

Point of View

From Capitol Hill

By Alfreda L. Madison

Democratic-Controlled Congress Gives New Lease On Life To Civil Rights Bills

Ralph Neas is the Executive Director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which is composed of 190 organizations that cross religious, national, ethnic and sex lines. He applauds the bipartisan support of two especially important civil rights bills which have top priority in this 100th Congress.

One of these is the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which passed the House in the 98th Congress but failed to reach the Senate floor — because then-Senate majority Leader Howard Baker never allowed it to come up on the Senate floor. Civil rights organizations saddled Baker with failure of the bill's passage.

The Restoration Act seeks to clarify the intent of Congress with respect to the principles of civil rights statutes. It would restore Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 to the broad coverage they enjoyed before the Grove City decision, which allowed the federal govern-

ment to subsidize discrimination against minorities, women, the disabled and senior citizens.

Opponents of the 1985 Restoration Act argued that the bill would affect the grocery stores and other extraneous entities. The new bill incorporates only the four amendments that have been passed by Congress.

There are still some opponents to the Restoration Act who are attempting to add some amendments that will cripple it. One amendment would broaden the religious entity exemption in Title IX. It would create a huge loophole and allow hundreds of schools and colleges not now eligible for a religious exemption to escape from Title IX coverage. These schools would be given a license to discriminate. Another amendment is the 'Tauke-Sensenbrenner (abortion neutral) Amendment. Instead of being an abortion - neutral amendment, it actually repeals longstanding regulations which protect students and employees against discrimination in education programs if they choose to have an abortion.

To Be Equal

IS THE ICE AGE ENDING?

by John E. Jacob

For the past six years, America has ignored the future by cutting poor people's programs, drilling holes in the social safety net, throwing more billions at the military than it can productively use, and running up a massive national debt.

The Administration has relied on the invisible hand of the free market to solve all our problems. But what we got instead was the very visible hand of greed undermining moral values and the sense of community that should be at the core of decent society.

I have called this period the Ice Age, because national policies froze blacks and other minorities into deep disadvantage. But there are now some signs of a Great Thaw — the slow melting of the icy policies that froze black people out of the mainstream.

Civil rights advocates contend that Congress' intent is that all federal funds that support discrimination should be cut off.

The Restoration Act, which has overwhelming support in the House, has fifty-two co-sponsors in the Senate, Senator Ted Kennedy, who will be the floor leader, says "The lights went out on civil rights in 1981 when President Reagan entered the White House. Six unsatisfactory years have passed on civil rights. But now the Senate is under new management."

Another bill that has been introduced in the Senate is the Fair Housing bill. The author is Senator Kennedy. In introducing the bill Kennedy said "Housing discrimination is American apartheid. It is one of the most virulent forms of bias. The violence of Howard Beach and Forsyth County is the bitter fruit of the racism that is fostered by segregated housing." There are 37 Senate co-sponsors.

The present fair housing law fails to eliminate policies and practices that deny minorities and women housing choices. HUD says that two million incidences of unlawful victimization occur

The nation is beginning to feel less comfortable with policies that hurt the poor and weaken working people. Many Americans who were happy to vote for getting government off their backs are beginning to understand



John E. Jacob

that they need government by their side.

What some Americans thought was a black problem, can now be seen as a national problem — for many more whites than blacks are poor, uneducated, and jobless. They're discovering that government

annually. This does not include the overt and violent acts directed against minorities who move into predominantly white neighborhoods. Where one lives means access to employment opportunities and educational facilities. Housing is a major obstacle to securing other civil rights assured by law.

The present bill hampers the Housing Urban Development Department in its efforts to correct housing discrimination. It has no enforcement power for compliance with Title VIII. It can only use persuasion compliance. The aggrieved individual can resort to court action, but that is very costly and time-consuming.

The new House and Senate bills would appoint administrative law judges at HUD, who would hold hearings on bias complaints and order remedies, including fines of up to \$1,000 a day. Either side could appeal the findings in federal courts. Ralph Neas says, "voluntary conciliation is probably the least efficient way to resolve these types of issues. No one goes to HUD, because they realize it's not the place to go if you

isn't the enemy, and that the proper role of government is to extend the helping hand of opportunity. And they're discovering that old values like fairness and justice are needed as never before.

We see those concerns stirring in our churches, as in the adoption of the agenda for economic justice approved by the National Con-

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ference of Catholic Bishops, which recommends full employment policies, private sector job-training programs and other measures.

And we see concern growing about homeless people in the park across the street from the White House and hungry people looking for handouts on Park Avenue. Those contrasts are too terrible for a democratic society to become comfortable with.

want to resolve your problems."

The Reagan Administration and the National Association of Realtors oppose the new bill. They state that it gives too much power to administrative judges. Although HUD Secretary Samuel Pierce agreed to back the new approach last year, the Justice Department refused to go along. Instead, the Administration wants to give the Justice Department more power to file suits on behalf of the aggrieved victims.

Both the Administration and Congress' bills would ban housing discrimination against handicapped persons. The congressional bill bars landlords from refusing to rent apartments to families with children.

The Senate Judiciary will begin hearings on the Fair Housing bill the last of March. With a Democratic majority on the committee, it is expected to be voted out of the committee favorably.

A recent poll by the Joint Center for Political Studies shows surprising agreement among blacks and whites on major issues.

Both agree that the nation's three top problems are unemployment, drug abuse, and the high cost of living. And both groups rank crime, health care and public education among the

top ten problem areas. So I have hopes for new coalitions that cross political, economic and racial lines; coalitions that replace indifference with concern and action about the plight of America's poor people.

In Washington, the initiative is shifting from those who have supported policies that hurt the poor to those who support policies that help the poor.

Just as examples of the new mood that signals the closing of the Ice Age:

Six years ago, national debate centered around weakening minimum wage laws. Today, it is about raising a minimum wage that's so low a full-time worker can't move above the poverty line.

Six years ago, national debate centered around welfare cheats. Today, Congress is considering welfare reform legislation that would encourage work, training, and support services to help people become employable.

Six years ago, the Administration started the war against affirmative action. Today, a conservative Supreme Court consistently upholds affirmative action programs, although that could change if the Senate confirms the appointment of Judge Robert Bork to the Court.

If these positive trends continue, the Ice Age will melt and new, better policies will be forged.

Words of Marcus Garvey

By Kofi Tyus

"So long as there is within me the breath of life and the spirit of God, I shall struggle on and urge others of our race to struggle on to see that justice is done to the black peoples of the world."

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