

Voter ID bill would endanger rights

By Marc H. Morial
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Just two months after overwhelmingly passing the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization of 2006, the U.S. House of Representatives recently reversed its commitment to ensuring the right to vote for all. Under legislation passed recently, they want U.S. citizens to show proof of their citizenship to vote and then show photo ID when they cast their ballots.

Introduced by Illinois Republican Rep. Henry Hyde, the bill, titled the Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006 (H.R. 4844), passed the House by a vote of 228 to 195. In the process, lawmakers are threatening to disenfranchise thousands of elderly, poor and minority Americans by burdening them with costly and inconvenient requirements.

Only a quarter of eligible voters have passports, which cost \$97 to obtain, and naturalization papers used to prove citizenship cost \$210 to be replaced. An estimated 6 to 12 percent of voters do not have government-issued photo identification, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

People of color, people with disabilities, the elderly, young, and people who live in poverty are among the groups least likely to have documents proving their citizenship. In certain parts of the United States, elderly African-Americans and many Native Americans were born at home, under the care of

midwives, and do not possess birth certificates.

According to a University of Wisconsin study from June 2005, 23 percent of persons aged 65 and older in that state did not have driver's licenses or photo identification. It also found that less than half of African-American men in Milwaukee County had valid driver's licenses.

H.R. 4844, while appealing on the surface, poses one of the greatest threats to fair and equal voting rights today. We should be focusing on encouraging full participation of our citizenry, not finding new ways to hinder the precious right to vote. While it would be great if all citizens had documents such as a passport or a birth certificate readily available, the truth is that many do not, which means that they would have to pay for them in order to vote.

Four states — Georgia, Missouri, Indiana and Arizona — have enacted laws requiring photo ID to vote. In two of those states, federal courts have struck them down as unconstitutional. In 2005, a federal judge in Georgia characterized the requirement as a poll tax (an unfair economic policy historically used to deter a certain group of voters from casting votes, or it is a fee or tax required for a citizen to vote).



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I can't agree more: It's a 21st century poll tax.

The bill's proponents maintain they're trying to crack down on voting fraud. But I would say they are perpetuating the greatest fraud of all. They're trying to prevent eligible Americans from exercising their most sacred and important civil right. Falsely claiming citizenship and voting fraudulently have long been federal offenses.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, Americans are as likely to commit election fraud as they are being killed by lightning. Since October of 2002, only 86 U.S. residents have been convicted of federal election fraud, while nearly 197 million ballots have been cast in general elections.

In Ohio, a statewide survey found four instances of ineligible persons voting or attempting to vote in 2002 and 2004, out of 9,078,728 votes cast — four in over 9 million, or a scant 0.00004 percent. Cathy Cox, the secretary of state for Georgia, has admitted that she could not recall one documented case of voter impersonation at the polls during her nine years as the state's top election official.

It is obvious that our current laws against voting fraud work when properly enforced.

Even if voters have valid ID, many eligible voters will be turned away because H.R. 4844 would place an inordinate amount of discretion in the hands of overworked and sometimes poorly trained poll workers. Deciding whether a voter matches or does not match the photo in an ID card — which can be many years old — is a very subjective process and prone to mistakes.

What U.S. House members want to demand of Americans to vote is far more than what is required of them to run for office. All that most congressional candidates have to do when declaring their candidacy is sign a pledge that they are U.S. citizens — much like what voters sign when registering to vote.

Shouldn't Congress be a little more worried about the state of electronic voting machines? It seems to me that they're the cause of more voting irregularities than individual voting fraud.

With midterm elections approaching, I can only surmise that House lawmakers are trying to improve their political prospects with constituents concerned with illegal immigration. Instead of producing viable immigration reform, the U.S. House decided to try to crack down on the few illegal aliens who might be voting in federal elections. Now that's not what I consider government efficiency.

Marc H. Morial is president and CEO of the National Urban League.

Former aides: King certainly not a Republican

By Lorinda M. Bullock
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON - In the time it takes to cook minute rice, Washington-based National Black Republican Association has managed to stir up some serious controversy with a radio commercial claiming Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a Republican and that Democrats founded the Ku Klux Klan.

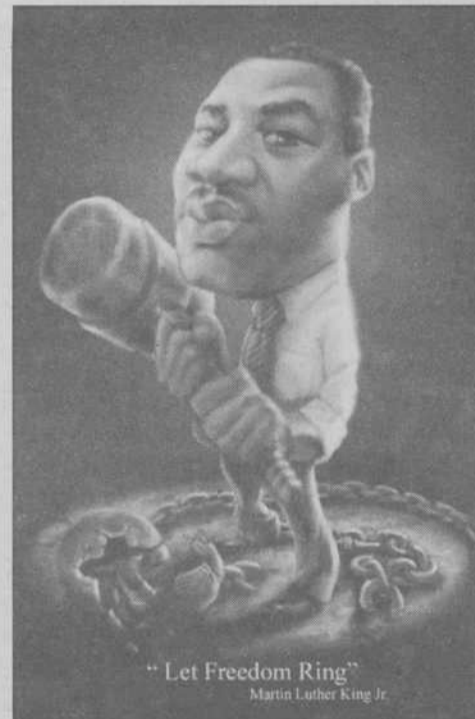
The 60-second spot features two Black women — one purporting to tell the other about a history of Republicans defending civil rights legislations, starting the NAACP and launching Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The radio ad made its debut last week, has run on radio stations in Maryland, Ohio, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and will start airing in Florida this week, according to NBRA Chairwoman Frances Rice.

"We're delighted that we've gotten a dialogue started," Rice said. "For far too long it had been a one-sided conversation in the Black community Democrats have been running our inner cities for the past 30-40 years, they have hijacked the civil rights record of the Republican Party and have taken Blacks down the path of socialism that has turned our inner cities into economic and social wastelands. And Blacks have been complaining about the same problems for the past 30 or 40 years, and the Democrats, incredibly, blame Republicans for the deplorable conditions in our communities, so we decided, rather than us complaining, as Black Republicans we would try to do something."

In the commercial, the two fictional voices of "Tina" and "Pam" started a "dialogue" indeed with their discussion on how Democrats were responsible for releasing the dogs and fire hoses on Blacks during the Civil Rights Movement and how the "Party of Lincoln" freed Blacks from slavery.

Critics note that in its early years, the members of the GOP were known as "Radi-



cal Republicans" because they supported social programs favored by Blacks. During that period, a majority of Blacks were Republicans. But that changed beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" program. Since then, Blacks have been closely aligned with Democrats, and Republicans, at least in the last four decades, have been viewed by most African-Americans as the enemies of civil rights.

Black Republicans are trying to paint a different picture. Their controversial commercial contains the following exchange:

Pam: Dr. King was a real man.

Tina: You know... he was a Republican.

Pam: Dr. King, a Republican? Really?

Tina: Democrats passed those Black Codes and Jim Crow laws. Democrats started the Ku Klux Klan.

According to historians, White supremacists — not the Democratic Party — started

the KKK. And many of the Southern Democrats — known as Dixiecrats — have switched to the Republican Party.

It is the assertion that Dr. King was supposedly a Republican that has drawn the strongest response.

Congressman John Lewis (D-Ga.), a former civil rights leader, called the commercial an "insult to the legacy and memory of Martin Luther King Jr." and "an affront to all that he stood for and to everyone who worked with him and followed him."

Lewis, former head of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, explained, "I knew Martin Luther King Jr. He was my friend. He was my colleague. We worked together, and I know he voted for John F. Kennedy, the Democratic candidate for President in 1960. I know he voted for Lyndon Johnson for president in 1964 and not Barry Goldwater. And if he had lived, he would have voted for Hubert Humphrey in 1968 and not the Republican candidate Richard Nixon."

Joseph Lowery, considered the "dean of the Civil Rights Movement" and co-founder of the SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, with Dr. King, dismissed the Black GOP claims.

"Election time is when the Republicans seem to fire weapons of mass distraction and mis-direction," he wrote in a column. "They have used same sex issues, abortion, prayer in school, immigration and, now, Martin Luther King, Jr., a Republican! I have often proclaimed that I am neither Democrat nor Republican, I'm Methodist! Martin was neither Democrat nor Republican, he was Baptist," Lowery wrote.

Lowery said today's Republicans are not in the Party of Lincoln, but the Party of "[Trent] Lott, [Tom] Delay, [Dick] Cheney, and George W. Bush," all ardent conservatives. Under questioning, Rice could provide no proof that Dr. King was a Republican.

Even some Black Republicans object to the commercial.

Michael Steele, Maryland's first African-American Lieutenant Governor and his Party's nominee for the U.S. Senate, said: "NBRA's current radio ad is insulting to Marylanders and should come down immediately. Although they may have had good intentions, there is no room for this kind of slash-and-burn partisan politics in the important conversation about how to best bring meaningful change to Washington, D.C. and get something done for Maryland... My campaign has already contacted NBRA and demanded the ad be removed from the air immediately."

Rice says she has no plans to comply with the request.

"I can understand candidates wanting to stay above the fray," she said. "But we're telling the truth. We founded the NBRA for the sole purpose of shedding a light of truth on the Democrat Party. And we recognize that we will suffer some slings and arrows."

This is not the first time Republicans have tried to appropriate Dr. King's name and reputation.

After affirmative action foe Ward Connerly repeatedly asserted that he was acting in the spirit of Dr. King, the King family publicly disputed that notion and demanded that Connerly stop misrepresenting Dr. King's views.

In an interview with *The New York Times* last August, Tom Houck of Atlanta, who worked with the King family, said movement insiders always joked about Andrew Young's conservative nature.

Houck recalled, "Dr. King used to say, 'You know now Andy is my favorite Republican.'"

Critics of Black Republicans cite as additional proof that not only was Dr. King not a Republican, he teased those around him who had conservative leanings.