



Quote From Rep. Carter

"To see the highest court in the nation overturn a decision that is so important to the livelihood of ethnic minorities and women is a redeeming quality in the justice system of this country. It renews my hope and certainly my faith in the governance area of the justice system. While data shows that the Black middle class has grown financially, fewer Blacks are in the system. Therefore, access and tenure in the socio-economic-political system is still a problem. As long as we experience discrimination in housing, on jobs, and in the politics of everyday life, we need Affirmative Action."

State Rep. Margaret Carter
18th District

High Court Ruling Could Boost Women in Nation's Workplace

by Jerry Garner

For the second time this month, the United States Supreme Court has issued a ruling supporting affirmative action measures aimed at giving minorities and women access to the labor market. By a 6-3 vote, the nation's highest court ruled that it was constitutional for employers to give special preference in hiring and promoting women workers to create a more balanced work force, if they choose to do so.

The court ruling was based on a case that was brought before the high court by a white male Santa Clara, California, transportation worker who was denied a promotion job as dispatcher in favor of a female employee who scored two points lower than he did on a test. The man argued that such practice amounts to reverse discrimination and is, therefore, unconstitutional.

In essence, the court's decision means that employers can implement affirmative action plans without demonstrating past patterns of discrimination if their goal is to integrate minorities and women into traditionally segregated jobs. The Supreme Court's decision was another defeat for President Reagan, U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese III, and the U.S. Justice Department Civil Rights Division.

Several weeks ago the court rejected the Reagan administration's position that it was illegal for judges to order employers to temporarily use strict racial quotas in promotion as well as hiring to counter past discrimination against African Americans.

By a 5-4 vote, the court upheld a federal district judge's orders in 1983 and 1984 requiring the state of Alabama to promote one Black state trooper for each white state trooper, assuming qualified African Americans are available, until the state could develop a promotion procedure acceptable to the judge who implemented the Alabama plan.

Although the Supreme Court's decision was hailed as a momentous victory for civil rights and women by national civil rights and women's organizations, a Black female activist in Portland viewed the court's decision with caution.

Jean Vessup, a member of the planning committee for the Black Women's Gathering, said she is taking a wait-and-see position on what effect the decision will have on women in the workplace. "But that's not to say that Black women who feel they have a complaint should not use every resource available to test the ruling if it offers them employment opportunities."

The ruling was significant because it probably means that Reagan won't rescind or amend an executive order requiring goals for hiring women and members of minority groups. The Santa Clara affirmative action plan was designed to be similar to the executive order issued by Lyndon Johnson in 1965. Rumor is that Reagan will amend Johnson's order and instead call for voluntary goals.

The Santa Clara case, like the Alabama decision before it, put additional pressure on the city of Portland. The city has come under intense scrutiny in recent months because it has failed to come up with an affirmative action plan in an attempt to address the city's dismal hiring and promotional record regarding women and minorities.