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FOCUS

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POLITICAL TRENDLETTER®

Perspective

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Compromise on Voter Registration Reform

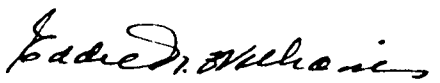
Last year, legislation that would put millions of new voters on the nation's voter rolls passed in the U.S. House of Representatives by a bipartisan majority of 289 to 132. A stronger registration reform measure failed to reach the Senate floor before that body adjourned. Commonly called the "motor voter" bills, the legislation would allow citizens to register to vote at motor vehicle licensing bureaus, other government agencies and by mail. While the legislation is complex and has many legal ramifications, one reason it did not pass in the Senate was the widespread perception that some key members of the civil rights community were uncomfortable with the compromises necessary for passage. There were indeed unresolved questions about the impact of the bill on the Voting Rights Act and fears that its provisions would not adequately protect black and low–income voters from being "purged" from the rolls.

Strong support for "motor voter" legislation has carried over into the 102nd Congress. However, when a voter registration reform bill (S. 250) was introduced in the Senate in January, it became clear that many of the issues raised last year remain unresolved. Because registration reform is so vital to the black electorate, especially during a time of declining registration rates, the root concerns deserve serious attention in order to reach a consensus.

First, the legislation should be clearly drafted so it cannot be interpreted as superceding or in any way limiting the provisions of the Voting Rights Act as amended in 1982. Without such clarity, the motor voter bill could work to the disadvantage of minorities. For example, if a statistical review found that a disproportionate number of blacks had not been registered through any of the provisions of the bill, it could be argued that the *effect* of the motor voter bill, on its face, had been to dilute the voting strength of minorities, in violation of the Voting Rights Act. In other words, judges hostile to the broad reach of the Voting Rights Act as amended could use the motor voter bill as a means of weakening an application of the Voting Rights Act to a discriminatory voter purge.

Another concern is that the bill's language on removing or "purging" names from registration lists does not go far enough to protect voters who are removed improperly from the rolls. There is a fear that inconsistent mail delivery of purge notices to blacks by officials could result in a dramatic reduction of the number of registrants in black neighborhoods. Because black and other minority precincts in New Jersey, New York, Louisiana, Michigan, and other states have been subject to discriminatory purges in the recent past, these fears are not without foundation. Voters should be guaranteed proper notice before they are removed from voter lists, but in the event of an error or inadequate notice, they should be able to vote on election day. That is, they should not have to suffer through a lengthy or intimidating procedure at the polls to confirm their current address, since such procedures could lead to abuses or long lines that would discourage participation.

These unresolved issues are serious but not insurmountable. Reform legislation is urgently needed—it is imperative that all parties concerned come together in a spirit of goodwill to fashion a bill that the Congress will pass and the President cannot successfully veto. ■



PRESIDENT

FOCUS

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Louis Sullivan's Health Mission to Africa

On February 5, the Secretary of HHS Conducted a Briefing at the Joint Center on His Visit to Africa and the State of Health Care There

The Mission. In his remarks at the World Summit for Children held under the auspices of UNICEF in New York last September, President Bush called upon Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis W. Sullivan and Dr. Ronald W. Roskens, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S.A.I.D.), to lead a fact finding mission to Africa to determine "what else America and the world can do to advance child survival across that continent."

During their two-week mission in January, Sullivan and Roskens, accompanied by 20 other U.S. experts and government officials, met with government leaders and health professionals in the Ivory Coast, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Assessing Africa's child health problems, the delegates were struck by the devastating impact of the AIDS epidemic and of malnutrition, malaria, and dehydration, particularly on mothers and children. Their report to the President identified areas where cooperation between the U.S. and African institutions can be expanded and the quality of U.S. assistance can be improved.

Secretary Sullivan. An honors graduate from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Louis Sullivan later earned a medical degree from Boston University, also with honors. Over his more than 30 years of service to the healing science, he has not only practiced medicine but has also been a professor of medicine and made major contributions as a researcher in the field of hematology. In 1975, Sullivan became the founding dean and director of the two-year Medical Education Program at Morehouse College. Under his guidance, that program became the Morehouse Medical School, a fully accredited institution which awarded M.D. degrees to its first 16 graduates in May, 1985. In 1982, Sullivan joined then-vice president George Bush's 12-member delegation to seven African countries.

On March 1, 1989, Sullivan was sworn in as secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), the agency responsible for the major health, welfare, food and drug safety, medical research, and income security programs of the federal government. Created in 1980 from the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, HHS has 114,000 employees and is responsible for approximately 250 separate programs. The HHS budget, projected at $625 billion for FY92, is larger than that of any other federal agency and makes up more than 36 percent of the federal budget overall. Following are Secretary Sullivan's remarks.

Introduction. The African continent is a complex mosaic of 500 million people with different languages, cultures, and religions. It is also a continent with massive problems and enormous opportunities. Ours was the most senior U.S. governmental delegation ever to visit some of the countries—certainly in Uganda and Malawi, and also in South Africa except for a brief visit of Secretary of State James A. Baker during the Namibian independence celebration last year.

The delegation found the movement toward democratic government in Africa to be most impressive. Senegal has experienced a peaceful succession of leadership in its multiparty civilian political system. The Ivory Coast had presidential elections last fall. And elections in Nigeria are in the planning stage. In Uganda, democratization has been temporarily set back as elections have been postponed. This has been cause for concern in that country but hopefully the process will get back on track soon.

The economies in these countries are depressed because they are mostly commodity-based. For example, Ivory Coast's chief products are coffee and cocoa, for which world prices have been greatly depressed. The same is true of the other countries we visited. If economic development in Africa is to move forward, large investments from the private sector are needed. In turn, the advance of stable democratic government in African countries is essential if they are to attract investment.

Child Killers. In the area of health, Africa has the highest rate of deaths among infants and children under the age of five in the world. About a million African children a year die from infant diarrhea. Malaria is also a major killer: in Malawi, it is the number one cause of death among children under age five, and we are now seeing drug-resistant malarial strains in that country. But other diseases are also significant causes of death among African children, including encephalitis, pneumonia, whooping cough, polio, and measles. Progress is being made against childhood diseases in countries like Nigeria, which has immunized over 60 percent of its children. In some communities, the immunization rate is as high as 90 percent, according to the Nigerian minister of health. That's certainly impressive compared to where they were five years ago when the rate was less than 30 percent. (The U.S. rate is around 95 percent, though in some inner-city neighborhoods it is as low as 80-85 percent.)

Many African countries have an insufficient number of trained health professionals. My staff will be following up with African physicians and other health professionals to help them develop stronger primary medical care networks. Through our public health service and the Centers

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HHS

(Continued from page 3)

for Disease Control (CDC), we will help these countries expand their epidemiological capabilities and train their health personnel.

There are other things that we are already doing. The CDC is assisting the Ivory Coast in tracking the spread of the AIDS virus and helping to develop public educational and prevention programs. In Zaire, a World Health Organization AIDS project funded by the U.S. is helping that country build its epidemiological capabilities. Zaire has a medical school that was funded through a U.S.A.I.D. contract with the Tulane University School of Public Health. Senegal and the Ivory Coast are also considering the development of schools of public health.

In Malawi, a country of nine million people, there are 150 physicians. But of that total, 120 are foreign nationals, most of them from Germany and the Netherlands and under contract in Malawi. Only 30 Malawian physicians are in the whole country. That country is opening a medical school in September because it has determined that for a country its size, the establishment of such an institution is necessary to meet the health care needs of its population. There are a number of Malawian health professionals in England, Germany, and here in the U.S., where they've gone to train and stayed. Part of the reason they don't return home is the frustration of being trained for the kind of medical system we have here and then going back and not being able to practice medicine in that way.

The Scourge of AIDS. With the kinds of health problems I've just indicated, Africa was already in a bad way before the AIDS virus came along. The impact of AIDS varies tremendously from one country to the next. For example, in Nigeria they have seen very few AIDS patients thus far. At the same time, their testing for the virus shows that in several population groups, primarily in urban areas, the virus infects around four to five percent of the population. By comparison, one person in 200 in the U.S. is infected with the virus. We estimate that in the U.S. we have about a million people infected with the virus, whereas in Africa there are approximately five million infected overall.

In Zimbabwe, the incidence of the virus is relatively low. The same was true of the Ivory Coast, which five years ago had virtually no AIDS patients. Now the Ivory Coast is seeing an infection rate of around 12 percent of the population and that rate is escalating very rapidly. We project that there, like here in the U.S., they are going to see a lot more cases in the next two to five years. That's a major problem for open societies like the Ivory Coast where people move in and out much more easily than in most countries in Africa.

The country where AIDS has hit with full force is Uganda. There, some 23 percent of the population has tested positive for the human immunodeficiency virus (the AIDS causing virus) and it is spreading rapidly. Some villages are made up of only children and old people; practically all of the people between the ages of 20 and 50 are dead—they've been wiped out by the AIDS virus. The country's president, Yowei Museveni, a Muslim who holds very strong religious beliefs, until recently opposed the use of condoms or condom distribution because of his concern over promoting sexual promiscuity. The AIDS problem has been so severe that President Museveni has now become very public and vocal about urging Ugandans to abstain from promiscuous sex or to use a condom if they engage in sex outside of marriage. His wife has become involved in developing plans to care for the increasing number of orphans. There are already 200,000 orphans in the country, largely as a result of the ravages of the AIDS virus, and the number is growing.

The health care infrastructure in that country is indeed quite weak. Makerere University was a fine institution that was internationally recognized and renowned, with an outstanding medical school where a number of medical discoveries had been made. Today its buildings are still riddled with bullet holes—scars left by attacks from former president Idi Amin's soldiers. The library hasn't had a new book in years. While it was heart-wrenching to witness this devastation, I was encouraged by the fact that Ugandans are returning to rebuild the university as well as other parts of the infrastructure.

Based upon my visit, I feel that Africa has tremendous problems which are going to be around for a significant time. Yet there are also great opportunities for the United States to be of assistance both from a humanitarian perspective as well as from the perspective of self-interest. The commodities that these countries produce, as well as their value as potential markets, are significant.

Obviously, as each African country gets on its feet economically, the potential for trading partnerships increases. But it's not going to be easy. It will take time and investment from both public and private sectors. Even though the HHS portfolio is almost exclusively a domestic one, the Department will conduct cooperative efforts with U.S.A.I.D., our primary funding agency for international assistance, to provide health assistance to Africa.

A Time for Advocacy. Finally, black Americans have a responsibility as well as an opportunity to see that the level of interest and support for Africa increases. American international health assistance is only a shadow of what it should be. So far as Africa is concerned, black Americans have not been strong advocates. It is certainly in keeping with our society that when Tip O'Neill is concerned about issues in Ireland, that's appropriate. It's also alright for Ed Derwinski (the secretary for Veteran's Affairs), my colleague in the cabinet, to visit Poland and urge the U.S. to be more helpful there.

The tendency that we have in the U.S. to be less involved in Africa than in European nations needs to be reassessed, both from a humanitarian perspective as well as from a standpoint of promoting democracy. In this country, where some 12 percent of our population traces its lineage back to Africa, we are challenged to educate the public, the Congress, and the President about Africa so that the problems and opportunities offered by that continent are put on the table for policy discussion and action. ■

POLITICAL TRENDLETTER®

Inside This Issue:

- **Congress reconsiders parental and medical leave legislation.**
- **Bush appoints black scientist to head National Science Foundation.**
- **Joint Center survey reveals that the term "black" is preferred.**
- **Across the Nation: Bettye Davis is elected to the Alaska House; Doris Ward is president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors; Richard Daley retains mayor's post in Chicago; and Kurt Schmoke gears up for re-election in Baltimore.**

Congress Tries Again for Parental and Medical Leave Bill

Labor and women's organizations are prepared to go head-to-head once more this year against powerful business lobbies to battle for the Family and Medical Leave Act (H.R. 2. and S. 5), which would require businesses to allow their employees 12 weeks of unpaid leave in certain cases involving a birth, an adoption, or a serious illness. Last year, a similar bill was approved by both houses of Congress, but it failed to win the President's approval. On May 10 the House had passed that bill 237 to 187 and on June 14 the Senate had approved it by voice vote. But saying he "strongly objected to the federal government mandating leave policies for America's employers and work force," the President vetoed the legislation two weeks later. The House fell 58 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to override his veto.

This year's bill, which was again introduced by Sen. CHRISTOPHER DODD (D- Conn.) and Rep. WILLIAM CLAY (D-Mo.), differs little from last year's measure. The bill mandates that employers must allow their employees unpaid parental leave to care for a newborn infant, a newly adopted child, or a sick child. It also requires unpaid medical leave for an employee who needs to care for a seriously ill spouse, parent, or in-law. Businesses with fewer than 50 employees would be exempt from these requirements. Any full-time or part time employee who has worked at least one thousand hours would be eligible for the leave benefits, and the employer must guarantee the employee's job security and maintain his or her health insurance. The employee would be required to give one month's notice prior to taking the leave and prior to returning to the job. The bill has bipartisan support and 167 co-sponsors.

Lobbying for the bill is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Coalition, a group of 160 organizations representing womens', labor, religious, and senior citizens' groups. Coalition members include the American Association of Retired Persons, the AFL-CIO, Church Women United, the National Organization for Women, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. The coalition was originally organized five years ago by the Washington, D.C. -based Women's Legal Defense Fund to lobby for passage of the first parental and medical leave bill, introduced by Rep. **PATRICIA SCHROEDER** (D-Colo.). In addition to grassroots lobbying, the coalition has provided Congress with analyses of the bill's impact and with position papers.

Opponents argue that the bill would burden businesses because employers would not only have to maintain jobs for workers on leave but also hire and train temporary employees during the interim. The leading detractors of the bill include the United States Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), and the Concerned Alliance of Responsible Employers (CARE), an ad hoc group of 170 business organizations. MARY TAVENNER of CARE says, "We don't oppose the benefit, we oppose mandated leave. When you start mandating a benefit, you hurt an employer's ability to run his shop."

CAROLYN MILLER of NFIB says the business community would prefer that decisions on employee benefits

be determined between employer and employee. Miller says, "To impose the mandate is to harm the businesses' flexibility and productivity. It's anti-business and anti-employee."

Nevertheless, according to **NICOLE GUERON** of the Women's Legal Defense Fund, the FMLA Coalition is optimistic about approval of the bill this year. Gueron says business support is growing and leaders like **LAWRENCE PERLMAN**, CEO of Control Data, a Fortune 500 company, have come out in support of the bill. Supporters are hoping that newly appointed Labor Secretary **LYNN MARTIN**, who voted for the bill last year as a Republican congresswoman from Illinois, will lobby the White House. Last year, coalition members divided their energies between the leave bill, the child care bill, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Gueron says since the child care bill and the ADA were approved, the leave bill can now benefit from the coalition's full attention.

JANE O'GRADY of the AFL-CIO says, "The bill is a labor benefit that all workers should enjoy. As more members of the family become a part of the American workforce, it would seem that employers would want to make some accommodations." She adds, "There is a need for this type of employee benefit, many businesses already have it, and it [the bill] is not an overwhelming burden on business." The full House may consider the bill before mid-April.

Black Physicist Takes the Helm at National Science Foundation

In February the U.S. Senate confirmed President Bush's nomination of black physicist WALTER E. MASSEY to head the National Science Foundation (NSF) in Washington, D.C. Considered by many to be one the nation's top research scientists, Massey becomes the second black person to direct the 41-year-old independent federal agency, which is charged with strengthening education and research in science and engineering at all levels. The foundation's first black director was JOHN B. SLAUGHTER, who served from 1980 to 1982. Slaughter is now president of Occidental College in Los Angeles, California.

Massey, a 52-year-old native of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, has been vice president for research at The University of Chicago and director of the Argonne National Laboratory. He has also served as professor of physics at the University of Illinois and Brown University. A graduate of Morehouse College, Massey received an M.S. and Ph.D. in physics from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. He has been a member of the National Science Board, the board of directors of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and President Bush's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology.

In his confirmation testimony before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, Massey stated that the United States must work to reclaim its position as a world leader in scientific research and development. He noted that in the past decade the governments of Japan and Germany have dedicated proportionally almost twice the funding to non-defense research and development as has the United States. Massey believes this trend threatens our nation's technological and economic competitiveness abroad. "The nation's ability to compete in the international marketplace, is based on important advances in science and engineering and the ability to introduce them into the market quickly, efficiently, and creatively," he says.

According to Massey, the United States faces two basic challenges: to "improve the quality of science and engineering education at all levels, and increase the number of people knowledgeable about science and engineering." During the last 10 years, he notes, the number of Americans receiving Ph.D.s in science and engineering has declined, and the proportion obtained by minorities is woefully inadequate. "Only eight percent of the bachelor's degrees and four percent of the Ph.D.s in science and engineering are awarded to blacks and Hispanics, while the numbers of high school and college-aged women interested in scientific and engineering fields are only a fraction of those of their male counterparts," he notes. Massey hopes to strengthen NSF initiatives to interest undergraduate and precollege students, including minorities, in pursuing the sciences. One such initiative is the Alliance for Minority Participation (AMP), a year-old program to which the NSF, colleges and universities, and the private sector have contributed in order to attract and retain minorities in bachelor's and advanced degree programs in science and engineering.

Massey does not plan to impose any sweeping changes in the administration or direction of NSF. "We're

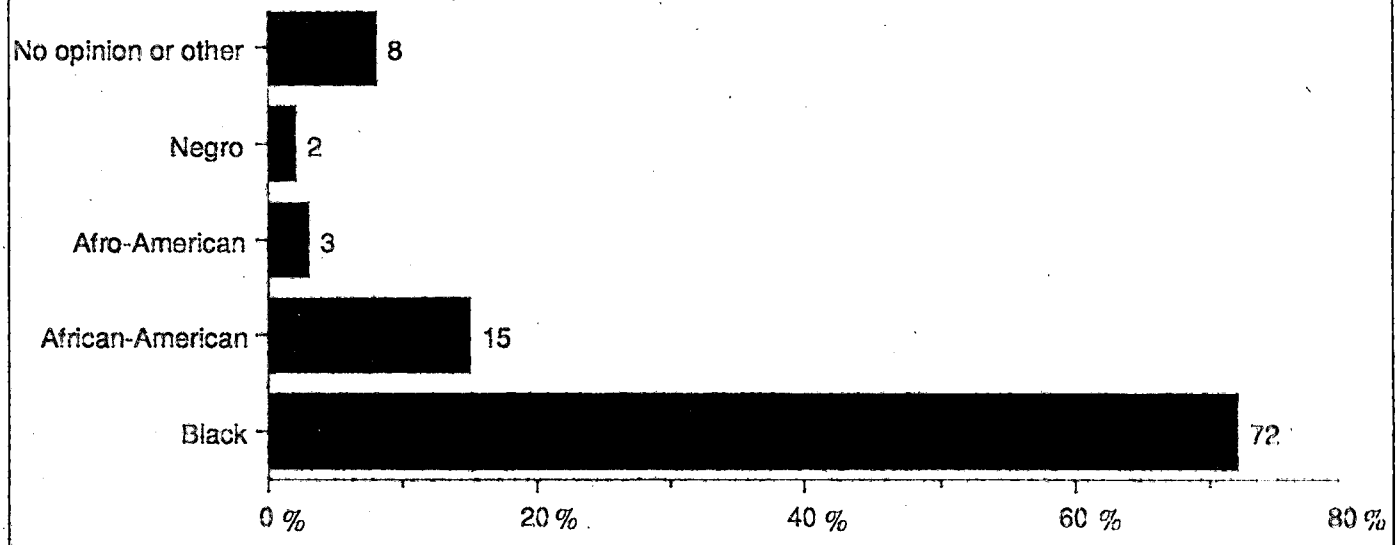
headed in the right direction," he says. His first priority is to get Congress to approve the President's budget proposal for the foundation. The budget calls for a 17.5 percent increase over last year's funding, bringing the total to $2.72 billion for fiscal year 1992. NSF, which currently has a budget of $2.2 billion, awards grants to academic research institutions, private research firms, industrial labs, and major research facilities and centers.

Survey Reveals Preference for the Term "Black"

According to the Joint Center's annual nationwide survey, black Americans prefer to use the term "black" rather than the term "African-American" to describe themselves. Of the 759 black persons randomly sampled, 72 percent preferred the term "black," 15 percent "African American," three percent "Afro-American," and two percent "Negro." Eight percent had no opinion or liked other terms.

The poll was conducted nationwide by telephone between August 31 and October 4, and had a sampling error of plus or minus three percentage points. The survey found some regional differences: In the East, the term "black" was preferred by 72 percent, in the Midwest by 76 percent, in the South by 85 percent, and in the West by 78 percent. The term "African-American" was more popular among those with a college education than those who had not gone beyond high school; the former group preferred the term by a margin of 20 percent to 15 percent. It was least favored by older respondents: 17 percent of those over age 50 preferred "African-American," compared with 19 percent of those age 30 to 49 and 28 percent of those age 18 to 29.

Percentage of Survey Respondents Preferring Selected Group Terms



Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Survey, 1990.

Join Us at Our Annual Dinner

We are pleased to invite you to our 14th annual dinner on Tuesday, April 9, 1991. The dinner, saluting black women in politics, will be held at the Washington Hilton Hotel here in the nation's capital. Our keynote speaker will be the mayor of the District of Columbia, Sharon Pratt Dixon. Robert E. Allen, chairman and CEO of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, is this year's national dinner chairman. The dinner, which is the Joint Center's only fundraising event, provides significant support for our research and outreach programs. This year's prices for 10-seat tables are: Chairman's Circle, $10,000; Sponsors', $5,000; Patrons', $3,000. Individual tickets are also available for $300 each. For reservations or further information please call Alfreda Edwards at (202) 626-3555.

ACROSS THE NATION

ALASKA: In November, Democrat BETTYE J. DAVIS became the first black woman elected to the Alaska state legislature. She now represents District 14B, which includes the state's largest city, Anchorage. A retired social worker and former member of the Anchorage Board of Education, Davis is also the first Democrat to represent the majority Republican district. The seat was held by black Republican **WALT FURNACE**, who vacated it last year to run, unsuccessfully, for the state senate. Unopposed in the August primary, Davis beat white Republican **CHUCK DICKEY** in the general election by one percentage point.

A native of Louisiana, Davis came to the Last Frontier State 18 years ago and has been active in the NAACP, the Women's Political Caucus, and the National Alliance of Black School Educators. In the Alaska House of Representatives, she has been assigned as chair of the Children's Caucus and vice chair of the Health, Education and Social Services Committee. She also serves on the Community and Regional Affairs Committee and the Special Committee on International Trade and Tourism.

The first black member of Alaska's legislature was **BLANCHE PRESTON McSMITH**, a Democrat, who was appointed to fill a vacancy in 1959 and served for one term.

CALIFORNIA: In January, San Franciscan DORIS M. WARD was sworn in as the first black president of the city's 11 member board of supervisors. A Democrat, Ward is an 11 year veteran of the board, which currently has one other black member, WILLIE KENNEDY.

During her tenure on the board, Ward has served on several committees, including Health, Civil Service, Finance, and Land Use. She currently chairs the Economic and Social Policy committees. Known for her expertise on land use, housing, and minority contracting, she has worked to retain affordable and low-income housing and is currently sponsoring the San Francisco Assisted Housing Preservation Ordinance. **Ward has sponsored legislation to bring cable television and telecommunications franchising to the city. She has cosponsored legislation to improve city contract opportunities for blacks and women and for rallying board support for legislation requiring the maintenance of statistics on hate crimes.**

ILLINOIS: After a campaign described as low-key, uneventful, and boring by members of the press, Chicago Mayor RICHARD M. DALEY glided to victory in the February 26 Democratic mayoral primary, claiming 63 percent of the vote. The 48-year old son of former mayor and Democratic Party machine boss RICHARD J. DALEY beat three opponents—black Cook County commissioner DANNY DAVIS, former mayor JANE BYRNE, and LYNDON LAROUCHE follower SHELIA JONES. Daley's victory almost assures him election on April 2 to his first full, four-year term as mayor. His current term began in April 1989 when he was elected to fill out the two years remaining to the late Mayor HAROLD WASHINGTON, who died in November 1987, seven months into his second term. Washington was the city's first black mayor. Black Democratic alderman EUGENE SAWYER was elected interim mayor by the board of aldermen and he served from Washington's death to Daley's election.

Davis and Byrne, who were considered Daley's strongest opponents, received 30 percent and six percent of the vote, respectively. Pundits considered Byrne's bid an act of vengeance against Daley, whose 1983 mayoral campaign to gain her seat divided the white vote. That division, combined with Byrne's alienation of the black community and tremendous black support for Harold Washington, had led to Washington's victory.

Davis was an alderman for 11 years before being elected to the County Board of Commissioners in November. In December, a group of black political leaders, led by Democratic Congressman **GUS SAVAGE**, selected Davis as the consensus black candidate to challenge Daley. However, Daley received endorsements from prominent figures in the black community, including Rev. **CLAY EVANS**, the pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church, one of the city's largest and oldest black churches. Daley was also supported by some black business leaders, including **ALVIN BOUTTE**, board chairman of Independence Bank, and **CERILLO McSWEEN**, owner of a chain of McDonald's restaurants. McSween held a $200-a-plate breakfast in Daley's honor. These endorsements and Davis's lack of campaign and advertising funds made it difficult for him to consolidate support among black voters.

MELODY SPANN, news director at Chicago's WVON radio station, says that although Davis is well regarded among blacks, he is not charismatic. Historically, she says, black Chicagoans do not vote in great numbers, and the 1983 momentum built around Washington was "the exception, not the rule." Says Spann, "Daley will have to really do something terrible or offend the black community before blacks will come out in droves to defeat him or to elect another black mayor."

Daley will face two opponents in the April general election, both long shots: Republican city police sergeant **GEORGE GOTTLIEB** and retired federal judge and former Democrat **R. EUGENE PINCHAM**. Pincham is the candidate of the city's black alternative third party, the Harold Washington Party. (See January 1991 Focus, "Windy City's Controversial Third Party.")

Next Round for Voter Registration Reform

After Legislation Designed to Expand Voter Rolls Failed Last Year, a New Proposal Is Being Debated On and Off Capitol Hill

by Marsha Nye Adler

During last November's general election, the *New York Times* surveyed adults nationwide to create a profile of nonvoters. The *Times* found nothing new: as in the past, today's nonvoters are younger than their voting counterparts, more mobile, less likely to have attended college, and more apt to have incomes under $30,000. They do not have strong party feelings, and are fairly equally divided in their leanings toward Republican and Democratic candidates. Yet while the nonvoters' profile hasn't changed, their numbers have grown steadily over the past 30 years. They represented only about 36 percent of the eligible population in 1990, so that for every person who cast a ballot that year, two others passed up their voting right.

Legislation introduced in Congress last year to spur voter participation passed the House by a convincing margin, though it failed adoption by the Senate. This year, a similar bill, S. 250, has been put forward with bipartisan sponsorship in the Senate. Like its 101st Congress predecessor, S. 250 has detractors who fear fraud, the cost of reform, and infringement of states rights. Some within the civil rights community are wary that the bill would make it too easy for states to "purge" citizens from voter rolls. Nevertheless, political observers give this bill a better chance of passage than last year's proposal.

Turned Off or Turned Away?

The Senate bill deserves passage because, for all the attention paid to the psyche of the nonvoter, this bill addresses a simple and fixable problem directly linked to low participation: the difficulty of registering to vote. In survey after survey, the reason cited by most nonvoters for not going to the polls is that they were not registered. Seventy million Americans fit into that category, more than a third of the eligible pool.

There is strong, growing evidence that a large number of nonvoters are not just "turned off" but, rather, are being discouraged from voting. The percentage of registered people who actually vote is high—86 percent in 1988. If the participation of registered voters is so high, registration itself is clearly the key to raising turnout. In many areas, voter registration systems have changed little over the last century, growing increasingly out of sync with citizens' lives. In half the states, voters must register in person at designated sites, at appointed—and sometimes very limited—hours and days, and early, sometimes 30 days before an election. Often sites are open only when citizens must be somewhere else, generally at work or college some distance away. Many sites are hard to get to and hard to find. Registering to vote is, therefore, all too easy to put off or forget about entirely.

In addition, for the vast majority of citizens registering once is not enough. Voters who move must re-register. In today's transient society that affects more and more people, particularly those who are younger and poorer. Currently, all but eight states automatically cancel registration for failure to vote. All but six of the remaining 42 states purge voters from the rolls for failure to vote within a period of four years or less. Thus, even if an individual is still eligible and lives at the same address, he or she can be removed from the rolls. Almost half the states that purge fail to provide nonvoters with the forms they need to re-register, and many states do not notify people that they have been dropped from the list. These people may only learn of their status when they arrive to cast a ballot on election day, too late to re-register and participate.

The Key to Increased Turnout

As Minnesota, Nevada, and the District of Columbia are learning, the problem of low voter registration can be remedied through a series of simple, low-cost reforms. There is ample evidence that such measures as mail-in agency-based registration and election-day registration are working. In states that have introduced these changes both registration and turnout have improved.

By far the most effective technique for increasing voter registration is agency based. The most widespread agency-based method is the "motor voter" system, administered by motor vehicle departments. Motor voter programs add a response section on either the drivers license application form or the computerized questionnaire to allow the applicant to register to vote. In the most effective of these programs, such as those in Minnesota and the District of Columbia, agency staff, help applicants fill out the information.

The District of Columbia set a new turnout record in the

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1990 mid-term election, surpassing the presidential election turnout of 1988, after raising voter registration by 26 percent in the four years since 1986. More than 75 percent of the new registrations came from the District's newly implemented motor voter program. Emmett Fremaux, the director of Washington's elections board, says, "the fact that a new record has been set in a non-presidential year indicates that a fundamental increase in voter registration has occurred in the District."

Four states that have used similar means have increased their turnout dramatically. Nevada, which in 1986 ranked near the bottom in participation, registered 54,000 new voters in 1990 through its newly instituted motor voter program. It raised turnout by two percent in what would ordinarily have been expected to be a classic low-turnout election, one with no statewide races. North Carolina registered 84,000 voters in 1990, raising turnout from 1986 by 20 percent. In Minnesota the combination of election-day, motor voter, agency-based, and mail-in registration has assured nearly 90 percent registration and an increase in turnout from 1986 of 25 percent. Another election-day registration state, Maine, raised its turnout between 1986 and the 1990 election by 13 percent after adding a motor voter program of its own.

Making Reforms Universal

It is on these successful state programs that congressional legislation has been modeled. In February, 1990, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 289 to 132 to require states to institute motor voter, agency-based, and mail-in registration. The bill also required a guarantee that the purging of voter rolls would be nondiscriminatory. The Senate considered its version of the legislation this past September, but end-of-Congress maneuvering blocked a floor vote. On January 23, 1991, Senators Wendell Ford (D-Ky.) and Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.) introduced S. 250, the National Voter Registration Act, and pledged to move the bill in the first months of the session. A House bill, similar to the one the House passed last year, is expected to be introduced in late March or early April.

One key provision of the Senate bill is that voter registration would become automatic for people applying for a drivers license or a photo I.D. card at state motor vehicle departments. While 13 states currently have some motor voter program, only the federal legislation offers this feature of automatic registration. The Senate bill also requires states to make registration forms widely available and for government employees to provide assistance in completing the forms. The bill includes agency-based registration at public schools, libraries, and vocational rehabilitation centers, as well as at government offices such as welfare and unemployment agencies. Mail registration, now available in half the states, would be expanded to all of them. Mail-in forms must be made available for public and private sector distribution, and states may be required to adopt a uniform federal application form. Registrants must not be required to notarize their applications, and strong penalties would be levied for harassment and fraud. The bill provides for recovery of attorneys' fees and costs.

Finally, S. 250 prohibits purging names from voter rolls because of nonvoting. Voters could only be removed from the rolls if they had died, moved, or had become ineligible for other reasons. The measure allows for cleaning of voter lists only when conducted in a uniform and non-discriminatory manner, and prohibits list cleaning within 60 days of a federal election. Both political parties have already voiced full support for this 60-day provision.

There remain some questions about the method of notifying voters who appear to have moved, and about how to protect the rights of voters who have inadvertently been removed from the rolls. Congressional leaders are working toward a consensus on the most effective registration mechanism with the greatest protections for voters.

Fear of Fraud

Perhaps the most potent argument opponents have raised has been that opening the system would create new opportunities for election fraud. Attacking reforms like election-day registration, for example, anti-immigration groups have raised the specter of thousands of unqualified voters descending on the polls and changing the outcome of elections. Yet in the three states that have instituted election day sign-up—Minnesota, Maine, and Wisconsin—there has been no rise in voter fraud. Studies of states that have instituted other reforms included in the federal bills show no increase in fraud by voters or election officials. Agency-based registration is also the most fraud-proof because registering agencies already require extensive documentation for licenses and benefits.

Election officials have been uneasy about the cost of reforms, but in the states that have them, new programs are inexpensive to administer. With statewide computerization of offices, the cost is minimal. Washington State estimates that registering voters through its fully computerized system will cost just 50 cents for each new registrant.

Even in jurisdictions such as Minnesota, Nevada, Colorado, and the District of Columbia, which do not use computerized systems in their highly effective motor voter programs, the cost is similarly low. Minnesota estimates that it spends 35 cents for each transaction. The District of Columbia's estimated cost is just three cents per voter. Congressional sponsors of reform legislation are considering ways to defray the cost of the federal program through grants and postal rate savings.

Opponents of federally mandated voter registration reform often fall back on the argument that elections and registration are traditionally state functions on which Congress should not legislate. Through the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and other legislation, however, Congress has been given the right to regulate in areas where there is a clear

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Keeping History as Important as Making It

Black Officials Must Take Responsibility for Contributing to American Political History by Preserving Their Papers and Political Memorabilia

by Auriel Pilgrim

Joseph Hayne Rainey, elected in 1870 from South Carolina, was the first black person to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. But although he served four full terms in Congress, little is known about this American political pioneer. There are no firsthand accounts of how he entered politics, became affiliated with the Republican Party, or was selected to run for office. Of his personal correspondence, only one letter has been passed down. No other original documents have survived. The same is generally true of the 22 other black members of Congress who served during the late 19th century. Moreover, during that period almost no institutions served as repositories for such materials.

Primary source documentation of the achievements of other black Americans who have played important political roles is similarly incomplete. P. J. Gibbs, author of *Black Collectibles Sold in America*, notes that "items such as pamphlets about black socialists in the 1930s and 1940s or black candidates for local, state, and national offices prior to the 1950s and 1960s are very scarce. Most of the political items come from the 1960s, which marked a time of political upheaval in the United States for blacks and whites. Although these items are of recent vintage, they are extremely scarce and expensive. . . ."

By documenting their own march through the political process, officials can play a vital role in preserving America's black political heritage. But too often, the position papers, speeches, buttons, posters, bumper stickers, and other campaign accouterments of black candidates and officials are scattered and lost. The same fate has attended their official papers recording their subsequent conduct and accomplishments in office. It is important that they keep records of everything from the outset of their careers, both as markers for those who follow them in public service and to preserve the authenticity of the historical record.

Safeguarding Primary Source Material

History cannot be left solely to historians, political scientists, and journalists. The interpretations found in their works, while essential, will always reflect the bias of the author. The only objective check on those biases must come from reference to the original documents of political events, including official papers. Correspondence, scrapbooks, awards, press releases, inaugural memorabilia, appointment calendars, planning papers, diaries, minutes from important meetings, and copies of legal and financial documents are invaluable. They must be saved and archived. Likewise, photographs and audio and video tapes of meetings and other events must be saved. To help achieve this end, officials should label—with dates, full names, and titles—all their materials. If there is some question as to an item's historical value, it is best to keep the item and leave the decision to the archivists or librarians who will be ultimately responsible for preserving the collection. (Of course, restrictions can be placed on the use of sensitive material.) The more information a collection provides, the more valuable the collection is.

Preserving or archiving documents is just as important as collecting them. Many sources may be consulted for assistance: local universities and public librarians, state archivists, and national repositories such as the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, all in Washington, D.C., or the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University in New Orleans. The deciding factors in choosing where to send materials should be an institution's commitment to preserving materials and to making them available to researchers.

Stronger efforts to collect and preserve black political documents are especially needed at the city, state, and regional levels. The weekly batch of news articles received at the Joint Center indicates that black political figures are making significant breakthroughs at these levels. November 1990 saw several historic electoral victories, including the election of the first black Republican to statewide office in Oklahoma, J.C. Watts, now the state's corporation commissioner; the first black woman state senator in Tennessee's history, Thelma Harper; and the first black elected to the statewide office of Clerk of Indiana's supreme court and court of appeals, Dwayne M. Brown. In January of this year, Daniel Blue became North Carolina's first black house speaker. He was sworn into his new office by Judge Henry E. Frye, North Carolina's first black state supreme court justice.

The responsibility for ensuring that tomorrow's history books accurately recount today's political events starts with black public officials themselves. They can play an important part in the preservation of black history by supporting public funding of institutions that house black collections in their local communities; by collecting documentation of their own experiences in office; and by contributing to biographies and authoring autobiographical works. Responsibly serving the people must be viewed as including the duty to preserve black history itself. ■

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national interest, and especially where there is a differential impact on groups within the population, particularly on minorities. This right obviously applies in the case of voter registration, and presents the most compelling argument of all for federally mandated reform.

Current practices in most states have the effect of discriminating against certain groups of potential voters—those who move often, students, disabled and elderly people—by requiring them to register in person at offices with restricted hours. Even states with mail registration often add requirements, such as notarizing the application, that further complicate the process.

Motor voter, agency-based, or mail-in registration systems would allow constant updating of registration and residence, keeping a much larger number of voters on the rolls. Coupled with reciprocity among political jurisdictions, these systems could virtually eliminate the problem of voters' being erroneously dropped from the rolls. More importantly, they could significantly cut the cost of keeping voter lists current.

The Fight for Congressional Approval

The prospects for Senate passage of S. 250 seem brighter this year than last. In the 101st Congress, the voter registration reform bill had no Republican cosponsors and meager Republican support in the Senate. But the current bill is cosponsored by Republican Senators Mark Hatfield and David Durenberger of Minnesota and they are expected to be joined by other GOP colleagues.

While the White House indicated during the last Congress that it had some problems with the reform legislation, it never threatened a veto. Nevertheless, the White House may have been behind the Senate Republican opposition that blocked a floor vote, and it may try to play a similar role in the 102nd Congress. With the current Republican cosponsors of S. 250, such a strategy would be less successful this time.

Support for the legislation has grown as the urgency of reform and the possibility of passage have increased. Public interest groups, including "good government" groups and civil rights and civil liberties organizations, as well as groups representing women and the disabled, have joined with religious organizations, labor unions, student groups, and education associations to endorse it. The bill is also supported by the National Association of Secretaries of State and by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. On March 1, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights added passage of S. 250 to its list of high priorities.

Among reform supporters, the chief remaining issue concerns which mechanism would be established for the cleaning of lists. During last year's discussions, a number of civil rights groups were wary of list-cleaning provisions added to gain the support of Republicans and conservative Democrats. Their concerns and efforts, borne of decades of negative experiences with election officials seeking to limit minority access to the ballot, resulted in considerable tightening of the language and added protections in the purge provision.

The Senate Rules and Administration Committee scheduled hearings for March 21 and April 10. The committee chairman, Sen. Wendell Ford, has said he intends to consider possible amendments and to review recent registration and election research. Remaining differences over the list-cleaning provisions are expected to be addressed so the committee can proceed to its April 17 mark-up of the bill followed by immediate floor action.

On and off Capitol Hill, there is a growing consensus that the reform of voter registration will be the most important political empowerment weapon of the 1990s. There is also growing confidence that a federal bill will be completed in the 102nd Congress, marking another victory in the decades-old struggle for voting rights. ■

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