



8220 Second Avenue – Detroit, Michigan 48202 – (313) 871-2087 phone – (313) 871-7745 fax

Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony,
President
Donnell R. White,
Executive Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
8/6/15

MEDIA CONTACTS: WardHill Omni Media
LaToya Henry, (313) 447-6404 (c)
Tonie Bell (313) 802-1817 (c)

Official Press Statement:

50 Years Later Voting Is More Than A Privilege...It Is A Right!

DETROIT – Today marks the 50th anniversary since the signing of the Voting Rights Act by President Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1965. This Right came after a long, arduous struggle by every segment of American society that believed in freedom, justice, and equality. President Johnson said:

“A vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men.”

If this statement was true in that time, certainly it is also true in this time. America must not be allowed to turn back the clock of progress for any segment of its population. This is why on this morning, we celebrate yesterday’s decision in the state of Texas to push back and hopefully even strike down the repressive voter ID law which basically disenfranchised some 600,000 Texans because of inadequate identification. This move helps to push Texas back into the 21st century, as it sought efforts to rush back to the 19th. While we have made significant progress in acquiring the right to vote, there are those who are systematically working to eliminate those rights. As of December 2013, restrictive voting bills were introduced in more than half of the states. At least 92 restrictive bills were introduced in 33 states. Of those, 13 restricted bills are still pending in 5 states.

Voters in 33 states now face tougher rules and regulations in regards to the right to vote. Strict voter ID laws and elimination of early voting has created a new crisis in various states in our nation. Of the twelve states with the largest Hispanic population growth in the 2010 census,

nine have new restrictions in place. The Brennan Center for Justice found that of the eleven states with the highest African Americans in 2008, seven passed laws making it harder to vote. Likewise, of the 15 states that use to be monitored closely under the Voting Rights Act because of the history of racial discrimination in elections, nine passed new restrictions. There has been a great push to shut down early voting, particularly on Sundays in states where African American faith-based institutions organized successful “Take Your Soles to the Polls” campaigns. The “Take Your Soles to the Polls” campaign was first initiated here in the City of Detroit by the Detroit Branch NAACP. Just as early voting has become successful among minorities and lower income voters, it has also become a target. In 2011, eight states that saw increases in minority early voting, have sharply cut back on early voting hours and days: Florida, Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. It is also important to note that while the efforts are being made to restrictive voting, according to the Brennan Center for Justice [at least 237 expansive bills that would expand access to voting were introduced in 46 states.]

While the NAACP supports the appropriate identification of American citizens at the polls, which is nothing new, restrictions made requiring certain types of state photo ID cards or government issued ID’s, do more harm than they do good. Since 2011, nine states have passed strict, new ID laws: Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Voting Rights Act, we are greatly concerned about the efforts to eliminate the right to vote for certain Americans. The number and complexities of new voting restrictions across the country are indeed staggering. Yale Law Professor Heather Gerken said:

“It is a death by a thousand cuts strategy.”

We are here today to stand up for the right to vote. We have come too far to be turned back now. We are here because every day brings a new challenge to the right to vote. This is more than just a celebration. We are here to proclaim our support for a call to action to protect, to defend and to expand the right to vote.

The Detroit Branch NAACP is the largest branch in the Association. For more information please call (313) 871-2087

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