

# GOP holds up renewal of Voting Rights Act

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Alabama, the civil rights hotbed where the famous Selma to Montgomery marches led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, has a Congressional delegation sharply divided over renewing of key parts of the landmark legislation.

"It's distressing. There are still some [members] from the South who have found various reasons, various excuses to oppose reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. I think it should be a huge embarrassment for the Republican Party," said U.S. Rep. Artur Davis (D-Ala.), whose 7th District incorporates Selma, Tuscaloosa and Birmingham, key battlegrounds in the civil rights struggle.

Davis predicts the legislation will be extended before it is set to expire next year.

"It will pass, but what's distressing about this is that in 2006, 41 years after our country got a Voting Rights Act, so many members of Congress are trying to

weaken or are trying to make it nearly impossible to administer. That's something that deeply concerns me," Davis said.

Davis and Congressman Bud Cramer, his only Democratic colleague in the state, remain staunchly behind renewing the act.

The stances of Alabama's remaining Republican representatives range from staunch support to staunch opposition to the bill, titled the "Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006," H.R. 9.

Reps. Robert Aderholt and Mike Rogers, a co-sponsor of the bill, were both a part of a contingency that stopped the bill from going to the floor on June 22 by protesting that it was moving too fast. They argue against Section 5, which requires 16 states with documented histories of racial voter discrimination to pre-clear new voting changes through the Justice Department. They contend all states should be covered by section 5. While that might appear broader, critics



*"It's distressing. There are still some [members] from the South who have found various reasons, various excuses to oppose reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act."*

— Rep. Artur Davis  
Democrat from Alabama

say such legislation would likely be nullified because states would need to show a history of past discrimination before being covered under anti-bias laws.

Rep. Spencer Bachus remains in support of the bill as it is. Rep. Terry Everett says he hasn't decided how he will vote. Rep. Jo Bonner has expressed reservations about Section 203 of the Act, which requires multilingual ballots in some areas.

The Senate is also moving slowly on the bill. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Arlen Specter has said the Senate won't hold hearings on the act until late this month.

Republican Sen. Jeff Ses-

sions of Alabama is among those who claim the law unfairly targets the South and should be expanded nationally. Republican Sen. Richard Shelby of Alabama says he hasn't focused on the bill enough to make a decision.

Whether they are for or against reauthorization, the bloody fight for the first passage of the act will remind lawmakers of its importance.

March 7, 1965, which would later become known as "Bloody Sunday," was the first leg of a 54-mile Selma-to-Montgomery march along U.S. 80 en route to the Alabama state capital, organized to help win passage of a national voting rights law. But Alabama state troopers brutally beat the marchers, including Congressman John Lewis, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or SNCC.

The marchers were forced to retreat that day, but eventually, more than 3,000 protesters marched across the bridge en route to Montgomery.

Moved by the televised violence against African-Americans and their supporters, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act that summer. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law on Aug. 6, 1965.

Speaking of the list of amendments in attempt to nullify Section 5, Lewis said in a statement, "We have

made those mistakes before in this country, especially as it relates to matters of race, and I hope this nation and this Congress will not choose to go down that dark road again. I hope we have evolved enough at this juncture to choose a better way, a way that is not regressive, but a way that will help us continue our preparations as a nation and as a people to lay down the burden of race in America."

Only two months ago, the reauthorization appeared to be a done deal. On May 10, the House Judiciary Committee voted 33-1 to send the bill to the floor for a full House vote. Judiciary Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) and the ranking member, John Conyers (D-Mich.), issued joint statements praising the act as passed out of committee.

The House and Senate leadership and President Bush also voice support for passage of the measure.

But, two weeks ago, just as the bill was about to go to the House floor for a vote, the unexpected happened. Approximately 30 Southern members of the House, reportedly led by members from Georgia and Texas, protested, saying they wanted more time to debate and offer amendments. Members from other Southern states joined in.

The floor vote was thwarted twice as members expressed their opposition, despite the fact that House Leader Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) has remained firm in his support of the reauthorization bill.

Davis of Alabama said he believes as many as 130 members of the 435-member House will vote against the reauthorization.

"Obviously we have made extraordinary progress

in the last 42 years, and we owe that progress to two things: number one, to changing hearts and changing attitudes; number two, to strong, effective legal structures. Both have been necessary," he said.

"The reality is that laws help protect our country from our own worst attitudes. And the Voting Rights Act works. It has been a spectacular success. And the last time I checked, when something is working you don't go out and break it."

The House vote on renewal is expected next week. Just before Congress broke for July 4 recess, it rejected an attempt to eliminate Section 203. The amendment, offered by Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.), was defeated 167-254.

David Bositis, senior researcher for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, supports a change in Section 5, but not in the way supported by rebelling Southerners.

"The law needs to be strengthened," he said. "There are various systematic efforts to keep Black voters from voting."

Bositis cited a new Georgia law that will require identification before voting. It will be in effect during the July 18 primary unless a court issues an injunction. Bositis said the Justice Department approval of the new Georgia voter ID underscores the need for stricter enforcement of the Voting Rights Act.

"The pre-clearance clause is toothless because the Bush justice department has been using the pre-clearance clause to harm," Bositis said. "All civil rights groups in Georgia were opposed to that law. What's going to be effective is you have to have

(See GOP, Page 4)

## Attorneys General tab their first Black leader

ATLANTA (AP) - Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker has been elected president of the National Association of Attorneys General, the first Black to hold the top post in the nearly 100-year-old legal institution.

Baker was elected by his colleagues from other states for 2006-2007. The announcement was made at last week's annual meeting of the states' top lawyers in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Baker, a Democrat, was appointed Georgia's attorney general in 1997 by then-Gov. Zell Miller. He has twice been elected to four-year terms and is seeking his third.

Baker has also clashed occasionally with Republican Gov. Sonny Perdue, notably over Perdue's use of state aircraft.

The two also battled over a redistricting plan in what was widely viewed as a larger test of wills over who has the power to call legal shots for the state.



Thurbert Baker leads a national attorneys general group.

When Baker refused to drop the state's defense of the Democratic plan, Perdue sued him.

The Georgia Supreme Court sided with Baker 5-2.

Baker has been honored for his work on open govern-

ment.

Recently, he made a high-profile appearance in the Georgia Supreme Court, sitting next to a top aide who defended the state's constitutional ban on gay marriage.



After graduating from the Expertise Cosmetology Institute, I immediately landed the perfect opportunity at Hot Headz Salon... Money's great and my schedule is MY SCHEDULE. Thanks, Expertise

—Ms. Kris, Las Vegas Class of 2002

- Pre-Registering for 2006 Classes
- Bi-Lingual (Spanish) Courses
- Excellent Placement Record -92% Success Rate
- Financial Aid Available for Those Who Qualify
- Prepare for the Nevada State Exam

902 W. Owens | Las Vegas, NV 89106  
702-636-8686 | www.expertisebeauty.com