

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

MEDIA ADVISORY

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USCCR REPORT DOCUMENTS PROGRESS TOWARD VOTING EQUALITY

Should Emergency Provisions Now Expire? Civil Rights Panel Offers Recommendations to Congress

WASHINGTON, DC— The United States Commission on Civil Rights today released *Reauthorization of the Temporary Provisions of the Voting Rights Act*, a report based on its October 2005 briefing. Two factors, the forty years since Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the impending expiration of the act's emergency provisions, served as a backdrop for the factfinding forum.

Congress intended the temporary provisions to remedy immediate and egregious voter discrimination which was denying African Americans the right to cast ballots and diluting the effectiveness of their votes. An expert panel offered the Commission testimony on the decades since, during which the nation made significant progress toward extending the franchise to all Americans. The experts focused on the continuing utility of provisions under Section 5, which require some jurisdictions to obtain federal approval before implementing voting changes. These will expire in 2007 unless reauthorized by Congress.

In releasing the report, Gerald A. Reynolds, Commission Chairman said: "The Voting Rights Act is a monumental piece of civil rights legislation. The Commission asks Congress to weigh carefully the evidence before it, including this report, and to consider whether current conditions justify the scope and reach of the law as originally conceived."

The report recommends that Congress: (1) hold comprehensive hearings on the constitutional, and policy aspects of VRA's temporary provisions; (2) develop a complete record of purposeful discrimination; and (3) rely on theories of discrimination that are likely to achieve broad consensus and withstand judicial scrutiny. The report also asks Congress to consider amendments to Section 5's coverage formula, the stringency of bail-out standards, the range of procedures subject to preclearance, and the length of any future extension terms.

The Commission passed the report unanimously at its February 17, 2006 meeting. The report, available on the Commission's Web site, at www.usccr.gov, also offers statements from three Commissioners.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chairman Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Jennifer C. Braceras, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, and Michael Yaki. Kenneth L. Marcus is Staff Director. Commission meetings are open to the media and general public.