

Critics: Proposed Ga. law is poll tax

ATLANTA (AP) — A proposed Georgia law would require prospective voters to prove citizenship, a practice opponents say would keep the poor, elderly and minorities away from the polls as taxes and literacy tests once did.

It's been more than 40 years since the Voting Rights Act was signed, barring voting practices used throughout the South for years to keep poor Blacks from voting. Today in Georgia, registering to vote is simple: check a box on an application affirming you are a citizen.

However, both chambers of the Georgia Legislature approved a bill earlier this month that would require people to provide a birth certificate, U.S. passport, naturalization papers or other documents proving citizenship. Similar bills have surfaced this year in five other states — Colorado, Illinois, Tennessee, Washington and Virginia, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Supporters, including the official in charge of Georgia elections, have said the measure would protect the integrity of the voting process. Critics have countered people who don't have the documents available or can't afford the costs of getting copies might end up being disenfranchised.

"It's a poll tax and we've lived through that before," said Jerry Gonzalez, executive director of the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials. "America has changed. We elected an African-American president, but Georgia wants to go back to the 1950s by enacting very restrictive, very cumbersome voting practices."

They point to Arizona — the only state with such a
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age would also extend to tenants who receive Section 8 public housing assistance. Importantly, the bill would not preempt more expansive protections provided under state or local laws.

The 90-day notice requirement gives tenants much-needed time to find alternative housing. Moreover, it also gives them the opportunity to consult with legal aid groups to find out what additional rights they may have under state and local laws.

Contracts

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Scott says there will be the ability to track exactly where the money went. If evidence of discrimination is found, that information can be used to impact or even overturn a string of court decisions going back 40 years that weakened minority business participation mandates.

One of those cases, *Crosby v. City of Richmond*, outlawed a 30 percent minority set-aside plan in the city of Richmond in 1989.

Meanwhile, on the front end, "spending decisions will be done by the states and localities," Scott stresses. "Half the money won't be allocated for at least a year... We will

"For many families, the protections provided in this legislation could be the difference between finding a place to live and becoming homeless," Ellison concluded.

Original co-sponsors of the Ellison legislation include: U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA), Chair of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity of the Financial Services Committee, as well as U.S. Reps Michael Capuano (D-MA) and Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY).

have the opportunity to monitor the spending as it goes and try to take corrective action, but it has been extremely difficult to figure out how to direct funding to minority contractors."

Civil rights organizations are concerned and closely monitoring the situation as billions of dollars pass through communities that are predominately Black.

"They're concerned for a number of different reasons," says Tony Robinson, president of the D.C.-based Minority Business Enterprise Legal Defense and Education Fund, a national organization that is the legal advocacy arm of the minority business

Davis: Abolish U.S. prison system

By Charles Hallman
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA)

— The U.S. prison system, in its present state, must be abolished, says University of California-Santa Cruz Professor Emeritus Angela Davis.

Davis, a longtime prison reform advocate, spoke recently at St. Cloud State University's (SCSU) Ritsche Auditorium. She cited a Pew Research Center report on prisons released earlier this month:

"One in every 37 adults in this country is either behind bars or under the direct control of the corrections system — on parole or on probation. Here in Minnesota, it's one out of every 26 adults. In terms of the entire country, that means 7.3 million people are under the control of the correction system," Davis said. She sees prisons as "structural racism," believing that the current U.S. justice system is "based on revenge" and current prisoner rehabilitation methods are not working.

"We have so many people behind bars because of the racialization that enables criminalization," Davis noted. "We have huge communities criminalized largely because they are under surveillance — those that are subject to greater surveillance are those communities that produce more prisoners.

"And in communities that aren't subject to that type of surveillance, people can do all type of things without getting caught, like [Bernard] Madoff. He stole millions of dollars, and now all they are talking about is whether he will be able to keep his house."

community. "The policy mandate coming out of the Congress has been [insufficient]. To make that more robust, it would have required the congress to establish a predicate," he said, meaning a "compelling interest" for the government to mandate affirmative action.

"They would have to show that there's discrimination in the marketplace... It's incumbent upon the Congress to examine what those barriers are," Robinson said.

One of the intentions expressed by the Obama administration is that the money goes to communities that are hurting worse. Black unemployment is currently at



Angela Davis during her activist days. The prison reform advocate has called for a total overhaul of the U.S. system.

The U.S. prison population continues to rise, especially among Black men and women, continued Davis, adding that a "national discussion on what we need to do to solve this problem" is badly needed. "Have you heard [President] Obama or anybody in the government talk about this?" she asked the over-capacity crowd.

"I don't want to replace the prison system with something else," she pointed out, adding that "a purposeful commitment to fix the educational system" would be better.

Sponsored by several campus organizations, the professor, activist and author of five books, including her *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (Seven Stories Press, 2003), first came into national prominence in 1969. The FBI later named Davis to their 10 Most Wanted list in 1970 after a gun registered in her name was used in an attempted prison escape; she eventually was jailed for 16 months before finally being acquitted of all charges in 1972.

13.4 percent, nearly twice the rate of Whites.

However political observers say that once the money gets into the hands of state and local representatives, it will be incumbent upon Black businesses and contractors to strongly demand their fair share.

"If they do not fight for the distribution of these resources and demand that they get an equitable share of the resources in terms of these projects in terms of employment and Black businesses, it will not happen," says University of Maryland Political Scientist Ron Walters. "So, this is going to be a tremendous test of the viability of

"Freedom means not the abstract ability to do whatever one pleases or not, that is the opposite of being behind bars," she explained, "but as the access to resources and materials that make it possible to fashion lives, communities and futures. Rights always have been guaranteed for some, but it has been the result of struggle for others.

"For some, rights and liberties have been linked to the status quo. For others, it has been linked to radical, revolutionary challenges to the status quo."

As a featured speaker of the SCSU's Women's History Month activities in March, Davis pointed out, "Women's history always has been about struggles and movements for change that transformed collective lives," adding that women of color historically had a lot to do with feminism.

She supports President Obama, but not just because he is Black. "I actually was more interested in the politics of the person," Davis disclosed. "It's not about who

Black elected officials. The question is will they in their rolls exercise their accountability to their community. That's going to be the key issue." Kaine says he will meanwhile try to maximize participation where Virginia does it best.

The Department of Transportation, which has had the best record of minority business contracting, is expected to disseminate \$800 million on infrastructure projects," Kaine says. "That's when you can really move the numbers when you're doing a lot of big construction projects. And we're doing a lot of big projects, so that's going to be our goal."

you are, but what you are willing to do.

"If Hillary [Clinton] had had a better political position on certain issues, I would have supported her. If there have been a White male candidate who would have been more progressive and radical, I would have gone with him."

Davis warned the audience not to see the president as a one-man problem solver. "Obama is not a Messiah," she duly pointed out. "Racism has not ended because one Black man and one Black family [is] in the White House."

On the importance of community activism, Davis said, "Everybody who believes in justice and equality must participate in the Movement. What have kept me [involved] are the communities I am associated with. The strength I need comes from other people."

After her speech, Davis told the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*, "I don't see [problems with the prison system] as a separate issue — it is connected with everything else. So, I can't say that I want [President Obama] to address that more than seeing him address education or health, because they all intertwine."

SCSU President Earl Potter told the student audience as he introduced Davis that she is "an agent of change... an icon of activism." After her talk, he said, "She is a wonderful role model for our students."

Many stayed after Davis' speech and chatted with her, getting her autograph and posing for pictures. "I thought it was a great thing to have Angela Davis come out here," said business management junior Jerry Daye of Apple Valley.

Junior Davidlyn Moore hoped that Davis's visit would help in SCSU's continuing diversity issues and solutions. "She is an influential woman," said freshman Charlyn Logan of Davis.

Of her first visit to St. Cloud since 1980, Davis said, "I enjoyed spending time with students, faculty and community people." The professor suggested that the basic point of her speech was simple: "We should be excited about ourselves and what we are capable of doing. I think that is the real message."

Charles Hallman writes for the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*.