

# FOCUS<sup>®</sup>

The magazine of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

## VOTING RIGHTS ACT MARKS FORTIETH BIRTHDAY

*Very Effective Law Nears  
Renewal Time*

By Joe Davidson

*Bolton, Mississippi, is a small place, not even large enough to warrant a traffic light. But it's a big enough prize that the white politicians who had long run the town didn't want to lose control.*

*So when Bennie Thompson, a rotund black man with an easy manner and quick smile, won the mayor's office in 1972, members of the white power structure fought back. He recalls them hauling him into state court where they argued that Thompson was not eligible to be mayor, because he didn't own property as required by Mississippi law.*

*But Thompson had a potent weapon on his side. Seven years earlier, Congress had passed the Voting Rights Act*

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*In Memoriam  
Kenneth Bancroft Clark  
1914 - 2005  
Founder and Board Member  
The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*

*It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Kenneth B. Clark, Founder and Board Member of the Joint Center, as we went to press. A feature article about his extraordinary life and visionary work will be in our next issue.*

## Playfair

And so they marched, six hundred strong, in pursuit of racial and political justice. They crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge that fateful day forty years ago on their way to the looming confrontation with police and a hostile mob. Months later, after black and white images of the scene had flashed across the nation and around the world, a determined President Lyndon Baines Johnson and a newly compliant Congress — although still uneasy, and in the cases of some members resistant — had passed and signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The effect was immediate and electric. The results began first as a trickle, then as a steady stream, then as a significant flow of black citizens into the ranks of state, local and national elected officialdom. When the Joint Center opened its doors five years later in 1970, somewhat more than 1,400 elected positions nationwide were filled by black citizens. Today their number exceeds 9,500.

In some cases, a single result has had a spectacular impact. One such was in evidence last week. At its 2005 annual dinner, the Joint Center and a ballroom full of its faithful played host to a fresh and brilliant star in the national political firmament. United States Senator Barack Obama, the newly elected junior senator from Illinois and only the third African American to serve in the Senate since Reconstruction, attended, spoke and generously made himself available. The tall, assured, self-confident young leader who strode last week into the spotlight at the Joint Center arrived where he is, in great part, thanks to that hardy band of courageous marchers in Selma. Their sacrifice and their courage decades ago led directly to his historic presence today in the world's most exclusive and most powerful club: the U.S. Senate.

What happens next? We know what happened as a result of yesteryear's courage. The symbols of progress are everywhere and we point to them every day: significantly increased numbers of black elected officials across the United States; 40-plus members of the Congressional Black Caucus; the lone U. S. Senator; and the legion of laws passed, policies adopted, barriers broken and obstacles overcome. Where we go now, however, is another matter.

There are shafts of hopeful illumination, and one in particular. For all his admitted uniqueness, his special oratorical gifts, his unmatched brand of personal leadership, it is not unthinkable that this nation will witness the rise of other Barack Obamas. They will be unique themselves, each one alive with the awareness of possibility, inspired by his example, infused with his energy and convinced by his success that they can succeed as elected officials, even Senators, indeed Presidents. That is only fair; the nation will be well served.

And the job for those of us who are not candidates for office? Keep an eye out for the youngsters. Encourage and support them. Let them know we believe in them, for then they will know there is a better than fair chance that they are justified in believing in themselves.

During this year of remembering the march on Selma and its progeny, a wise America will use this opportunity to remind the next generation of what happened and what we have learned. All were affected then; all were hurt by the brutality and bigotry; all have benefited from the lessons of tolerance and fairness that emerged. Therein lies one of the special obligations of us, the generation who lived through those times: we remember, but today's generation cannot. They can know, however, if we teach them.

Thos. Playfair

# FOCUS MAGAZINE

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# Q & A With Congressman John Lewis

## A HERO OF “BLOODY SUNDAY” CALLS FOR RENEWAL OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

*No one symbolizes the struggle to secure voting rights for African Americans and the success of the Voting Rights Act more than John Lewis. He was chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) when he led 600 protestors from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, on March 7, 1965. They marched against restrictions that effectively deprived much of the black population of the right to vote.*

*They didn't get far. Just as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, the marchers were charged and beaten by police officers. Ever since, the day has been known in civil rights folklore as “Bloody Sunday.” Ironically, the blatant police brutality against peaceful demonstrators seeking their Constitutional rights — an event covered on national television — gave a big boost to congressional legislation that would outlaw disenfranchising tactics. The Voting Rights Act became law five months after the march.*

*Lewis was arrested more than 40 times and endured physical attacks and injuries during the course of his civil rights work. He left SNCC in 1966 and later became director of the Voting Rights Project. President Jimmy Carter appointed Lewis director of ACTION, the federal volunteer agency, in 1977. Lewis's political career began in 1981, when he won a seat on the Atlanta City Council. He was elected to Congress from Georgia five years later and has served there ever since. The following is an edited transcript of a conversation Congressman Lewis had with then FOCUS editor Joe Davidson about the Voting Rights Act.*



**FOCUS:** *Congressman Lewis, Bloody Sunday was 40 years ago. It really symbolized the need for voting rights in this country. Take us back to that period, so that our readers, perhaps some who weren't around then, can get an idea of just what Bloody Sunday was and how it came about.*

**LEWIS:** In 1965, all across the state of Alabama, all across Mississippi, and most of the Deep South, it was almost impossible for the average person of color to become registered to vote. People stood at what we call a moveable line. They had to be prepared to pass a so-called literacy test, pay a poll tax, interpret certain sections of the Constitution of Alabama. In Selma, Alabama, you could only attempt to register on the first and third Mondays of each month. You could only attempt to register at the county courthouse.

While we were conducting this non-violent campaign to try to get people registered to vote, there was also interest in an adjoining county, Perry County, about 30 miles from Selma, in a little town

called Marion, Alabama. A young African American man, by the name of Jimmy Lee Jackson, was involved in a march on the night of February the 18th, 1965 — and a confrontation occurred. He tried to protect his elderly mother, and was shot in the stomach by a state trooper. And a few days later, he died in a local hospital in Selma. In the course of what happened to him, we made a decision — the movement did — that we would march from Selma to Montgomery to dramatize to the nation that people wanted to register to vote.

On Sunday afternoon, 600 of us, mostly elderly black men and women and a few young people, lined up to walk in an orderly fashion from Selma to Montgomery. We came to the highest point on the Edmund Pettus Bridge crossing the Alabama River. We saw a sea of blue Alabama state troopers. We continued to walk until we came within hearing distance of the state troopers. A man identified himself and said, “I'm Major John Cloud of the Alabama state troopers. This is an unlawful march, [and] will not be allowed to continue. I give you three minutes to disperse and return to your church.” And in about a minute and a half, Major John Cloud said, “Troopers advance!” And they in fact came toward us, beating us with nightsticks, bullwhips, dragging us with horses, releasing the tear gas. I was hit in the head by a state trooper with a nightstick. I thought I was going to die. I thought I saw death.

Forty years later, I don't recall how I made it across that bridge to the streets of Selma, back to the little church, Brown Chapel AME Church. But, I do recall

being back at the church that Sunday afternoon. The church was full to capacity. More than 2,000 now outside trying to get in to protest what happened, and someone asked me to say something to the audience. I stood up and said something like, “I don’t understand it, how President Johnson can send troops to Vietnam, and cannot send troops to Selma, Alabama, to protect people who only desire to register to vote.” And, the next thing I knew, I’d been admitted to the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma.

**FOCUS:** *What injuries did you suffer?*

**LEWIS:** I had a concussion then, in Selma.

**FOCUS:** *When we first met, I was working on a story about the tenth anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. This was in 1975, and you were with the Voting Rights Project. I caught up with you in Louisiana when you were trying to register people to vote. And I recall that even 10 years after the Voting Rights Act, there was some reluctance [to register] on the part of some black people because there still seemed to be a fear that their white employers might somehow take retribution against them. Was that your experience, and if so, how long did it take for this type of fear to get out of the system?*

**LEWIS:** Well, it did take a few years. And, to some degree, among some of the older blacks, you still have some of it. But it did take a few years. People have to go through a period of getting registered, go through a period of having the courage, nothing but raw courage, to go over to the courthouse and cast the vote.

I think the Voting Rights Act of ’65 [and] the Civil Rights Act of ’64 created a climate and environment for people to go on in spite of their fears.

**FOCUS:** *How important, in a practical way, would you say the Voting Rights Act has been over these last 40 years?*

**LEWIS:** Well, I think the Voting Rights Act has been very, very important during the past 40 [years]. Without the Voting Rights Act, many African American members of Congress from the South would not be here today. We wouldn’t be here.

And many white progressive or moderate members of Congress and white mayors and state officials wouldn’t be holding [office] in their towns and cities and counties and state legislatures, if it hadn’t been for the Voting Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act transformed not just southern politics, but American politics.

**FOCUS:** *How did it do that?*

**LEWIS:** It — by the registration of hundreds and thousands and millions of new voters — it created a climate, created an environment, where political office holders and political office seekers had to go all out and try to bring these people in.

One thing I’ve said over the years, one thing about white politicians and southern

*“The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have in our democracy.”*

*-Congressman*

*John Lewis*

politicians, Democrat or Republican: They learned how to count, and they knew the significance [of the black vote].

**FOCUS:** *The Voting Rights Act comes up for reauthorization in 2007. Is there any fear among black politicians that it either won’t be reauthorized or maybe it will be weakened in the reauthorization process?*

**LEWIS:** Well, I think the great majority of black politicians, and some non-blacks, are concerned about it. But I think people have faith and hope that it will be renewed. But you never know, you never know.

**FOCUS:** *The country, as many commentators have said, and perhaps as the [2004] voting results show, is more conservative than it once was.*

**LEWIS:** Oh yeah.

**FOCUS:** *Will this have an impact*

*on whether or not the reauthorization is successful, or is successful in its current form, without any weakening?*

**LEWIS:** I think the Voting Rights Act has been quite successful, very successful. And we do not need any effort to weaken or destroy ... the Voting Rights Act.

**FOCUS:** *Are you expecting any effort along those lines?*

**LEWIS:** I think there will be some efforts on the part of some to water down, or to renege on it.

**FOCUS:** *When the Congressional Black Caucus met with President Bush in January, Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., from Chicago, asked the president a question about reauthorization, and [the president] did not know about it. Is that a bad sign?*

**LEWIS:** Well, for the president of the United States, who also has been the governor of the state of Texas, not to know about the Voting Rights Act — in particular, Section Five of the Act — to say that he was not aware, and he didn’t know enough about it to make a comment, I think that is a sad commentary.

**FOCUS:** *How would you assess the way black people today employ the right to vote? .... Has it gotten to the point where some of us take the right to vote for granted?*

**LEWIS:** I don’t think, as a race, as a people, that we’re doing all we could to maximize our potential in the political arena.

**FOCUS:** *What would you like to see us do?*

**LEWIS:** I would like to see, more than anything else, that we start teaching the young people at an early age to be sensitive to political participation. That when we go to the polls to vote, we take our children with us. The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have in our democracy. And we must use the vote.

**FOCUS:** *Thank you very much.*

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*Joe Davidson was editor of Focus magazine from November 2001 until March 2005.*

# HEALTH REPORT

## “Let Them Eat Cake or Fat...”

BY GAIL CHRISTOPHER

With all the recent attention given to Medicare prescription drug coverage and social security privatization, many may have missed a health policy development that is critically important for African Americans. In January, the federal government issued new dietary guidelines. For the first time since they were introduced in 1980, the guidelines emphasize weight loss as well as healthy eating and cardiovascular health.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s) Economic Research Service (ERS), four of the top ten causes of death in the United States are associated with diets that are too high in calories, total fat, saturated fat, or cholesterol or too low in dietary fiber. Improvements in diet and overall health can reduce illness, increase productivity, improve educational attainment, and prevent premature death. The new dietary guidelines are particularly relevant for communities of color, which experience excess deaths and chronic illness from diet-related illnesses, such as obesity, hypertension, cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

At the press conference announcing the guidelines, Sara Shaeffer, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, asked then Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman: “How big a hurdle is cost to Americans, particularly low-income Americans, to eating healthfully and fol-

lowing guidelines?” Thompson replied, “Oh, I think cost is not a determiner of whether or not you eat properly. I mean, there’s fruits and vegetables out there, a lot of inexpensive foods that can be extremely healthy.” Said Veneman: “I might add too that I think it’s very important to recognize that consumers today are not only driven by price but also convenience, and the response has been improving in terms of how consumers are being given better convenience choices as well as the foods that are nutritious for you.”

Their response reflected the fundamental disconnect between many Washington-based health researchers and policymakers and communities of color across the country. Where issues of access to quality food and healthful lifestyles are concerned, within impoverished minority communities price and supply can be significant barriers. Using 1999 data, the ERS reports that consumers can meet the recommendations of three servings of fruits and four servings of vegetables daily for just 64 cents.

Yet neither ERS’s research conclusions, nor Thompson’s comments, reflect the reality of limited access to quality food as it is experienced by many minorities in low-income neighborhoods across the country. And Veneman’s remark about improved consumer choice only makes sense for certain consumers. In fact, the problem of unequal access to quality supermarket foods is a common problem in low-income communities, both urban and rural.

In contrast, less healthy food choices (high in fat and sodium and nutrient-poor)

are readily accessible within most poor urban neighborhoods. Meals from fast-food restaurants are a good example. In 2001, researchers from Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston found that within the city limits of New Orleans, predominantly black neighborhoods had 2.4 fast-food restaurants per square mile, as compared with 1.5 restaurants in predominantly white neighborhoods. This pattern is common in minority communities across the nation.

## Scarce Supermarkets and High Prices

Food consumption patterns, created by changes in *availability and access*, may well be a critical factor in what now appears to be an increasingly *obesogenic* (fat generating) environment. In fact, the obesity epidemic is what prompted the government to place a new emphasis on fresh wholesome foods and exercise in the recently published guidelines.

Lack of access to supermarkets is correlated with the prevalence of diet related diseases like diabetes and obesity, according to a June 2004 study by the Food Trust in Philadelphia. The link between hunger, malnutrition and delayed brain development in children is also well documented. It is a major problem therefore that there are fewer supermarkets located in low-income neighborhoods than in middle-class or affluent ones. A pioneering 1995 study by the University of Connecticut’s Food Marketing Policy examined 21 metropolitan areas and found that there were 30 percent fewer supermarkets in low-income areas than in high-income areas.

*Food redlining* is the term used to describe the phenomenon of large-scale supermarkets abandoning lower income communities for more affluent areas, leaving entire communities with little or no

access to affordable quality food. Food redlining can be just as harmful as financial redlining, a long established practice in housing discrimination.

While obesity is increasing at alarming rates throughout the country, African American and Latino populations, particularly children and youth, are bearing a disproportionately high burden of obesity and related illnesses, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. The government's new leadership on the issue could carry great significance for these communities — as long as the recommendations can be used to change food industry practices. But if supermarkets continue to disappear from low-income communities, as they have been since the 1960s, and if fast food “density” continues to escalate, these valuable guidelines — promoting the eating of more vegetables and fruits, more low-fat protein, and moderate sodium vs. potassium consumption — will mean little in black and Latino neighborhoods. Obesity and being overweight do have many genetic and behavioral causes, but easy access to foods low in nutrition and limited access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables may be key environmental contributors.

In inner-city and low-income neighborhoods, access to fresh, wholesome foods is further limited by price. While a few supermarket chains have begun to return to urban communities, most low-income residents must rely on corner stores and convenience markets. In one regional study, the USDA found that the average full-service supermarket offered three times as many kinds of fruit, six times as many kinds of vegetables, and nine times as many kinds of meat as the average small store. The USDA also found produce and meats in smaller stores to be of lower quality. Other research has shown that food prices in small stores can be as much as 76 percent higher than prices in large stores.

To help lower the risk for diet related diseases, which include cancer and high

blood pressure as well as diabetes and obesity, the new guidelines tell us to “Consume a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages within and among the basic food groups while choosing foods that limit the intake of saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, added sugars, salt, and alcohol” So what's a black or Latino person living in a poor neighborhood to do with this advice?

### Steps in the Right Direction

The City of Philadelphia offers an excellent example of how food security advocates, public officials, and the business community can partner to address the serious issue of access to quality foods in urban areas. In response to a report by the Philadelphia Food Trust, which outlined the supermarket shortage and gaps in food availability in low-income neighborhoods, in April 2002 the Philadelphia City Council held a hearing that eventually led to the creation of a Food Marketing Task Force. The task force developed recommendations to solve the problem. At the

employment and microenterprise development. Four new supermarkets have been approved since the program began in September 2004. One of these has already opened; it employs 258 people and has generated other microenterprises that lease space within the store. The other three stores are slated to open within the year. The Food Trust is also working with academic institutions to follow the health and economic impact of this venture.

A lesson to be learned from this is that local residents can take action to change their food environments, rendering them less obesogenic and more healthy overall. From local school board actions to improve the quality of school lunches, to improving vending machine fare and options for exercise, to increasing the availability of farmers markets, church-based food coops and wholesome food offerings in smaller stores, the areas of useful action are many. Some nonprofit groups have also increased transportation options by working with local cab and bus companies and chain grocery stores.

The good news is that the federal

### *“Local residents can take action.”*

same time, two state legislators, Representatives Dwight Evans (D-Philadelphia) and Jake Wheatley (D-Pittsburg) convened a statewide hearing on the issues.

As a result of these parallel efforts, the Fresh Food Financing Initiative was created. This is a unique public-private partnership between the Food Trust, the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition (GPUAC) and The Reinvestment Fund. The state government has appropriated \$10 million and The Reinvestment Fund is matching with \$30 million from private resources and the New Markets Tax Credits allocation. Supermarkets seeking to develop new stores in underserved communities will now be able to access these funds, in turn generating economic opportunities through local

government has made a helpful new foray into the nutrition game by raising the bar toward healthier eating. The bad news is that local communities of color will have to organize and advocate for policy and industry change before they can realize the benefits. Local action is required if these new guidelines are to help win the battle against racial and ethnic health disparities.

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*Gail Christopher is vice president for Health, Women, and Families at the Joint Center and director of the Joint Center Health Policy Institute.*

# POLITICAL REPORT

## Bush's Budget Squeezes States

BY ERIN MADIGAN AND PAMELA M. PRAH

Bush administration officials have told their colleagues in state government that it is up to them to devise a plan to solve the nationwide problem of runaway Medicaid costs.

As those costs escalate, President Bush's budget proposal calls for squeezing \$40 billion to \$45 billion in Medicaid savings over 10 years through changes that include clamping down on who qualifies for government payments for nursing home services and cutting prescription drug expenditures.

Besides trimming Medicaid, the administration's \$2.5 trillion budget proposal would shrink other key programs important to states. On the chopping block are programs to help train workers for new jobs, revitalize inner-city communities and improve water quality. The Bush plan would consolidate several similar programs, giving states more freedom to spend the money as they see fit – but, in most cases, providing less money.

The budget proposal lays out the president's spending priorities for fiscal 2006, which begins October 1. Under Bush's plan, most federal agencies and programs would be scaled back except defense and homeland security. The Republican-controlled Congress will have final say on how the federal government spends taxpayers' money and how policymakers will plug this fiscal year's estimated \$427 billion deficit, which was largely brought on by heavy spending for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined with new tax cuts.

In his 2006 budget message, the president pledged to work with Congress to modify Medicaid, the state-federal health-care insurance program for 52 million poor and disabled Americans. It is a major constraint on state budgets. Bush also pledged to work with the governors on this matter when he met with them recently in Washington. But lawmakers on Capitol Hill have not shown much interest in restructuring Medicaid, so the states have their work cut out for them. The biggest sticking point: The president is keeping to his plan to cut federal Medicaid funds.

### *States now spend more money on the [Medicaid] program than on primary and secondary education combined.*

When the nation's governors met with Bush, Medicaid funding was at the top of their agenda. "The Medicaid program needs to be rethought and reformed. It needs to redefine the federal-state role in a way that makes states' financial commitment sustainable over the long-run," the National Governors Association said in a statement. Virginia Gov. Mark Warner (D), who is NGA chairman, said he's concerned that the proposed reductions in

Medicaid would shift costs to states.

States now spend more money on the program than on primary and secondary education combined. Collectively, states and the federal government spend more than \$300 billion on Medicaid, whose cost continues to rise at a double-digit clip.

The White House wants to reap savings in Medicaid using three main tactics: reducing the money spent on prescription drugs, cracking down on accounting loopholes some states use to draw down additional federal funding and stopping senior citizens from transferring their assets to qualify for government-funded nursing home care through Medicaid.

### Increased State Autonomy?

Some parts of the budget proposal likely will resound well with states, health care analysts said. The administration wants to give states greater flexibility to expand health insurance coverage to vulnerable populations and seeks to eliminate some administrative hurdles that prevent states from veering from mandated coverage guidelines without federal approval.

The administration also is proposing grants to encourage states to expand access to community-based care for the disabled and elderly rather than nursing home and institutional care.

The administration's budget says it wants to "build on the success" of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP). It was created in 1997 to expand coverage to poor children whose parents earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid. The administration would like Congress to re-authorize S-CHIP program early, in fiscal 2006 rather than 2007. The White House also proposes reducing the time frame states have to spend their S-CHIP money from three years to two years, so states can target funds in a more timely way.

Making good on a campaign promise, Bush also plans to spend \$1 billion over

two years on state grants as part of a national outreach campaign to enroll as many children in Medicaid and S-CHIP as possible.

Despite these plans, the budget proposal leaves many questions about Medicaid's future unanswered. "Clearly this is a major proposal, and it has far-reaching implications. But much of the detail is not apparent," said Joy Johnson Wilson, federal affairs counsel at the "National Conference of State Legislatures. Wilson said she is also concerned that the budget calls for turning federal allocations for administrative processes in Medicaid into a block grant.

Diane Rowland, executive director of the nonpartisan Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, said the Bush administration has "opened the door to a lot of potential changes in the way that Medicaid operates, and its interaction with [S-CHIP], and the way it organizes and delivers long-term care services, but it's not clear what's really envisioned once the states step through the door."

Medicaid is not the only program important to states that would get squeezed under the Bush plan.

States have long complained that Washington passes the buck when it approves sweeping new programs without sufficient

funding for states to actually launch and run the initiatives. For example, states officials contend they were shortchanged last year by at least \$10 billion in federal funds promised to carry out the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) education law and another \$9 billion for special education. The president's latest budget plan won't allay those critics.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), a Washington, D.C., group that focuses on policies affecting the poor, estimates that grants to state and local governments for all programs other than Medicaid would decline by \$10.7 billion or 4.5 percent under Bush's proposal.

Here's how the administration would fund other programs important to states:

**Community Development** — The administration wants to fold a myriad of economic development programs that are scattered across the federal government into one program based at the Commerce Department, but with less funding. The programs now garner more than \$5 billion. The president proposes to reduce that to \$3.7 billion.

**Crime prevention** — A program to help states and local agencies hire police officers, known as Community-Oriented Policing Services, or COPS, would be eliminated.

**Education** — Bush's education budget proposal would cut overall funding by 1 percent and eliminate 48 programs, but would boost Pell Grants serving low-income college students and provide small increases for special education and No Child Left Behind. This includes a \$1.5 billion initiative to extend NCLB accountability and testing requirements to high schools. Hardest hit would be vocational education and programs targeting low-income and inner-city youths, such as Upward Bound, Talent Search and GEAR UP.

**Welfare** — The president's plan would cut the number of people receiving food stamps by changing eligibility requirements, and it would freeze the funding for child-care subsidies.

**Environment** — Low-interest loans to states to improve water quality, treat wastewater and reduce pollution would drop to \$730 million from \$1 billion.

**Health Care** — The administration is proposing \$4 billion for state purchasing pools to help low-income people buy health insurance with a proposed health insurance tax credit, but the plan requires legislative approval. In addition, the White House wants Congress to pass a bill allowing small businesses and private nonprofits to buy health insurance across state lines. Similar proposals previously have raised concerns for state insurance regulators.

**Job training** — Four existing job training programs would be melded into one, giving states more flexibility in how they spend the money, but overall giving them less money, dropping from the current \$4.1 billion to \$3.9 billion.

**Transportation** — State grants for highway safety would receive the same amount of funding as current levels. Bush's plan would increase federal spending on road construction, but this falls \$10 billion short of the levels that state highway officials wanted. A revamped highway and transit bill stalled last year when the administration and Congress couldn't agree on how much to spend.

*Erin Madigan and Pamela M. Prah are staff writers with Stateline.org, which supplied this article.*

PROJECTED FUNDING CUTS IN THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET, SELECTED PROGRAMS				
	CUTS IN 2010		Total Projected	Projected Impact
	As % of 2005	In Dollars	Cuts 2006 -	in 2010 (Selected
	Baseline	(Millions)	2010 (millions)	Programs)
Vocational and Adult Education	-58%	-\$1,275	-\$5,855	
School Improvement Programs	-19%	-\$1,187	-\$4,103	
Children and Family Services, including Head Start and Other Children's Services	-13%	-\$1,144	-\$3,311	118,000 fewer Head Start participants
Elementary and Secondary Education	-12%	-\$4,564	-\$11,545	
Ryan White HIV/AIDS	-10%	-\$191	-\$550	
Low Income Home Energy Assistance	-8%	-\$165	-\$219	360,000 fewer recipients
Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children	-8%	-\$470	-\$658	671,000 fewer recipients in 2010

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 2005

# ECONOMIC REPORT

## Bush's Ownership Plan Cuts Social Capital

BY MARGARET C. SIMMS

The budget President George W. Bush sent to Congress for fiscal year 2006 places a heavy emphasis on economic opportunity and ownership. Certainly there are many approaches the federal government can use to encourage individuals and families to acquire assets and many ways it can lower the barriers people often face when they try to do so. Effective incentives might include subsidies or tax credits for savings, reduced interest rates for home ownership or business start-ups.

But government can also foster wealth-building through strategies that are more community focused, helping to build human and social capital within communities so that individuals who live in them are better positioned to build wealth, with or without government assistance. The president's budget shows much more interest in the first type of strategy than the second.

### Asset Building

Within a very tight budget, President Bush manages to keep or expand programs that assist families in their efforts to build savings and become first-time homeowners. His budget would maintain funding levels for the Assets for Independence program, which encourages people to build Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). It also proposes a new program allowing taxpayers to split direct deposit of tax refunds.

HUD would continue several programs that encourage homeownership, including

home ownership vouchers and the zero-down-payment initiative. The administration also proposes a new tax credit for single-family homeownership that would go to builders of affordable housing. Unfortunately, the support for some of these efforts would come at the expense of rental and public housing programs, which would be reduced.

### Human and Social Capital

The development of what economists call "human capital" — through education and training — can be critically important to promoting ownership. Greater human capital means better access to jobs with good incomes and upward

mobility. Overall, stronger education not only makes people more employable but equips them with the basic skills needed to understand or learn about financial markets, homeownership options, and business development.

Unfortunately, the president's budget calls for a reduction in education spending for FY 2006. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the cumulative effect of the initial cut and the "discretionary caps" that are imposed on the budget going forward is an \$11.5 billion cut in elementary and secondary education spending over the 2006-2010 period. Nearly 60 percent of these cuts will be borne by states with large African American populations. Among the cuts would be an elimination of federal support for vocational education, so that those funds can be shifted to the No Child Left Behind initiative, covering its extension to the high school level. The budget would reduce funding for adult education — by 74.1 percent for FY 2006, according to the Center for Law and Social Policy.

**Projected Cuts in Selected Education Programs Under the President's FY 2006 Budget Proposals (in \$millions).**

States With African American Population of 1 Million or More	Elementary and Secondary Education	Vocational and Adult Education
Alabama	-\$174.8	-\$99.5
California	-\$1,219.8	-\$694.1
Florida	-\$565.2	-\$321.0
Georgia	-\$308.0	-\$173.7
Illinois	-\$477.1	-\$227.5
Louisiana	-\$203.6	-\$105.7
Maryland	-\$183.0	-\$87.2
Michigan	-\$379.5	-\$187.1
New Jersey	-\$318.6	-\$137.2
New York	-\$764.6	-\$336.6
Ohio	-\$401.1	-\$215.8
Pennsylvania	-\$399.0	-\$223.4
South Carolina	-\$161.1	-\$90.0
Texas	-\$942.9	-\$472.1
Virginia	-\$35.9	-\$130.9
U.S Total	-\$11,544.8	-\$5,855.1

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Where Would the Cuts Be Made Under the President's Budget: State Data*, [www.cbpp.org/2-22-05bud.htm](http://www.cbpp.org/2-22-05bud.htm)

Programs that build social capital would also suffer under Bush's proposals. The proposed consolidation into one program of 18 existing community development grant programs (including the HUD Community Development block grant) is clearly a funding reduction. The consolidated program, which would be administered by the Economic Development Administration of the Commerce Department, would shrink to \$3 billion. (Currently the Community Development Block Grant alone has a budget of nearly \$5 billion.) Support for programs that encourage businesses to locate in distressed neighborhoods, such as the New Markets Tax Credit program, would decline as well.

For more information, see [www.whitehouse.gov/omb](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb); [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org); and [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).

*Margaret C. Simms is vice president for Governance and Economic Analysis at the Joint Center.*

# VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Continued from cover

to put teeth in the constitutional guarantee of the right to vote for all citizens. When the Act took effect, the use of racist vote-denying tactics, such as poll taxes and literacy tests, was outlawed. Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, the Act is widely considered the most effective civil rights law. Because of it, the number of African Americans registered to vote soared and the number of black elected officials continues to climb.

“The first thing the Voting Rights Act did was empower black voters,” said David Bositis, a senior research associate at the Joint Center. The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law documented an example of that in a 2003 report on the Act’s expected reauthorization. Describing the years immediately after Congress approved the Act as the “Second Reconstruction,” the report used Selma, Alabama, as a case study.

“Before Bloody Sunday, the DOJ (Department of Justice) had litigated voting rights for four years in Dallas County, Alabama, where Selma is the county seat. Despite those early enforcement efforts, African American registration had increased from 16 registered voters to only 383 out

of 15,000 African Americans of voting age. The Act became effective August 6, 1965. In a single week, the number of registered African Americans doubled and by November, nearly 8,000 African American voters were registered in Dallas County. In Mississippi, African American voter registration jumped from 6.7 percent before passage of the Act to 59.8 percent in 1967. By 1975, the DOJ estimated that almost as many African Americans had registered in some southern states in the first five years after the passage of the Act as had registered in the entire century before 1965.”

With that upsurge in black registration came a steady growth in the number of black elected officials. Fewer than 1,500 African Americans held elective office in 1970, according to the Joint Center’s survey. Now there are estimated to be roughly 9,500 black elected officials.

## Change in Mississippi

Thompson is one of them. Because of the voting rights law, Thompson was able to argue that the lawsuit against his mayoral election should be reviewed in federal court, and not by a state judge. He vividly

remembers the Mississippi judge telling the lawyer for Thompson’s opponents: “Well, they’ve taken it out of my hands now. I can’t do anything for y’all.”

The case against him failed, as a similar one had after he, as a 21-year-old, was elected to the town’s board of aldermen in 1968, just three years after the Act passed. He feels “in no uncertain terms” that he would not have become mayor had it not been for the Act, “because justice would not have been on my side.” After a six-year stint as mayor, during which he secured the town’s first fire truck, Thompson was elected a Hinds County supervisor. He moved to Congress in 1993, where he continues to represent Mississippi’s Second District, which includes the Mississippi Delta.

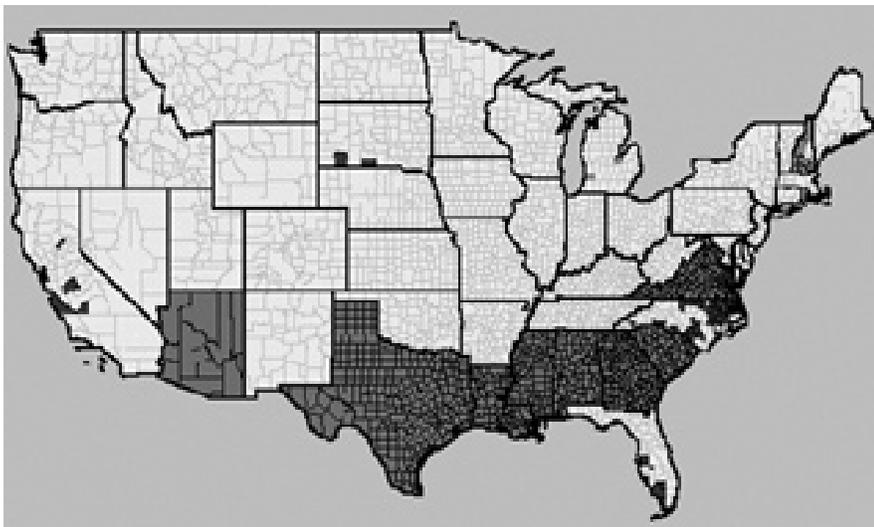
Today Thompson is one of 43 African Americans in Congress, where the Congressional Black Caucus is a formidable power center. There were only five black members when the Act passed, according to Bositis. This year not only is a significant anniversary of the Act, but it also marks an intensification of efforts to secure reauthorization of certain sections of the Act generally referred to as “special provisions.” If Congress does not renew those sections by 2007, they will expire. But contrary to myths that have circulated on the Internet, black Americans will not lose the right to vote that year, no matter what happens in the reauthorization process.

As the NAACP Legal Defense Fund notes in a fact sheet, “The right of African Americans and of all citizens to vote free of discrimination based on race or color is guaranteed by the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution and does not expire.”

## Renewing the Act

The special provisions that could expire include Section 5’s “pre-clearance” condition. It requires states and sections of states covered by the law to prove (to the Department of Justice’s satisfaction) that

STATES AND COUNTIES COVERED BY SECTION 5 OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice

any new changes to their voting procedures are not discriminatory before those changes are implemented. Another special provision, Section 203, requires bilingual voting materials in certain areas. Other special provisions define which jurisdictions must obtain the Justice Department's pre-clearance (approval) and the criteria by which the Justice Department may monitor elections.

Although renewal of the provisions is not needed for two years, the effort to extend and perhaps strengthen the law is well under way. Hearings on the law probably will be held next year, and work to develop a strong case for reauthorization has begun. Caucus members felt an increased sense of urgency regarding reauthorization after they met with President Bush in January. When Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) asked Bush, "Do we have your support in extending and strengthening the 1965 Voting Rights Act when it comes up for renewal in 2007?" the president said he was not aware of it, but he would deal with it when it crossed his desk, according to Caucus members who were present.

"He seemed not to know much about [the] Voting Rights [Act] itself," said Washington, D.C., Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton in an interview. She and other Caucus members noted the irony of Bush's lack of knowledge because he was governor of Texas, a state that is fully covered by the law.

## Strong Coalition Needed

For civil rights activists, the president's lack of awareness underscores the need to build an effective movement in support of the Act. "That work really needs to start now," said Julie Fernandes, senior counsel of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. "We want to build a strong coalition to strengthen the Act."

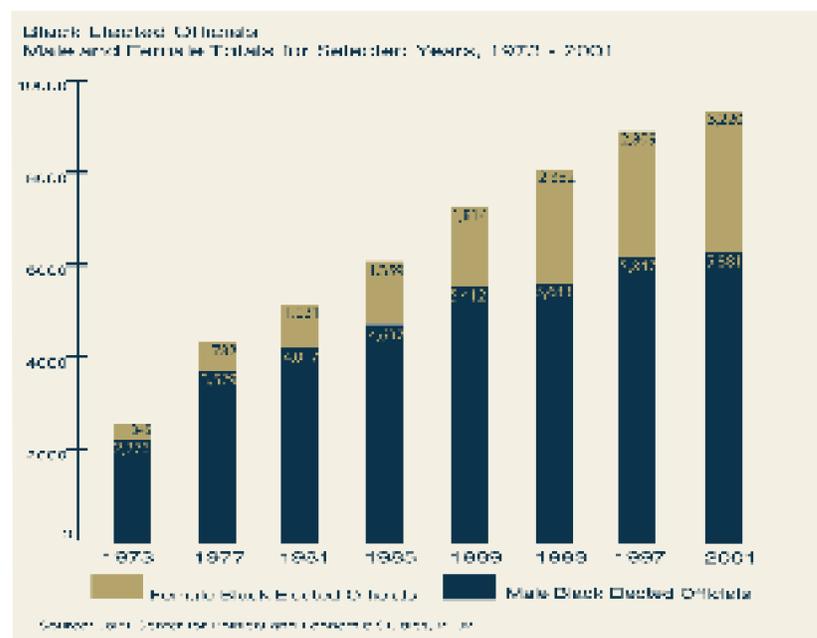
One item she would like strengthened is wording in the law that prohibits covered jurisdictions from enacting voting-related measures that would leave African Americans and others worse off. The Supreme Court has so narrowly interpreted that language, Fernandes said, that if a tradition-

ally all-white city council changed voting procedures to ensure that the council remained all white, even as the city's population became increasingly black, that would not violate the Act. The reason: No African Americans would lose seats on the council, so they could not claim to be worse off. She's working for language that she says would restore the original meaning of the law by allowing such city council action to be ruled discriminatory because it would unfairly work against the black population's attempt to gain representation.

covers Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. Parts, in some cases small parts, of California, Florida, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina and South Dakota also are covered.

If Section 5 and the other special provisions are not renewed, "we would lose many of the tools that provide protection of the rights provided by the 15th Amendment to the Constitution," warns Hilary Shelton, director of the NAACP's Washington office.

The 15th Amendment is short but



## Narrow Tailoring

It might seem counter-intuitive, but making the Voting Rights Act permanent or extending it to all states likely would not toughen it but actually could weaken or threaten it by making it vulnerable to a constitutional challenge. "The Supreme Court in recent years has made it very clear that race conscious legislation is subject to strict scrutiny," Fernandes said. "The legislation has to be narrowly tailored. Our concern is that the Supreme Court in recent years has looked disapprovingly on race conscious remedies that last in perpetuity." She said the same concern would apply if the legislation were extended to the entire country.

Section 5, the "pre-clearance" section,

powerful: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." Of those words, the NAACP's Shelton says, "the rights are given, but the rights have to be actualized." That's what the Voting Rights Act has done.

*Joe Davidson was editor of Focus magazine from November 2001 until March 2005.*

# African American Leadership: CHALLENGES FOR A NEW GENERATION

BY MICHAEL R. WENGER

The Voting Rights Act was just five years old and “Bloody Sunday” was still an all-too-vivid memory when the Joint Center was created in 1970. Its purpose was to help newly elected black public officials meet the challenges that confronted them. Emerging from the shadows of 100 years of Jim Crow racism, these early beneficiaries of the elimination of the poll tax, literacy tests, and the grandfather clause had few places to turn for advice, resources, and guidance as they contended for the first time since Reconstruction with the burdens of governing.

Today, as we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act and the 35th anniversary of the Joint Center and as the number of black elected officials has jumped from several hundred to more than 9,000, the Joint Center remains engaged in supporting emerging leaders in the African American community. With a generous grant from the AT&T Foundation the Joint Center is exploring the challenges facing a new generation of African American leadership in both the public and private sectors. In the context of rapid and significant societal change, we seek to identify the kinds of capacities and understandings that leaders will need in order to serve their constituencies in today’s communities effectively. We know that racial disparities persist in educational achievement, economic well-being, access to affordable housing and quality health care, and treatment by the criminal

justice system. Is there a need for greater collaboration between public and private sector leaders as they attempt to address these entrenched and perplexing disparities? And if there is, what form should such collaboration take?

## Looking Back, Thinking Forward

One of the lingering challenges for emerging leaders is the persistence of racial bias. While there has been some real progress toward equality opportunity, as Joint Center surveys of BEOs and of the general public indicate, much remains to be done. David Bositis, a Joint Center senior research associate, recently conducted a Fortune/Joint Center survey of black professionals to discern their outlook. His survey found that while younger black professionals are more optimistic than their elders, a substantial majority of black professionals believe that strong anti-discrimination laws and enforcement are necessary because CEOs and senior business executives are not really concerned about racial discrimination in their companies. They are either oblivious to it, these professionals find, or they look the other way when it occurs.

A town hall meeting convened by the Joint Center on April 20 — “Rising African American Leaders: Challenges for a New Generation” — was the first public event of this new effort. Moderated by Washington, DC, radio personality Joe

Madison, the forum addressed such questions as:

1. How do the challenges differ from those faced by African American leaders of the past?
2. Are the challenges that “rising leaders” confront different in the public and private sectors?
3. What are the best strategies for addressing potential conflicts between the public and private sector perspectives and for promoting networking that can foster a mutual appreciation for the differing perspectives of both sectors?

Among the panelists were Joint Center President Emeritus Eddie N. Williams, who reflected on the challenges that faced the early wave of leaders who emerged as a result of the Voting Rights Act, and Glenn Ivey, State’s Attorney for Prince George’s County, MD, and a former Joint Center intern and board member.

Future forums will explore ways in which to address in a collaborative manner specific, current issues of deep concern to the African American community, such as Social Security reform and closing the achievement gap in education. An audiocast of the April 20 town hall meeting is available on the Joint Center’s web site at [www.jointcenter.org](http://www.jointcenter.org).

*Michael R. Wenger is a consultant to the Joint Center.*



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