

OPINION

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Shutting Out Minority Voices

Voter I.D. laws reduce turnout

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS
Election reform is a serious issue in this country, one that has to be dealt with. But denying American citizens the right to vote is not the way to do it.

And that's exactly what's happening in states that implement new identification requirements. A new study shows that voter I.D. requirements designed to combat fraud may actually reduce turnout, particularly among voters of color.

Data recently released by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University shows voter turnout for the 2004 elections was about 4 percent lower in states that required voters to sign their name or produce documentation. Turnout was 10 percent lower for Hispanics and about 6 percent lower for blacks and Asians.

With some states threatening to enact even stricter laws, it is a safe assumption that turnout would be reduced even further. This is simply not acceptable.

Federal law currently requires first time voters to verify their identity. Approved forms of identification varies, ranging from social security cards to utility bills to signatures. Only one state, Indiana, currently requires voters to produce a government-issued photo ID. The federal government, however, would like to change that.

The Federal Election Integrity Act would require voters to present government-issued identification at the polls. Though a Georgia court has declared such a law unconstitutional, the American government has continued to push it ahead. The House of Representatives passed the measure last year; the Senate has yet to vote.

According to a report sponsored by the Justice Department, such a require-



ment would disproportionately affect Latinos and African-Americans, the elderly, the homeless, low-income people and married women; studies show these groups are less likely to carry a photo ID.

Because the law is designed to prevent undocumented citizens from voting, voters would be required to prove citizenship with a photo ID. Since most states don't require citizenship to obtain a state ID or driver's license, the only piece of identification that meets this requirement is a passport, which can cost up to \$100. Recent statistics indicate only 25-percent of voting age Americans have a passport; that num-

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ber is significantly lower among minorities.

Several states, including California, Mississippi and Texas, are considering some version of a photo ID law this year.

In 1965, the U.S. made a commitment to historically disenfranchised people when the Voting Rights Act was passed by guaranteeing that no American would be denied the right to vote on account of race or color.

If this government is committed to ensuring all Americans are able to participate in the political process, then it has to find a way to combat election fraud without compromising the voting rights of citizens.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PUBLISHER: Charles H. Washington
EDITOR: Michael Leighton
PUBLIC RELATIONS: Mark Washington
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt
OFFICE MANAGER: Kathy Linder
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CALL 503-288-0033 FAX 503-288-0015
news@portlandobserver.com ads@portlandobserver.com subscription@portlandobserver.com

Letter to the Editor

War Legacy

Whatever happened to war bond drives? Previous wars asked the population to loan money to the government. Now, we give tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans and add to the national deficit. Wars are expensive.

China now owns 30% of our debt and will have severe bargaining power when it comes to trade negotiations.

What is the legacy that we will leave?
Lowell Wetzel
Aloha

Bring America Back from the 'Dark Side'

Shut down Guantanamo Bay

BY CURT GOERING

Last month marked the fifth anniversary of the transfer of the first war on terror suspects to the U.S. detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The world was repeatedly assured by President George W. Bush and others that these were exceedingly dangerous prisoners - "vicious killers ... the worst of a very bad lot," as former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called them.

Officials insisted that they were not POWs and therefore not entitled to the protections of the Geneva Conventions; instead, they were declared "unlawful enemy combatants." They would be vigorously interrogated, charged with war crimes and tried before military commissions.

At least that was what we were told.

What a difference five years makes. About 775 detainees from 45 countries have been held at various times in Guantanamo. Today, about 430 detainees languish there. Senior administration officials have even said that some men may be held for the rest of their lives. Vice President Dick Cheney meant business when he warned that the United States would be operating "on the dark side."

Instead of being an icon of American values of justice and accountability, Guantanamo Bay has become its antithesis. It needs to be shut down.

Little-publicized information about how the detainees were rounded up, let alone their abusive treatment, should raise significant questions. An analysis by Seton Hall University School of Law found that of 517 cases, only 5 percent had been captured by U.S. forces. Nearly 90 percent had been captured by Pakistani or Afghan Northern Alliance forces or tribal warlords and turned over to U.S. custody, often sold for rewards as high as \$20,000.

Leaflets dropped by the U.S. military appealed to what they could do with that money - "wealth and power beyond your dreams ... enough money to take care of your family, your village, your tribe for the rest of your life." It is not surprising that random and arbitrary arrest and detention would result.

In response to concerns that detainees were held wrongly, the administration set up military tribunals. These tribunals, overseen by panels of three military officers, were allowed to rely on coerced evidence, and detainees had no access to lawyers or secret evidence. Not surprisingly, this appalling process determined that 520 of the 558 detainees who had their status review from August 2004 to March 2005 were "enemy combatants."

Despite these findings, not a single Guantanamo detainee has yet been convicted or even tried. Only



10 have been charged.

As part of the administration's push to pressure Congress to rubber stamp the military commissions after the Supreme Court struck them down in June, another 14 detainees were transferred to Guantanamo in September after being held incommunicado in secret custody by the CIA for up to four and a half years. The transfer, though, has created another problem for the government: It turned them from detainees with allegedly high intelligence value to detainees with information about possible government crimes.

The government is now arguing in court that the information these detainees have about secret detention facilities, interrogation techniques and the conditions of confinement should never see the light of day as such disclosure would cause "exceptionally grave damage" to national security.

Due process and the rule of law have been among the casualties of the detention regime at Guantanamo.

Instead of being an icon of American values of justice and accountability, Guantanamo Bay has become its antithesis.

Few Americans could ever have imagined that our own government, even in the pursuit of security, would betray bedrock human rights principles by holding hundreds of detainees indefinitely without charge or trial for years.

But what was once unthinkable has now become grim reality.

The voices to close the camp are gathering strength and now include many former and current heads of state (including former U.S. presidents) and the former U.N. Secretary General.

World-renowned figures of highest moral stature have appealed to the Bush administration to shut Guantanamo down. The tarnished reputation of the United States as a law-abiding and human rights-respecting country suffers further each day the camp remains in operation. There is only one way to fix this mess. All detainees in Guantanamo should be charged immediately with a recognizable criminal offense and given a fair trial or be released unconditionally and not sent anywhere to face torture or ill treatment.

Five years is too long. It is time to bring America back from "the dark side" into the community of nations as a country that is recognized globally for upholding human rights and the rule of law.

Curt Goering is senior deputy executive director of Amnesty International USA.

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