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Reagan soft on civil rights

WASHINGTON (AP) — Internal records of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and a lawyers' study of Justice Department operations contradict Pres. Ronald Reagan's claim that his administration has enforced civil rights laws more actively than its predecessors.

An EEOC document obtained by The Associated Press showed that, contrary to Reagan's recent claim to a black audience, the number of job discrimination suits approved by the commission has dropped sharply.

And the independent Washington Council of Lawyers concluded in a recent report that "the administration has retreated from well-established, bipartisan civil rights policies" in several areas. Enforcement of

school desegregation and fair housing laws has all but halted, according to the 138-page study.

Only in prosecuting police brutality and similar violent denials of individuals' civil rights has the Justice Department excelled, the report said.

A Reagan spokesman, Peter Roussel, said there would be no immediate comment from the White House.

Reagan told a dinner for black Republicans on Sept. 15 that he usually tries to ignore personal attacks, "but one charge I will have to admit strikes at my heart every time I hear it. That's the suggestion that we Republicans are taking a less active approach to protecting the civil rights of all Americans."

"No matter how you slice it, that's just plain baloney."

"Look at the record," Reagan suggested. "The level of activity of this administration in investigating and prosecuting those who would attempt to deny blacks their civil liberties by violence and intimidation has exceeded the level of every past administration."

The lawyers council, which bills itself as a bipartisan association of attorneys from private firms, government and public interest groups, said in its study published the same day

Reagan made his speech, that the administration's record in that area is at least equal to those of the two previous administrations.

But Reagan went on to say, "The Justice Department has filed nine new anti-discrimination cases against public employers and has reviewed more than 9,000 electoral changes to determine compliance with the Voting Rights Act. And that, too, is a higher level of activity than in any prior administration."

The council study found these statistics, used earlier by a Justice Department official, "highly misleading, though technically accurate. . . . Upon closer examination, a different picture emerges."

The 9,000 reviews Reagan mentioned are those required each time a state or local government covered by the Voting Rights Act makes a change in its election law. Such automatic reviews have been particularly numerous in the wake of the 1980 census that forced widespread redistricting.

Furthermore, the council said, the administration filed only two new cases in the voting rights field during its first 20 months, compared to nearly a dozen during the first 12 months of the Carter administration.

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Brazil's president blames west for worldwide economic crisis

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The president of Brazil on Monday opened this year's policy debate in the U.N. General Assembly blaming Western powers for "a profound crisis in the international economic system."

President Joao Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo, in a 35-minute address opening the 157-nation assembly's debate, urged the developed nations to

take immediate steps to reduce crippling high interest rates and to deal with other economic problems.

The policy debate is to go on for the next three weeks.

It was the first time a Brazilian head of state had delivered Brazil's policy position. Figueiredo said it was "the seriousness of the international situation" that had brought him to the United Nations.

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