***The Voting Rights Act: Still the Most Important Civil Rights Bill***
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On July 27, 2006 President Bush signed the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006 into Law. The Voting Rights Act is the most effective tool to protect the right to vote and is still necessary to combat continued illegal and unconstitutional activities.

Despite the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution which guaranteed African Americans the right to vote, many states continued to use tactics such as poll taxes, literacy tests and intimidation to stop people from voting. Today the tactics include at-large elections, last minute poll place changes and redistricting.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted to insure that no federal, state or local government may in any way impede people from registering to vote or voting because of their race or ethnicity. Most provisions in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are permanent. However, 3 provisions of the Voting Rights Act would have expired in August 2007 unless reauthorized.

- The "preclearance" provisions of Section 5, which require jurisdictions in all or part of sixteen states to demonstrate to the United States Department of Justice ("DOJ") or the United States District Court for the District of Columbia that a voting change does not have a discriminatory purpose or effect on minority voters before that change can be implemented;
- The minority language provisions of Section 203, which requires more than 450 counties and townships with a significant number of voting age citizens with limited-English proficiency in a covered minority language to provide assistance in that language at all stages of the electoral process; and
- The portion of the examiner and observer provisions of Sections 6-9 which authorize DOJ to appoint an examiner and send observers to polls to deter, witness, and report discriminatory activities at the polls in any jurisdiction covered by Section 5.

The legislation will extend the provisions another 25 years.

Visit the Maryland State Board of Elections (http://www.elections.state.md.us/index.html) for information on Voting, Voting Registration, Elections, Getting Involved and more.

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