

Opposition to act racially subversive

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Civil rights leaders are correctly focusing on the hijacking of proposals to renew the Voting Rights Act by a handful of Southern Dixiecrats posing as Republicans. This is especially egregious considering President Bush, Republican leaders in the House and Senate, as well as a clear majority of the members, both Democrats and Republicans, have expressed support for renewal of the landmark legislation. Allowing the Democrat-turned-Republican minority to hold the legislation hostage, even temporarily, represents a failure of leadership on both sides of the aisle.

But there is something even more sinister than Dixiecrats acting like they're still fighting the Civil War — the deliberate campaign to nullify ballots cast by African-Americans. After all of the voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, if this scheme is not taken on, it won't matter whether African-Americans vote in national elections or if voters enjoy the protection of the Voting Rights Act.

This point was brought home by Greg Palast, an investigative reporter for BBC Television and the *Guardian* newspapers, at the recent Rainbow/PUSH national convention in Chicago. In both his public speeches and in his latest book, "Armed Madhouse," published by Dutton, Palast recounts in excruciating detail how disqualified ballots,

most of them cast by African-Americans, were enough to have easily defeated Bush — had they been counted.

In his book, Palast notes that CNN's 2004 exit polls broadcast after midnight Election Day, showed John Kerry defeating Bush among women voters by 53 percent to 47 percent. Among men, Kerry defeated Bush 51 percent to 49 percent.

"So here's your question, class: What third sex put George Bush over the top in Ohio and gave him the White House?"

"Answer: the uncounted."

Palast explains it this way: "The nasty little secret of American democracy is that, in every national election, ballots cast are simply thrown in the garbage — millions of them. Most are called 'spoiled,' supposedly unreadable, damaged, invalid. They just don't get counted."

And the consequences are disastrous.

"In Ohio, there were 153,237 ballots simply thrown away, more than the Bush 'victory' margin," Palast writes. "In New Mexico the uncounted vote was five times the Bush alleged victory margin of 5,988. In Iowa, Bush's triumph of 13,498 was overshadowed by 36,811 votes rejected."

Officially, 1.8 million uncounted votes



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were reported to the federal Election's Assistance Commission. That would be bad enough, but Palast reports that those are only partial numbers and the final figure exceeds 3 million. This massive political disenfranchisement is carried out in four basic ways:

1) Provisional ballots - allowing voters to cast votes that are to be counted later, provided that they could be verified. "Republicans won by the rejection of provisional ballots that were cast in Democratic precincts." The author says 1,090,279 provisional ballots were tossed out.

2) Spoiled ballots - created when writing is too light to be read or the card is not punched hard enough, sometimes creating "hanging chads." Discounted votes: 1,389,231.

3) Uncounted absentee ballots - 526,420 in 2004.

4) Barred voters - "There's the purge of 'felon' voters whose only crime is VWB, Voting While Black," Palast writes.

To see how these denials changes the margin of victory — or defeat — we only need to look at the 2000 Florida results.

"Black folk cast 54 percent of the 179,855 ballots 'spoiled' in Florida in that election," Palast observes. "Given the nearly unanimous

support for Democrats among those Black voters, candidate Al Gore undoubtedly was the choice of the vast majority of those votes thrown in the spoilage bin. Indeed, we can calculate with high-accuracy that Gore's total vote in the state would have been higher by 77,000 if all spoiled votes had been tallied — in a race officially giving the presidency to Mr. Bush by 537 votes."

In 2004, it was the same story but a different state: this time Ohio. The uncounted votes in the Buckeye state came to 239,127. Bush's margin of victory was 118,599. In both Florida and Ohio, the secretary of state — the person responsible for overseeing the election — was co-chair of Bush's presidential campaign, representing a clear conflict-of-issue.

During the last presidential campaign, Palast got a hold of a GOP purge or challenge list used to depress the Black vote. The list was compiled from predominantly Black zip codes and the would-be voters were guilty of one thing, as Palast pointed out — voting while Black.

Yes, it's crucial that we renew the Voting Rights Act, but our work must not stop there. We must make sure that once we do vote, it counts and is not used as part of a scheme to rig the election.

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Cooperative economics key to Black plight

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

For the second consecutive year, I had the honor of speaking at the recent Collective Banking Group's annual conference. I also presented two workshops on "Building Collective Wealth."

It was a privilege to be there among brothers and sisters who are striving to learn more and wanting to do more to enhance the economic position of Black people in this country. It was also the booster shot that I need from time to time to maintain my equilibrium and to keep me on course, despite the hesitancy and uneasiness that often beset me.

Sometimes it's quite difficult to work for the economic uplift of our people.

Rather than recount everything that happened, as I did last year, I highly recommend you get audio-visual recordings of the proceedings from the First Baptist Church of Glenarden, Md., bookstore at (301) 699-8449. You will be blessed by the speeches and the workshops that were presented. You can also go to www.collectivebankinggroup.org for more information on the event and the



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speakers.

The CBG continues to lead the way when it comes to doing what many folks just talk about. The group is the greatest display and best example of collective economic activity in this country, and it is amazing to me that we do not have chapters of the CBG across this country.

I am disturbed by the fact that our high-profile leaders and speakers are not promoting the CBG model as one of the solutions to our economic problems. Maybe

it's because many of them get their sponsorships and speaking fees from banks and are afraid to speak out against the blatant discrimination that take place everyday against Blacks by various banking institutions.

I often wonder why we do not understand that by working together and standing together against injustice and unfair treatment, regardless of the sponsors of our organizations and individuals, we could leverage fair treatment and still get our individual perks.

Why? Because banks and other financial institutions would know that if they fail to treat us right, hundreds of thousands of us

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grounds, likening it to a poll tax from the Jim Crow era.

In 2001, three weeks before Election Day in Kilmichael, Mississippi, the all-White town council decided to cancel the municipal elections when it became apparent that, for the first time in the town's history, a Black candidate would win the mayoral election. However, because Mississippi is covered by the Voting Rights Act, Kilmichael's change in election procedure — in this case, canceling the election — had to be approved by the Department of Justice before it could take effect. The Department of Justice concluded that Kilmichael's decision to cancel the election was racially motivated and insisted that the election go on as planned. Without the Voting Rights Act, the all-White council would have prevailed.

None of us will ever forget that prior to the 2000 election Florida eliminated thousands of people from the voting polls on the premise they were convicted felons; most of them were people of color, and the allega-

tions turned out not to be true in countless instances.

The next provision up for renewal or reauthorization is Section 203, the Language Assistance Provision. This provision of the Voting Rights Act applies to four minority groups: American Indians, Asian Americans, Alaskan Natives and persons of Spanish heritage. Congress covered these four minority groups after hearing evidence of voting or other forms of language-based discrimination that limited the groups' access to the political process. There was evidence of severe language barriers and high rates of illiteracy within the groups and evidence of depressed voter registration turnout. Other groups that were considered disadvantaged were not included because there was insufficient evidence to establish that they had experienced similar difficulties in voting.

Qualifying states must provide ballots translated and printed in the groups' primary languages or have interpreters at the polling places. This regulation pertains to states where more than 5 percent of the voting-age

citizens belong to a single racial-minority community and are Limited English Proficiency or LEP; where more than 10,000 voting-age citizens in a jurisdiction belong to a single language-minority community and are LEP, and the illiteracy rate of the language-minority population is higher than the national illiteracy rate. Is this provision still needed? Absolutely.

In August 2003, weeks before a September election in Bexar County, Texas, the council attempted to eliminate five early polling places that serve predominantly Latino neighborhoods — an act that would have left many Latino voters without convenient access to the polls. Similarly, during the 2004 and 2005 elections in New York City, voters and poll inspectors were observed harassing Asian-American voters by making derogatory remarks about their presence in the U.S.

The remaining provision up for renewal are Sections 6 to 9, the Federal Examiner and Observer Provisions, whereby the U.S. Attorney General's office can send election observers to monitor the polling places and the

counting of ballots in areas with a history of discrimination.

Despite the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement and the progress made during the last four decades in minority registration and voting, there is no question that barriers to equal minority voter participation continue to exist. Renewal of the act is not just a minority issue; it's not just a Black issue, but an issue for all citizens that deeply care about preserving American democracy and ensuring equal access to the electoral process.

It is critical that we renew and restore the Voting Rights Act to guarantee that our democracy is open to all and that it works for all. As a group, Blacks didn't agitate for passage when it came up for a vote last week, but we must rock the boat now — and we don't have time to waste.

Pass the word and do something. Call or write your U.S. Senators and Congressional representatives (in Nevada, contact Ensign, Reid, Porter, Berkley and Gibbons) and demand passage of the Voting Rights Act.