

OPINION

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A Poisoned Chalice for the Voting Rights Act



BY REV. JESSE L. JACKSON SR.

Beware the stranger bearing gifts. Or as the law teaches, caveat emptor: buyer beware. Look before you

leap. All these warnings apply to the emerging Republican positioning on the Voting Rights Act.

Forty years ago, after the bloody march in Selma, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act. The Act requires that states with a history of discrimination get pre-approval from the Justice Department for any changes in their voting procedures. The reality of segregation and vote suppression required scrutiny of any changes to insure that they

were not discriminatory in effect.

This was a great victory for the movement that Dr. Martin Luther King led. Give us the vote, Dr. King taught, and we can begin to change America. And as African Americans were able to register and vote and legal segregation slowly came to an end, a new South was created. The New South became a center of investment, which had redlined the segregated South. The New South became the home of presidents — Carter and Clinton — who would have found it impossible to be elected from a segregated region.

Politics changed too. As Lyndon Johnson predicted when he signed the Voting Rights Act, Democrats paid a great price for being the party of progress. In the South, Republicans made themselves the party of white sanctuary. Jesse Helms and others taught them how to use racial fears to win campaigns. The current Republican majorities in the House and Senate are founded on the racial politics of the South.

By 2007, the Voting Rights Act must be reauthorized. This requires congressional hearings on the evolving history of racial discrimination in the South. By demonstrating the reality that minorities still face discrimination — from voter intimidation, racially motivated redistricting, racially biased disqualification standards, racial biased distribution of voting machines and much more — Congress can reestablish the predicate for maintaining strict scrutiny over those states with a history of segregation and legalized discrimination.

Will the Republican Congress

reauthorize the Voting Rights Act?

When asked in a meeting with the Black Caucus of the Congress, President Bush said he didn't know anything about the question. But as Governor of Texas, he governed one of the states covered by the Voting Rights Act and so he must have known what it entailed.

Now some Republican leaders are suggesting that the law be made "national and permanent." That sounds good. By making it national, strict scrutiny will apply to all states. By making it permanent, the periodic battles over reauthorization will not be necessary.

Beware. This plan, hatched in right-wing think tanks, sounds good, but is designed to gut the Voting Rights Act. By making it national and permanent, the Congress would set the act up for being ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Since the Act focuses on race, it requires strict scrutiny

to make certain there is a rational basis for its provisions. If it is made national and permanent, divorced from the record of discrimination that requires special review, the act could well be deemed unconstitutional. Republicans would have used the court to murder the Voting Rights Act while pretending to have clean hands.

This maneuver is particularly disturbing given the current right-wing leadership's desperate efforts to sustain their majority by fixing the game. Rep. Tom "the hammer" DeLay, the Republican majority leader in the House, trampled all precedent by forcing through off-year reapportionment in Texas to gain four seats in the House. Now Republican governors with legislative majorities are under instruction to do the same thing elsewhere. If they are prepared to break the tradition of reapportionment every ten years to rig the rules, imagine what they

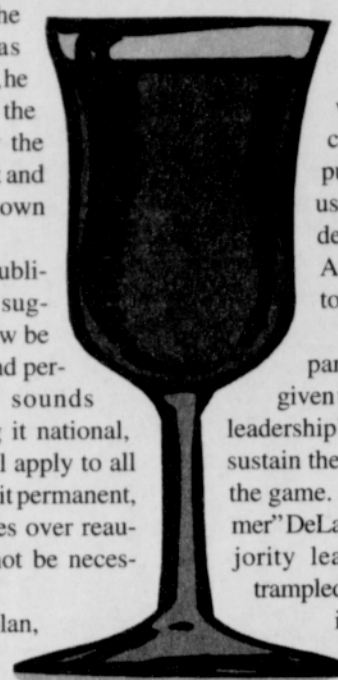
will do if they can get rid of the Voting Rights Act scrutiny. We'll be headed back to the days when blacks were systematically denied the right to vote.

If Republicans were serious about electoral reform, there is a simple alternative. Reauthorize the Voting Rights Act and maintain strict scrutiny on the states with a long history of race-based discrimination. Then pass a constitutional right to vote for every American, making our Constitution as sensible as the election laws we helped write for Iraq. The states with a history of segregation would stay under scrutiny, and voting rights across the country would also gain greater protection.

But Senate Majority leader Bill Frist of Tennessee and House Majority Tom DeLay of Texas oppose electoral reform. Instead, they're maneuvering to use the courts to gut the Voting Rights Act. (And to insure the Courts go their way, they are ready to trample the rule of the Senate to pack the Courts with right-wing zealots.)

President Bush is using his faith-based initiative to help purchase allies in the churches. He'd like to focus our attention on gay marriage and abortion, even as he attacks first affirmative action and now voting rights. For African Americans, this is the proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing. And we'd better watch out or we'll wake to find the wolf has made off with all of the rights that we fought so hard to achieve.

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr. is a long-time civil rights activist.



This plan, hatched in right-wing think tanks, sounds good, but is designed to gut the Voting Rights Act.

—by Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr.

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BY CONGRESSMAN CHAKA FATTAH

President Bush's fiscal year 2006 budget makes the wrong choices for our nation. Over the past four years, our country has moved from

We Can and Must Do Better

Invest in our future and future generations

record surpluses to record deficits. Under the president's budget, the economic security of every person will be hampered if not crippled by the nation's growing debt.

The president's budget calls for a \$4.5 billion decrease in education funding for the nation's children, while providing a \$32 billion increase in tax breaks for millionaires. This is unsound and unwise and it hurts the most vulnerable among us.

We need a responsible budget that brings together our nation, builds and invests in America's future, and provides opportunity for all Americans. As such, I along with members of the Congressional Black Caucus proposed a budget substitute. It focuses on the CBC's legislative agenda of closing disparities in all American communities and restores fiscal responsibility to the federal budget process.

The CBC budget invests in our security by providing the necessary resources for the Department of Homeland Security to fully begin protecting America's rails, ports and shores. It also provides significant resources for first responders and makes available critical funding for body and vehicle armor to protect our troops in Iraq.

The CBC budget invests in our future and future generations by fully funding the No Child Left Behind Act; increasing funding for college awareness programs such as GEAR UP and Trio; doubling support for historically black colleges and universities; ensuring that all children are provided the fundamentals of a quality education through a highly qualified teacher, rigorous curriculums, updated textbooks and computers, small class sizes, state of the art libraries, and qualified school coun-

selors; funding home ownership initiatives to help families build real wealth; restoring funds for child nutrition programs and Community Development Block Grants; and providing additional funding for the Minority Health Initiative in urban and rural communities.

The CBC budget ensures fiscal responsibility by reducing the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts for individuals whose incomes exceed \$200,000.

Finally, we must intensely look at the president's policies and budget that are not just fiscally bankrupt, but morally bankrupt as well. We can and we must do better.

Through the intense work of my colleagues, the CBC budget is fiscally sound and it focuses on investing in each of you and in America's future generations.

U.S. Rep. Chaka Fattah, D-Penn., is a member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

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Intervention Needed

Healthcare Reform Can Save Jobs

Major corporations throughout the country are threatening to lay-off thousands of workers unless they can find relief from skyrocketing healthcare costs. In the last few years healthcare costs have increased by an average of 15 percent per year and most corporate leaders believe that government intervention will be necessary to avoid massive layoffs or a reduction in benefits.

The federal government however, has not presented a plan to address this current crisis. Instead of rescuing corporations and workers from the current healthcare crisis, the current administration is focused on solving a so-called social security crisis that has yet to occur.

The automotive industry is being hit the hardest with healthcare costs. General Motors, the nation's largest automobile maker, will spend a record \$5.6 billion on healthcare this year. The corporation partly blames

rising healthcare costs for billion dollar losses and now is planning to eliminate thousands of jobs.

Chrysler was recently forced to amend their union agreement with 35,000 blue-collar workers who are now required to pay a portion of their own healthcare costs. General Motors is expected to try and negotiate a similar agreement with the United Auto Workers Union.

Both union and automobile executives have called for government intervention through comprehensive national healthcare reform.

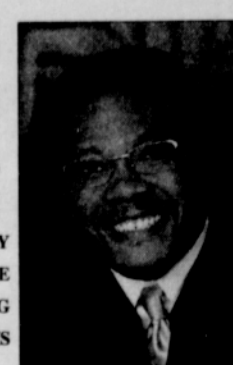
Asking workers to reduce their benefits or begin paying their healthcare costs is not the answer. That will only reduce income to workers, reduce spending in the marketplace and as a result, cause more layoffs by businesses whose products aren't selling.

The unions and corporations must press our federal officials to give real attention to healthcare reform.

In President Bush's State of

The Union Address, he pledged healthcare assistance by way of cheaper insurance premiums, yet he gave no plan as to how it would be accomplished. His other solution is to place caps on medical malpractice awards for people injured by doctors. In other words he wants to limit monies for the pain and suffering of malpractice victims so that doctors can lower their malpractice insurance premiums. I'm still trying to figure out how that would help working Americans and corporate employers lower their healthcare premiums.

Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.



BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS