

Congress considers D.C. voting rights bill

By Stephen K. Cooper
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Washington-area lawmakers are scrambling to put D.C. voting rights on Congress' agenda before the November elections.

With time dwindling before Congress leaves town on Sept. 29, Del. Eleanor Norton (D-D.C.), recently urged members of a House subcommittee hearing to support the District of Columbia Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act of 2006.

"This is a district that is two-thirds African-American," Norton said. "We have a right to vote."

The bipartisan bill would raise the number of House

members to 437, by adding one seat for Washington, D.C., and one at-large seat for the state of Utah, which missed out on an additional representative by approximately 800 residents during the 2000 census.

The bill, HR 5388, was introduced by Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.), and has dozens of House co-sponsors, including Norton, an original co-sponsor. The bill is also supported by many civil rights groups, including the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, a federation of more than 180 organizations.

Norton said she planned to work with Davis, staff members from the state of Utah, civil rights leaders and

D.C. officials to overcome any problems that might stop the legislation from winning approval in Congress.

"I am convinced that the problem-solving approach we are using can work. Both Utah and D.C. want this bill badly, and there is no reason for leadership on both sides to be any less desirous of a bipartisan solution that would give each side one new member of the House," Norton said.

The House Government Reform Committee, which Davis chairs, already approved the bill in May by a vote of 29-4. The House Judiciary Committee has yet to schedule a hearing on the bill. No mention has been made

of a House floor vote yet.

One chief roadblock to the measure is Judiciary Committee Chairman Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.), who opposes HR 5388, largely because the measure would create the at-large seat in Utah until 2012.

Utah voters would be required to vote for two separate congressional representatives.

Reportedly, Sensenbrenner would prefer that the additional seat in Utah be a traditional one in a

fourth Congressional district.

Norton said she feared that the bill might be amended once it reaches the full Judiciary committee.

House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), predicted that House Democrats will support the D.C. voting rights legislation, despite Sensenbrenner's concerns with the Utah seat.

"This is a political game. Let's put it on the floor. Let's vote it up or down," Hoyer said. "We support voting rights for D.C."

House Judiciary member Rep. Artur Davis (D-Ala.), blamed the lack of voting rights for Washington, D.C., residents on Congress' inattention, misunderstanding, and a lack of opportunity and will.

Davis commented that D.C. residents are serving in the U.S. military in Baghdad fighting for democracy in Iraq, "but here in the nation's capitol they are denied that right," he said.

Stephen K. Cooper writes for Afro Newspapers.

Republican House okays government ID mandate

By James Wright
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - To the chagrin of members of the Congressional Black Caucus, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that would require government-issued identification to vote. The requirement does not take affect until elections in 2010, but has already drawn condemnation from CBC members and the civil rights community.

The bill, "The Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006," was passed Sept. 20 by the House (228-196) along partisan lines.

Theodore Shaw, director-counsel and president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, called the legislation "un-American."

"It's a modern day poll tax. Any bill that would require all eligible citizen voters to engage in a bureaucratic process to obtain a citizen ID that includes swearing poverty in order to vote is corrosive and undemocratic," he said.

"The bill effectively transforms the vote from a right to a privilege by elevating the privileged over those citizens who will disproportionately become ensnared in this voting trap including African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, the elderly disabled and the poor."

Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) on Sept. 20, joined other CBC members and members of Congress of Asian and Latino caucuses in voicing concerns about the bill.

"I am beyond disgusted,"

"As a country with one of the lowest percentages of voter participation in the world, we should be doing everything we can to remove the barriers to voting."

—Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.)

he said of the bill's passage, "I am shocked."

Noting that Georgia is wrestling with the issue of voter IDs, he said:

"I find it hard to believe that the Republican leaders in Congress would put election year games ahead of the voting rights of Americans. People died in democratic process. We must not turn back the clock. We must open up the political process and let all Americans come in."

Lewis noted that "a poll tax is an extra burden on their most precious right" which is to vote.

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) said that the bill is counterproductive to what democracy is about.

"As a country with one of the lowest percentages of voter participation in the world, we should be doing everything we can to remove the barriers to voting," she said. "For example, we should have been debating legislation to fix the real problems with the 2002 and 2004 elections — long voting lines, voter intimidation, faulty machines, poor training of poll workers, discriminatory voter registration laws, or, for example, making Election Day a federal holiday so that everyone can exercise their right to vote."

Rep. Al Wynn (D-Md.) had problems with his race for re-nomination for his seat. He made a point of bringing that out.

"Given the irregularities regarding the close vote in the Fourth Congressional District, we should be cautious of any bills that infringe on citizens' right to vote," Wynn said. "It's a shame that two months after the Voting Rights Act we have passed this. This is an unfair mandate on the American people."

NAACP President and Chief Executive Officer Bruce Gordon said that the bill's name is misleading and that instead of securing the integrity of the elections process, it undermines it.

"To add insult to injury, the bill would do little or nothing to prevent actual instances of voter fraud," Gordon said. "Rather, (the bill) would only exacerbate the already existing problem of voter non-participation by erroneously removing or discouraging countless eligible voters, American citizens from the process."

The bill still has to go through the Senate and has to pass both houses before it would be enacted into law.

James Wright writes for AFRO Newspapers.

Dean courts Black vote

DETROIT (AP) - The Democratic Party can no longer sit back and wait until three weeks before an election to ask minorities for their vote, Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean said Friday.

"In many ways, the Democratic Party hasn't moved itself out of the '60s and '70s," Dean said in remarks to the DNC's African-American Leadership Summit, which is aimed at mobilizing Black voters and encouraging more minority candidates for state offices.

"If we don't get smart about having folks on the ticket that look like the people whose votes were asking for, in meaningful positions of authority, then we're not going to win. And the party that gets to do that first is the party that's going to win," Dean said.

Annie Mae Holt, a 59-year-old Detroit teacher who attended the gathering, said

Democrats must be careful not to allow Republicans to create a divide.

"We need to make sure that people who look like the diversity that is evolving in the United States is represented on our Democratic ticket," Holt said in an interview.

Black voters could be crucial to Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm's effort to overcome a stiff challenge from GOP challenger Dick DeVos. Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick recently promised to energize city voters for Granholm and avoid a repeat of the low 1990 turnout that contributed to Republican John Engler narrowly winning the governorship.

"In order for this party to win, we have to include more people," Kilpatrick said. "The numbers say that we need to move the African-American (and) Latino vote inside urban America. Unless we go get it, we won't win."

RE-ELECT
Morse
ARBERRY, JR.
NEVADA STATE ASSEMBLY CLARK COUNTY DISTRICT 7

Progress - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow!

Paid Political Advertisement by Morse Arberry, Jr.