25 years. Earlier this month, this bill overwhelmingly passed the House by a vote of 390 to 33 and passed the Senate unanimously. The President signed it into law on Thursday, July 27.

The fundamental right of African Americans to vote is guaranteed under the 15th Amendment and protected under the Constitution. Our right to vote is not in jeopardy. However, the administration and regulation of the voting process is an ongoing issue, and I am committed to ensuring that this right is not violated. I encourage all Americans to stay informed about voting rights issues and to exercise your right to vote.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Voting Rights Act?

President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act (VRA) into law on August 6, 1965. The VRA commemorates the lives and legacies of those who marched, struggled, and died to secure the right to vote for all Americans. One of the nation's most crucial civil rights victories, it provided protection to minority communities and prohibited any voting practice, including poll taxes and literacy tests, that would abridge the right to vote on the basis of race. The Voting Rights Act is a permanent federal law; therefore, it will not expire. However, the VRA does contain some temporary provisions.

What are the temporary provisions?

Enacted as temporary legislation in 1965, the provisions in section five require state and local political jurisdictions with a documented history of discrimination to submit proposed changes to their voting laws to the U.S. Attorney General or to federal judges for "pre-clearance" before changes can take effect. This process ensures that the federal government has the ability to prevent discriminatory voting laws before they are implemented. For example, states must receive approval before changing the closing time of polling places.

In 1975, the VRA was expanded to protect voting rights of significant language minority voters. Section 203 provides language assistance to U.S. citizens who may not speak or read English fluently enough to comprehend some of the complex ballot initiatives that are often part of the voting environment today.



Voting Rights Timeline

1789 - U.S. Constitution ratified; first elections held

1855 - Blacks can vote in only five states

1870 - 15th Amendment prohibits denying the right to vote based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude"

1876 - Black voters in the South denied participation

1915 - Grandfather Clause used to disenfranchise Black males declared unconstitutional

1920 - 19th Amendment gives women the right to vote

1924 - Indian Citizenship Act provides suffrage for Native Americans

**Voting Rights
Timeline**
(continued)

1961-23rd
Amendment gives vote to citizens of Washington, DC

1964 -24th
Amendment abolishes the poll tax for federal elections

1965 -Voting Rights Act outlaws literacy tests and sends federal registrars to the South; "pre-clearance" provisions added

1970 - "Pre-clearance" provisions renewed

1971 - 26th
Amendment gives 18-20 year-olds the right to vote

1975 - Voting Rights Act amended to give poor speakers of English an opportunity to participate in the political process; "Pre-clearance" provisions renewed

1982 - "Pre-clearance" provisions renewed

1993 - National Votes Registration Act makes registration more uniform and accessible

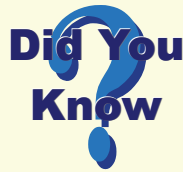
2006 - Voting Rights Reauthorization Act passes House and Senate

Why can't the temporary provisions be made permanent?

Making these key expiring provisions permanent would leave them vulnerable to a Constitutional challenge. Congress must show each time it reauthorizes these provisions that the harms and discrimination they are designed to address still exist.

While major provisions of the VRA apply to the entire country, nationwide application of the expiring provisions would shift the focus of these powerful enforcement provisions away from those areas that have the most significant and pervasive history of discrimination. Nationwide application would extend the VRA beyond the targeted jurisdictions where there is a record of voting discrimination and it continues to be a problem.

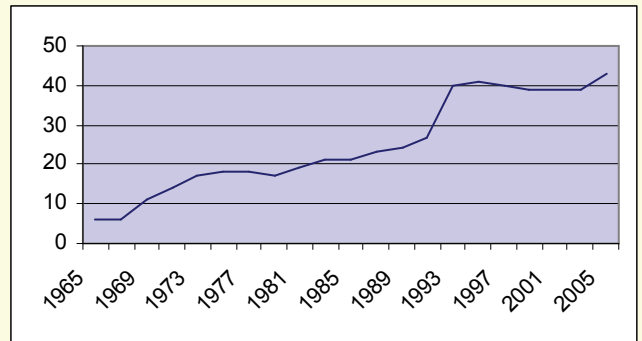
For more information about the Voting Rights Act, visit the U. S. Department of Justice Web site at http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/intro/intro_b.htm or the American Civil Liberties Union Voting Rights Project Web site at <http://www.votingrights.org/>.



The success of the VRA has led to significant political achievement and greater minority

representation at all levels of government. In 1964, there were only 300 black public officials nationwide. Today, there are more than 9,100 African American and 6,000 Latino elected officials across the country, and the number of Asian Americans holding elected office has tripled. The number of African Americans in Congress increased from six in 1965 to a record 43 in 2005.

African Americans in Congress
89th-109th Congress

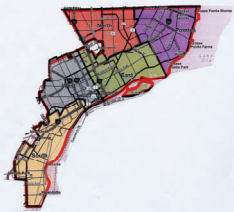


Source: The Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service

“America is best when we all participate. We must continue our efforts to protect the rights of every American voter...the right to vote must never be compromised.”

— *Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick*

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