

NCAI, Others Mark Voting Rights Act 40th with Campaign to Renew

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund (LCCREF) convened a national conference in Washington in July to mark the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, one of the most effective civil rights laws ever passed by Congress.

Inclusive, far-reaching, and reflective of the most fundamental values of participatory democracy, the VRA guarantees millions of minority voters the equal opportunity to have their voices heard through the electoral process.

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) is a prominent coalition co-sponsor of the VRA national conference and campaign to reauthorize, strengthen, and extend the act. With Native voter turnout continuing to rise, the VRA remains more important than ever.

Adopted to combat discrimination facing African Americans in the South, congressional reauthorization over the years has expanded the VRA to meet the needs of other minority communities nationwide who face voting barriers.

"The Voting Rights Act has been critical to political and civic engagement and empowerment of the Native American community," maintains NCAI Executive Director Jacqueline Johnson.

"American Indians have long struggled to participate fully in the electoral process and have suffered years of disenfranchisement. In some states, Na-

tive people weren't even given the right to vote until as late as the 1960s."

Congress has extended the VRA's impact with four rounds of renewals in 1970, 1975, 1982, and 1992.

Key provisions set to expire in 2007 require congressional action. Conference participants, including elected officials, policymakers, experts, and advocates on the VRA, explored the dramatic gains made in minority political participation since VRA passage and the multitude of continuing problems.

"The Voting Rights Act has changed America in the past 40 years. In 1965, I saw people standing in unmovable lines, trying day after day to pass the so-called literacy test. Those tests are gone, but the unmovable lines re-emerged in the elections of 2000 and 2004," said Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.).

"Those challenges to equal access made it clear to the average American citizen that we have not fully escaped the chains of our dark past. It was clearly demonstrated that there are still more than enough reasons to continue to closely monitor the voting process to ensure fair and free elections in the United States."

Lewis embodies the voting rights struggle of the 1960s. He was badly beaten in 1965 when Alabama state troopers attacked 600 non-violent civil rights marchers in Selma who were pushing for voting rights. The assault, captured by

national news cameras, ignited public opinion and moved Congress to swiftly pass the VRA, signed into law by President Johnson on Aug. 6.

Voting barriers often are imposed by practices of state and local jurisdictions and are most effectively checked and overturned by enforcement of the VRA. Three key provisions of the act that have served to reverse abuses are set to expire in 2007 and are being considered by Congress.

Section 5 of the Act requires jurisdictions covered where there is a history of minority voter discrimination to obtain approval, or "preclearance," from the U.S. Department of Justice or the federal court before they can implement any changes to voting practices or procedures. The areas covered include the states that were part of the "Old Confederacy" and other jurisdictions nationwide. The statute requires proof that proposed changes do "not have the purpose and will not have the effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color [or membership in a language minority group]." During the VRA's four decades, the Justice Department has lodged approximately 1,000 objections against voting changes in the covered jurisdictions.

Section 6-9 of the VRA contains portions that authorize the federal government to send federal election examiners and observers to certain jurisdictions covered by Section 5 where there is evidence

of attempts to intimidate minority voters at the polls. These were utilized in a number of jurisdictions during the national elections of 2000, 2002, and 2004 where evidence of such intimidation was supported by historical patterns and current practices ranging from purging minority voters from the voter rolls to changing polling places to issuing notices and other communications that served to intimidate minority voters.

Section 203, the third key provision set to expire in 2007, requires certain jurisdictions to provide bilingual language assistance to voters in communities where there is a concentration of citizens who are "limited English proficient."

Historically, VRA reauthorization has won robust support on both sides of the political aisle. All previous renewals and extensions were signed by Republican presidents: Nixon (1970), Ford (1975), Reagan (1982), and George H.W. Bush (1992).

"This is not a partisan issue but a question of protecting American democracy," said Rep. Lewis, who reiterated that renewal of the act now is imperative to strengthen still vitally needed provisions.

Conference co-sponsors offered analyses and recommendations to strengthen the VRA and included leaders of the nation's most prominent African American, Asian American, Latino, and American Indian civil rights organizations.

Bavarian Charm Returns to Mount Angel

MOUNT ANGEL, Ore. – Mount Angel's 40th annual Oktoberfest runs from Sept. 15-18 and you're invited to join the more than 350,000 people who come every year for the weekend of their lives.

They are drawn to the tiny rural community 40 miles south of Portland, Ore., by its beautiful countryside, Bavarian charm, and one of the greatest folk festivals in the Northwest.

There is something for everyone at Oktoberfest – more than 60 little food chalets laden with rich, delicious Bavarian treats; a large arts and crafts show full of treasures to take home; an adult Biergarten, family Weingarten, and interactive family Alpinegarten.

There is free entertainment on the village bandstand featuring the great sounds of the Alpine country and a free kindergarten on Sept. 17-18.

Take part in a 10-kilometer volkswalk or fun-run. Enjoy a sports program that includes softball, golf, and volleyball tournaments; a high school football classic; and a 200-vehicle cruz-'n' car.

You are sure to enjoy the good old-fashioned German hospitality Mount Angel has to offer. For more information, call 503-845-9440 or visit the Oktoberfest at www.oktoberfest.org.

Oktoberfest Facts

- When: 11 a.m. to midnight, Sept. 15-17; 10 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., Sept. 18

- Where: The village of Mount Angel, approximately 40 miles south of Portland and 20 miles north of Salem on U.S. Highway 214. From the north, take I-5 Exit 271 at Woodburn; from the south use the Salem, Market St. I-5 Exit 256 and follow signs through Silverton to Mount Angel.
- **Free:** Admission to the festival area. Parking is \$4 all day. Free shuttle provided from distant parking lots.
- **Free:** Continuous, live entertainment on the Village Bandstand from noon until closing each day
- **Free:** Friday and Saturday Night Street Dances with the Country Dutchmen
- **Free:** Kindergarten open Sept. 17-18 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. with kids' programs, clowns, 4-H petting farm, face painting, and more.
- **Free:** Cruz-'n' Car Show on Sept. 17-18. More than 100 vehicles each day represent the best from the '30s to today.
- **Free:** Admission to the Biergarten, Weingarten, and Alpinegarten on Sept. 15 from noon until 5 p.m. (small cover charge at other times, \$3-\$5).
- **Free:** American Volkssport Association 10-kilometer (6.2 mile) volkswalk on Sept. 16-17 at 8 a.m.; 10-kilometer fun-run on Sept. 17.
- **Free:** Concerts in historic St. Mary Church all four days

Check Out Storytellers Network

by Elaine Lanegan

The purpose of the Turtle Island Storytellers Network is to create speaking and consulting opportunities for gifted American Indian oral historians and cultural artists during the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial and beyond.

Our Web site opened in April 2005 and in September should include 80 individual Web pages of talented tribal presenters from tribes in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, North and South Dakota, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio, and Indiana.

Each Web page includes a summary of the speaker's background and tribal heritage, an audio file with transcript, photographs, and the individual's contact info.

Our project is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail at the National Park Service, and Wisdom of the Elders, Inc.

The Turtle Island Storytellers Network's Web site is www.turtleislandstorytellers.net/.

The Wisdom of the Elders radio Web site is www.wisdomoftheelders.org.

General Council Meeting

Nov. 5, 2005

Siletz Tribal Community Center

Siletz, Oregon

1 p.m.

Call to Order
Invocation
Roll Call
Approval of Agenda
Approval of Minutes
Program Report: Health
Tribal Member Concerns
Tribal Election: Declarations
Chairman's Report
Announcements
Adjournment