

Congress to consider Voting Rights Act

WASHINGTON (AP) - Supporters of the Voting Rights Act acknowledge they know no member of Congress who wants to scrap it. But with hearings that started this week, Congress is hardly their biggest concern.

The House Judiciary Committee this week holds the first two of what could be more than a dozen congressional hearings into extending key provisions of the 1965 law for another 25 years. While congressional approval may seem inevitable, advocates insist exhaustive hearings are necessary to ensure the extension stands up in court.

"We're trying to build a record," said Laughlin McDonald, attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union's Voting Rights Project. "We are anticipating a challenge to what Congress might do."

The Constitution's 15th Amendment guarantees people of all races the right to vote, and most aspects of the Voting Rights Act — which forbids literacy tests and other impediments for minorities — will never expire.

But other key provisions will expire in 2007 without congressional action. One requires states with a history of racial discrimination, mostly in the South, to get federal approval before changing their election laws. Another mandates bilingual election assistance for those who do not speak English.

McDonald says he expects to win the political fight in Congress. But if it comes down to a legal fight, all bets are off, which is why the evidence presented at this week's hearings could be critical.

In recent years, the Su-

preme Court and U.S. Justice Department have narrowly interpreted several of the original act's key elements, much to the chagrin of civil rights activists.

Most glaring, they say, was the 2003 case *Georgia v. Ashcroft*. The Supreme Court seemed to suggest in its ruling that states can change their district lines provided Black voters are still able to influence an election, regardless of whether their preferred candidates are elected.

McDonald said that was never the intent of the Voting Rights Act, which was established to ensure minority representation — or at least their right to pick candidates of their choice. He said he'd like Congress to clarify that as part of the extension.

"There is a consensus in the civil rights community

that *Georgia v. Ashcroft* ought to be fixed," McDonald said.

Beyond that and a few other small changes, civil rights activists want Congress to pass a clean 25-year extension. They oppose using the bill as a forum for new legislation governing voting machines and are also against a permanent extension, which could make the whole law prone to legal attack.

"The reauthorization process is an opportunity to take stock of where we are and, if necessary, to make adjustments that will protect and strengthen the act," John Conyers of Michigan, the House Judiciary Committee's top Democrat, said in a recent opinion column.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., also

supports extensive hearings and has scheduled the first two for this week. The first, on Tuesday, was an overview of the 1965 act and its subsequent amendments. The second, scheduled for today, will focus on the expiring provisions, including Section 5, which requires federal approval for changing voting laws, and Section 203, which concerns bilingual assistance

at the polls.

"The Voting Rights Act has brought voting rights to millions of Americans previously denied their right to vote," Sensenbrenner said. "While some sections of the law will not expire until 2007, I strongly believe now is the time for the Judiciary Committee to begin a thorough examination to reauthorize this critical legislation."

Rice: No desire to be president

WASHINGTON (AP) - For Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, no means no — and no again — when it comes to whether she will run for president.

"It's not what I want to do with my life; it's not what I'm going to do with my life," Rice said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

A group pushing for a Rice candidacy has run a television ad in New Hampshire — traditional site of the first presidential primary — and plans to air it soon in Iowa, where the first party caucuses take place.

At least two websites are promoting Rice even though Rice herself has said for months that she is not interested in running.

Asked on NBC and on "Fox News Sunday" whether she would run for president in 2008, Rice said she is flattered but would decline.

"I'm not somebody who wants to run for office. I haven't ever run for anything," Rice told NBC. "I think I'm doing what I need to do, which is to try and promote American foreign policy, American interests, the president's democracy agenda at an extraordinary time."

Pressed by host Tim Russert, Rice said, "I don't know how many ways to say no."

"So," asked Russert, "no ...?"

A few seconds of silence followed. "Tim," Rice said, "I don't know how many ways to tell people that I have no interest in being a candidate for anything. ...No."

She told Fox host Chris Wallace, "I'm quite certain that there are going to be really fine candidates for president from our party, and I'm looking forward to seeing them and perhaps supporting them."

Rice was interviewed from London at the conclusion of a diplomatic mission.

Dealer wins discrimination lawsuit

By Arne Williams

Special to Sentinel-Voice

PHOENIX (NNPA) - Nicholas Alozie, a Nigerian-born professor who claimed he was discriminated against and forced to close his African-artifacts mall store in Arizona Mills won \$100,000 in punitive damages in a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court.

An all-White jury recently sided with Alozie in his discrimination suit against Arizona Mills and its corporate owner, Mills Corp, but failed to agree with his second claim — that he was forced to close the store. Jurors did not award him for lost income or emotional distress.

"It was racism all the way," Alozie said of the mall's behavior toward him.

"There was no award for damages to my civil rights. The jury agreed that I was discriminated against, but allowed them (Mills Corp.) to get off easy by not awarding compensatory damages for my lost revenue and emotional distress."

Alozie heads the social and behavioral studies department at Arizona State University's Polytechnic campus. He believes the lack of Blacks and other minorities on the jury explains the results.

"This explains how a Black man can win a lawsuit of this level and not be made whole by getting enough money to recover what was



Nicholas Alozie, who was discriminated against and forced to close his African artifacts store in Arizona Mills, won \$100,000 in punitive damages in a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court. The artifacts on his office wall at ASU East resembled the items sold at his store.

taken from him through discrimination," said Alozie. He is also concerned about the message the case sends to other corporations. "The award is less than the monthly rent for one large anchor store at one of their malls," claimed Alozie. "What type of message does this send to a multi-million dollar corporation?"

Alozie's attorney, Sabinus Megwa, agrees.

"It's very weird, usually, if someone is discriminated, there's damages to his civil rights, so I'm surprised there was not an award," he said.

In a statement, the Mills Corp said, "We are pleased that the jury recognized that

the plaintiff was not entitled to any recovery on his claims. We believe, however, that neither the nominal award (of \$1) nor the punitive damages that were assessed against the defendants are supported by the evidence."

Alozie said that it is time for Arizona Mills and the Mills Corp. to apologize to the community for their discriminatory behavior. "They wanted to close my store because it attracted what they believed were the wrong type of people."

Alozie opened the store in July 1999 under a temporary lease.

At the end of 2000, he

said, the mall management told him there was no temporary space for his store but that he could stay if he signed a permanent lease.

His store closed while he waited for a space under a permanent lease. Meanwhile, a competing non-minority business, Painted With Oil, was able to keep a temporary lease, as was Tommy Hilfiger, Alozie said.

Alozie did manage to reopen with a temporary lease in June 2001, which lasted until September that year, when a permanent space was found. His rent tripled to more than \$16,000. He stayed there until he was ha-

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Camp

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The computer boot camp concludes on Saturday, Nov. 12, with a computer basics class for beginners that will feature instruction on hardware, software and how computers work.

Damon Hodge, a spokesman for Omega Psi Phi Charities of Nevada, said the computer boot camp is the first of what's slated to be a series of technology workshops that Omega and the Cultural Diversity Foundation are planning in the coming months and years.

"It's important that the digital divide and all its constructs—social, economic, ethnic, demographic, etc.—be bridged. We hope to help do that by offering help to everyone in need of technological savvy, particularly seniors, the poor and disaffected minorities," he said.

"I want to thank the men of Omega and Joni Flowers for being so forward thinking and progressive. I also want to thank our corporate sponsor of this event."

Seating for the computer boot camp is very limited. For those interested in information and reservations, contact 702-646-2615 or send an e-mail to jflowers@cdfnv.org or damon_hodge@yahoo.com.