

Surprise Reversal on Voting Rights Act

Republicans caved into opposition

BY MARC H. MORIAL

The Voting Rights Act reauthorization recently suffered a political setback in the U.S. House after the GOP leadership caved into opposition by a small group of right-wing extremists, abruptly canceling a vote on extending provisions of the historic 1965 law that are set to expire next year.

In a surprise reversal, U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Republican leaders took the legislation off the House calendar on June 21, with promises to renew efforts to pass it once the concerns of a few are resolved.

The bill's detractors felt compelled to wait until a meeting of House Republicans on the day of a scheduled floor vote, to air their objections - not in May after the bill won nearly unanimous support from the House Judiciary Committee or after it was introduced with widespread bipartisan support from both chambers of the U.S. Congress.

Earlier this year, Hastert promised to

proceed quickly on the legislation, calling it one of his top priorities. Or so he said.

Since 1965, Congress has renewed the act three times and added three new provisions: extending the right to vote to 18-year-olds in 1970; protecting voting rights for non-English speakers in 1975; and most contentious of all creating majority minority congressional districts in 1982.

The provisions most problematic to the act's detractors are: federal oversight of voting rules for nine states with documented history of voter discrimination - otherwise known as Section 5; and the requirement of foreign language ballots in areas with large populations of non-English speakers.

Section 5, the so-called pre-clearance provision, requires areas covered to submit all proposed changes in voting laws to the U.S. Department of Justice for approval.

Reps. Lynn Westmoreland and Charlie Norwood, loudest of the House objectors, claimed the legislation unfairly singles out certain jurisdictions because of past discrimination. They

want the act to apply to all states regardless of past history or none at all, possibly rendering the law unconstitutional.

In a written statement, Westmoreland said it made no sense to keep covered states "in the penalty box for 66 years" based on 1964 election results.

But, the majority of all federal objections have occurred since 1982, when

to impose a photo identification requirement upon voters without making provisions for those who couldn't afford to shell out \$20 for a five-year state-issued ID.

The state's pre-clearance plan received U.S. Justice Department approval in August of 2005, over staff objections, only to fail in the courts. A U.S. District Court struck it down, compar-

ing it to an unconstitutional poll tax.

U.S. District Judge Harold Murphy concluded that it would "most likely have prevented Georgia's elderly, poor and African-American voters from voting."

Had the courts not intervened in Georgia, poor, elderly and African American would have lost their voting rights.

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We urge Speaker Hastert to immediately schedule a floor vote on the Voting Rights Act reauthorization because it is clear that it enjoys the support of a substantial majority of House lawmakers and is likely to pass overwhelmingly.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Campaign Rap Song is a Winner

'Vote 4 Miss Angela' catches on

(AP) — An obscure candidate in a down-ticket Georgia race is getting some much-needed attention from a rap campaign song that pummels voters with a simple, mind-numbing lyric: "Vote 4 Miss Angela."

That's Angela Moore, a 43-year-old medical personnel company owner making her first run for office in Georgia's Democratic primary for secretary of state.

She was relatively unknown until her campaign rap, written and performed by a 12-year-old boy, began making the rounds on the Internet. It has received 26,000 hits in first three weeks it's been posted on her campaign Web site.

"Even I get tired of hearing, 'Vote for Miss Angela! Vote for Miss Angela!'" she said, referring to the song's repetitive intro and chorus. "But, you know what? It



Angela Moore (right) shares a laugh with rapper Keenan "Pootah" Mathews. She is creating a political music buzz with his "Vote 4 Miss Angela" campaign rap song in a race for Georgia Secretary of State. (AP photo)

sticks in your head."

Moore asked now-13-year-old Keenan Mathews, who performs under the stage name Pootah, to record the song last year after she caught his act at a charity show in Atlanta.

"Make the right choice/be heard with your voice," he raps in the song, before rhyming "Miss Angela" with "sending out an SOS from here to Los Angeles."

The rap ends with a repeated chant of "Vote or die" - a line borrowed from a 2004 get-out-the-vote campaign lead by rap producer Sean "P. Diddy" Combs.

The song quickly became an entertaining diversion among Georgia political types - getting forwarded in e-mails and eventually cropping up on blogs including Wonkette.com, the Washington site that touts itself as "politics for people with dirty minds."

Political analysts say the song may be just the kind of thing a relatively unknown candidate needs.

Medicare Drug Scam Alert

Another consumer alert has been issued regarding a telephone solicitation to defraud seniors and people with disabilities.

The "299 Ring" scheme offers Medicare beneficiaries promising a new prescription drug card for a flat fee of \$299, and requests beneficiary bank account numbers that are then used to electronically withdraw the money.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has learned that a new variation

on the scheme requests higher dollar amounts and promises a new Medicare card, instead of a prescription drug plan.

The new Medicare card or prescription drug plan they claim to be selling is not legitimate.

"By getting the message out to Medicare beneficiaries about how they can avoid scams, we've seen the number of incidents go down," said CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan.

Sexual Predator Information Online

Oregon State Police have gone online with a new website which publishes information regarding dangerous sex offenders in the state by zipcode and other geographical information.

The site was established in accordance with a new Oregon law to provide information such as name, address, physical descriptions, pictures and conditions of release regarding high-risk offenders.

"This is one of many tools we need to keep our communities safe," said Gov. Ted Kulongoski. "It is important to remember that most sexual offenders have never been convicted and are therefore not in this database. This is why it is imperative for parents to be ever vigilant of our children and with whom they associate."

There are approximately 700 registered sex offenders in Oregon who

are classified as predatory or sexually violent dangerous offenders. These offenders are required to register for life under Oregon law.

Not all sex offenders are classi-

fied as "predatory," so not every person who has been convicted of a sexual offense will be listed on the website.

The website can be accessed at sexoffenders.oregon.gov.

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LITTLE MAN OPENS NATIONWIDE JULY 14

Advocate Joins OHSU Board

Roman D. Hernandez, a Portland attorney with Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt, has been appointed to the Oregon Health & Science University Board of Directors by Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Hernandez is the immediate past president of the board of directors of the Portland Hispanic Chamber and continues to serve on the chamber's board. He serves as regional president for the Hispanic National Bar Association for the Pacific Northwest region.

In his legal work, he focuses on defending businesses in connection with employment-related claims.

His law career began in 1999 when he clerked at Schwabe. Prior to law school, he served in the United States Air Force for



Roman D. Hernandez nearly five years where he attained the rank of captain. Over the past several years, Hernandez has devoted many hours toward community and civic involvement.

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