

# Commission: Voting Rights Act Needs Extension

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congress should extend the special provisions of the Voting Rights Act an additional ten years, and both Congress and the Department of Justice should make important changes in the law and its enforcement practices to provide necessary added protection of minority citizens' right to vote and seek office. Those recommendations are part of a new report, *The Voting Rights Act: Unfulfilled Goals*, released at a press conference recently by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

The 426-page report evaluates the current status of minority voting rights in jurisdictions covered by the original special provisions of the Act enacted in 1965, as well as those covered by the 1975 amendments. The Commission's report also assesses whether discrimination continues to exist in those jurisdictions and whether minority participation in political processes has increased.

Nine states and parts of thirteen others are covered under the special provisions, and must "preclear" any changes in voting procedures with the Department of Justice (DOJ) or the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, to prove that the changes do not discriminate against minority citizens in purpose or effect.

The Commission recommended several amendments aimed at more effective enforcement of the Act: section 2 of the Act (the portion applicable to all 50 States) should be amended by Congress to prohibit voting practices that are discriminatory in effect, even if they are not necessarily discriminatory in intent; Congress should amend the Act to let complainants sue for civil penalties or damages against the State and local officials who refuse to comply with the section 5 preclearance requirements; the attorney general should be given an affirmative responsibility to enforce Sec-

tion 5, since some jurisdictions either do not submit proposed changes for preclearance or implement such changes despite DOJ's objections; and DOJ should issue more specific guidelines than it has to date on what constitutes effective minority-language assistance, since lack of specificity in the current regulations has resulted in inadequate assistance to minority-language voters.

The Commission also recommended Congressional hearings to consider enactment of a Federal law establishing minimum standards for registering and voting in Federal elections.

The Commission said that despite increased political participation by minorities in many States covered by the special provisions, "minorities continue to face a variety of problems which the act was designed to overcome." For example, the number of blacks elected to public office nearly doubled between 1975 and 1980 in six of the

covered Southern States (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia) plus North Carolina, from 964 in 1974 to 2,042 in 1980. Nevertheless, the Commission's report cites evidence that minority registration still lags behind that of whites in some covered jurisdictions and that minority citizens have been elected to few positions on county governing bodies or to major or statewide offices.

Moreover, the Commission states, "harassment and intimidation of minority voters and candidates persists, and registration still is inaccessible to minorities living in rural areas... Building on the blatant and pervasive discrimination against them in the past, the present attitudes of registrars deter minorities from registering." Registration in many areas takes place only during the work day and in central locations like county courthouses — doubly inconvenient

for the many rural, low-income minority citizens without adequate public transportation. Minority requests for alternative registration procedures, including the use of deputy registrars and satellite registration offices in minority communities, have reportedly been denied by registration offices or granted only after appeals to State legislators or national civil rights organizations.

Another problem cited in the report is the location of polling places in predominantly white communities or in buildings that house all-white organizations or civic clubs. At-large election systems, numerous voting rules, annexations, consolidations and boundary changes also continue to dilute minority voting strength and "severely limit the ability of minority communities to elect the candidates of their choice," according to the report.

The Commission found that of the more

than 700 specific proposed changes by covered jurisdictions objected to by DOJ between 1975 and 1980, the largest number concerning annexations that would have increased the number and percentage of whites in the annexing jurisdictions. The report also points out that DOJ frequently objected to requests that would create at-large election systems, and to use of the "majority vote rule" requiring winning candidates to receive a majority of the votes cast rather than a plurality.

The report cites other evidence indicating that although bilingual oral assistance at registration and polling places is needed by the minority language community, this need has not been met. Although the minority language provisions in jurisdictions subject to preclearance by the 1975 amendments are not due to be considered for the extension until 1985, the Commission recommended that these provisions be extended now until 1992,

thereby allowing all of the act's special provisions to expire at the same time.

In a separate dissenting statement contained in the report, Commissioner Stephen Horn takes issue with the report's findings and recommendations concerning the minority language provisions of the act. "If one wishes to cast a ballot in the United States of America, one should learn as much English as is necessary to fulfill that limited, but fundamental aspect of citizenship," Horn said.

A limited number of copies of *The Voting Rights Act: Unfulfilled Goals* are available from the Commission's Office of Program and Policy Review. Bound copies of the report can be obtained after October 1, 1981 from: Publications Warehouse, 621 North Payne Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan fact-finding agency concerned with discrimina-

tion or denial of equal protection of the law because of race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap or national origin. Members of the Commission are Chairman Arthur S. Fleming; Vice Chair Mary Frances Berry, professor of history and law and senior fellow at the Institute for the Study of Educational Policy at Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Stephen Horn, president of California State University, Long Beach; Blandina Cardena Ramirez, director of development at the Inter-Cultural Research Association, San Antonio; Ms. Jill Ruckelshaus, former special assistant to the President for women's affairs, Washington; and Murray Saltzman, Rabbi, Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Baltimore.

John Hope, III, is acting director.

Register To Vote

# A&T Students Spend Summer On Oil Rig

HOUSTON — For Spruill and Gregory '81 was expected to be employment in a routine college students Norman and Twyman the summer of filled with temporary office setting. For



College students Norman Spruill (left) and Gregory Twyman traded in textbooks for pipe wrenches to learn more about the petroleum industry during summer training at an Aminoil offshore oil production platform.

Valdez Chavis, it was supposed to be a summer of leisure.

Little did the three expect at the time that, at the close of their second semester at North Carolina A&T University, they would find themselves working 100 miles from shore in the Gulf of Mexico. They would fill the position of "roustabout" and would be assigned to work on a steel island known as an oil production platform.

Norman and Gregory, both electrical engineering majors, and Valdez, an architectural engineering major, were among more than 30 college students from across the nation who participated in a summer intern program sponsored by Aminoil USA, Inc., a subsidiary of R.J. Reynolds Industries, Inc.

The program, which includes colleges and universities that do not specialize in petroleum studies, is aimed at filling the critical need for technical professionals for Aminoil's growing petroleum exploration and production business. The development plan is designed to expose students to basic oil and gas operations in their first year of the program and in succeeding summers provide special training in the technical disciplines.

For college roommates Norman and Gregory, who heard about the program just before their freshman year came to a close, the opportunity

to work on an offshore platform led to the discovery of a new world.

"I didn't know anything about the oil business," Gregory said, following the conclusion of his three-month assignment as a general laborer working 10 days-on and 10 days-off the platform.

"My first day on the job," he continued, "someone told me: 'Go over to the Christmas tree (a system of gas and oil valves) and set off the wing valve.' I said, 'What?'"

Norman recalls that his first assignment was to fetch a pail of grease and to lubricate a derrick cable. "As a roustabout, you do everything — you're a mechanic, a technician, a crane operator," he explained. "And that's a good way to learn about this business," Norman added. "You don't learn just about equipment. You learn how that equipment applies to the process."

The students said there was no lack of answers for the many questions

they had about the oil industry, and the electrical systems they were so eager to learn about.

"Everybody was helping us out," Norman said. "Roustabouts, the platform foreman, the operator. They'd say, 'Let's talk about this process or that process.' And if one person didn't know the answers, he'd find somebody who did."

Valdez related similar experiences.

"At first I was nervous," he explained. "It took until about my second hitch on the platform before I understood what was happening."

"Now I have an idea of how it is to be offshore. Before, the only time I had seen an offshore platform was on TV."

Under the Aminoil summer intern program, individuals have the opportunity to work on-shore, as well as offshore, sites. Students pursuing engineering studies become engineering aids the summer between junior and senior years.

At a meeting earlier this year with North Carolina A&T University officials, George E. Trimble, Aminoil's chairman, president and chief executive officer said, the petroleum industry is overlooking a valuable source of potential administrative and technical professional when it recruits solely from those traditional institutions that focus on petroleum studies.

Although petroleum engineering is not among that university's areas of specialization, Aminoil's individual development program would enable non-petroleum technical degree graduates to "convert" to petroleum engineers.

Aminoil is the nation's third largest independent petroleum exploration and production company. In addition to exploration and production in the United States and other countries, Aminoil produces, processes and sells natural gas; markets crude oil, natural gas and petroleum products and develops and supplies geothermal steam.



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