

Rally

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were prior to the change. The attorney general can then prevent a change by issuing an objection, which can be challenged in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Section 5 also requires federal poll watchers to be onsite during voting.

Section 203, which requires voting precincts to eliminate any language barriers, is also up for renewal in 2007.

Though House Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wyo.) said at the NAACP annual convention that he will support full authorization of the measure, Jackson said nothing can be taken for granted.

"The forces that we defeated in 1965 never stopped trying to take it back. They use gerrymandering, annexation, at-large, roll-purging, intimidation, gentrification. They never stop trying," Jackson said.

Jackson also repeated the uncertain answer that President Bush gave to his son, U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.), during a Congressional Black Caucus visit to the White House in January.

The congressman quoted Bush as saying he 'didn't know enough about' the Voting Rights Act to say whether

he will support reauthorization.

White House Spokesman Scott McClellan has since said that Bush is "firmly committed to protecting the voting rights of all Americans... In terms of the re-authorization of that section of the Voting Rights Act, the president said that he would take a look at it."

Voting rights experts around the country are mobilizing, just in case.

Ted Shaw, director-counsel and president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, warns of tricks leading up to re-authorization.

Any argument that the full act should be permanent or should require nationwide coverage could be fatal to anti-discriminatory protections, said Shaw.

"Both permanency and nationwide coverage are tricks... The Supreme Court has made it very clear in its jurisprudence, whether we like it or not, that any race-conscious measure has to be periodically reviewed to determine whether they're still necessary," Shaw said.

"If Section 5 becomes permanent, given the nature of Section 5, it's going to be struck down because there hasn't been a nationwide jurisdiction, which has a history of discrimination in the

electoral process or low minority inclusion. The Supreme Court is going to say that's an unwarranted intrusion in those jurisdictions."

Shaw was one of the facilitators during a two-day "Renewal Kick-off Campaign" and national conference on the Voting Rights Act, last week held by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund.

Conference Executive Director Wade Henderson said he was encouraged by Sensenbrenner's support, but that's not enough.

"We're also talking about restoration of the Act's vitality to where it was when it was reauthorized 23 years ago in 1982," Henderson said.

"Our objective is to move the discussion in that direction."

Retired Judge Nathaniel R. Jones of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, said citizens must also watch Democratic members of Congress who negotiated the "nuclear option," compromising in order to confirm conservative federal judges.

"Those who wink and nod at this result may rightly be called upon to defend against the charge of being enablers and accomplices to the repealing of key sections of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act,"

Jones said.

U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), former chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee pointed out that Election 2000, when 4 million to 6 million votes were lost because of violations or faulty machines, showed how easily a vote can be nullified.

"In 1965, I saw people standing in unmovable lines, trying day after day to pass the so-called literacy test," he said.

"Those tests are gone, but the unmovable lines re-emerged in the elections of 2000 and 2004. Those challenges to equal access made it clear to the average American citizen that we have not fully escaped the chains of our dark past."

It is because of the confusion during Election 2000 that the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law has established a commission to hold hearings around the country, gathering evidence to use for possible strengthening of the act.

Although the pre-clearance clause pertains to mostly southern states, the bipartisan National Commission on the Voting Rights Act, is gathering evidence of on-going racial and language discrimination in voting nationwide, said Barbara Arnwine, executive director

of the Lawyer's Committee.

The committee is chaired by long-time NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund attorney, Bill Lann Lee, a former assistant attorney general for civil rights, and former U.S. Rep. Charles McCurdy Mathias, Jr. (R-Md.), who helped draft the bill.

"What people really thought was that most of the evidence was probably pertaining mostly to the South. They've mostly been amazed. They've got testimony from Massachusetts, New Jersey, Alabama, Texas, Arizona, Minnesota and Wisconsin," she said.

"We have to see what the evidence tells us," said Arnwine. "Every time we have a hearing, people plead for Section 5 expansion. Every time we have a hearing, people plead for expansion of Section 203. Every time we have a hearing, we hear people crying for greater presence of the Justice Department to monitor their election. We've heard people say they thought the Justice Department failed to object when they should have."

Meanwhile, a pre-march Town Hall meeting will begin at 5:00 p.m. Friday at Ebenezer Baptist Church in

Atlanta.

The march, which will also focus on workers rights to organize and ending the war in Iraq, is developing into a "real rainbow coalition," Jackson said.

"The response has been tremendous. In this rally, the NAACP is coming big time. Bruce Gordon will give his first major speech. The Urban League, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the National Council of La Raza, the Congressional Black Caucus, the Latino Caucus, and the AFL-CIO have all committed to participate," Jackson said.

A variety of big-name entertainers, including Stevie Wonder, Roberta Flack and Harry Belafonte, have also committed to participate, he said.

"After that, we will raise it to the next level — to Congress," Jackson said.

"We're putting it on the front burner. We're telling the marchers to go back to their states and focus on the mandate: Increasing voter registration for the 2006 campaigns and putting pressure on senators to support voting rights reauthorization and voter enforcement. We're reviving street activism en masse."

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