

Voting Hurdles Remain Despite Protections

By **Freddie Allen NNPA Washington Correspondent**

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – If you thought that the United States Constitution guaranteed your right to vote, think again. “While the right to vote is inherent throughout our founding document, and there are amendments prohibiting discrimination, nothing in the Constitution explicitly guarantees our right to vote. We, as Americans, possess no affirmative right to vote,” said Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Wis.) as he intro-

duced the bill he co-sponsored with Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) on the floor of the House of Representatives last May. The Pocan-Ellison Right

to Vote Amendment would provide all eligible citizens an affirmative right to vote and make it harder for state and local legislators to pass restrictive voting laws that have disenfranchised Blacks and poor voters in the past. The bill gained little traction in Congress last year as lawmakers stumbled from one self-inflicted wound to the next. They bounced from the budget sequestration that forced automatic spending cuts and tax hikes that stalled economic growth, to repeated attempts to repeal the Affordable



Speaker Nancy Pelosi (left) and Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN) (right) at his swearing-in ceremony with Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an.

thing that neither party has the stomach for. But the right to vote amendment, restrictive voting laws and election reform were all on the menu during the recent Eighth Annual Voting and Elections Summit, presented by the Overseas Vote Foundation and U.S. Vote Foundation.

The summit featured election experts and voters' rights advocates who addressed issues related to grassroots innovations in

voting, midterm mobilization and new voting technology. Speakers also discussed the most recent developments in voting including the Voting Rights Act of 2014, the Presidential Commission on Election Administration's report and last summer's historic Shelby County v. Holder Supreme Court decision that held that Section 4 of the law was unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court

demanding that the Congress update the preclearance formula in Section 4 that required states with a history of voting practices that discriminated against Blacks to clear any changes in voting laws in advance with the Justice Department.

The court insisted on a more updated formula for determining the states covered under Section 4. Before the VRA of 1965, Blacks, especially in the South, were subjected to poll taxes, literacy tests, intimidation and sometimes death in effort to vote.

After the law was passed, the Justice Department often turned to Section 4 and Section 5 of the VRA to prevent discriminatory voting practices. “Section 5 [of the Voting Rights Act of 1965] was amazingly effective at blocking the use of new discriminatory practices in the covered jurisdictions,” said Robert Kengle, co-director of the Voting Rights Project at the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

In the wake of the Shelby County v. Holder decision, state legislators rushed to

pass new restrictive laws that were once automatically blocked by the Justice Department. Norman Ornstein, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, a private, nonpartisan, conservative-leaning think tank dedicated to research and education on public policy issues, economics and social welfare, said that Chief Justice John Roberts used “powerfully faulty logic” in his decision in the Shelby County case.

“Imagine there is an intersection which has a long history of people speeding going through the town traffic accidents deaths. So, they put in speed bumps traffic lights speed cameras stiff fines and remarkably over a period of time, no problems, no deaths,” said Ornstein. “Then you get authorities saying, ‘We solved that problem now let’s take out the speed bumps, take out the cameras, never mind the fines.’”

Ornstein continued: “And my goodness, before long, mayhem occurs.” Now, because of the Supreme Court decision, the Justice

See VOTING on page 18

In the wake of the Shelby County v. Holder decision, state legislators rushed to pass new restrictive laws that were once automatically blocked by the Justice Department

duced the bill he co-sponsored with Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) on the floor of the House of Representatives last May. The Pocan-Ellison Right

Care Act, to the government shutdown that cost the economy billions.

There was little time to get anything done, let alone constitutional reform, some-

CELEBRATE OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

PCC Cascade Campus Open House and Tour

January 20, 2015
PCC Cascade Campus
705 N Killingsworth

Open house & building tours from 2-6 p.m.
Program begins at 4:30 p.m.

At Portland Community College, we believe that access to higher education can transform lives. We are proud to create opportunities for all members of our community.

We invite you to celebrate new opportunities for Northeast Portland with PCC. Join PCC Cascade Campus President Dr. Karin Edwards at the grand opening of two new academic and student buildings on the Cascade Campus.

Portland Community College

Dr. Karin Edwards
PCC Cascade Campus President

We Are Better Together

Almost always, the creative dedicated minority has made the world better.

- Martin Luther King Jr.

OFFICE OF MAYOR CHARLIE HALES

BUREAU OF HOUSING

BUREAU OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABILITY

PORTLAND BUREAU OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

PROCUREMENT SERVICES

BUILDING PORTLAND BUSINESS
www.portlandoregon.gov