

Legislators back rights extension

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• Section 5, which requires jurisdictions with a history of discrimination in voting to get federal pre-clearance of any new voting practices or procedures before they may be implemented;

• Section 203, the bi-lingual ballot provisions that ensure that some citizens with limited English proficiency are able to read ballots in a language they can understand; and

• Sections 6-9, which authorize the Attorney General to appoint federal election observers where he finds evidence of attempts to intimidate minority voters at the polls or prevent them from exercising their right to vote freely.

Watt praised fellow CBC member John Lewis (D-Ga.)

who "led the movement that resulted in the passage of the original Voting Rights Act in 1965 and has once again been the moral force and leader in the introduction of today's bipartisan bill."

"The vote is precious, almost sacred," Lewis said. "It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democracy. We gather here today in this bi-partisan, bi-cameral way to affirm its importance and openly commit to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act."

The House Subcommittee on the Constitution has held 10 hearings to receive oral and written testimony from

witnesses, including supporters and opponents of reauthorization. The hearings examined the effectiveness of each of the expiring provisions in remedying discrimination and protecting minority voters over the last 25 years, as well as their continued need going forward.

"The comprehensive record established by the Committee strongly supports reauthorization of the VRA and I believe this record will be vitally important in ensuring that the resulting legislation can withstand an almost certain constitutional challenge," said Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.), House Judiciary Committee Chairman.

While progress has been made, vestiges of discrimination are still present in cer-

tain parts of the country, lawmakers say.

"Our journey toward equal voting rights still requires extreme vigilance on the part of Congress," said Rep. John Conyers, the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee.

"However, this day is a tribute to those brave individuals of all races who risked their lives to pursue the simple right of all Americans to participate in their government, as well as an assurance that the right to vote remains solid law."



Lewis



Conyers

Family members officially protest Parks' will

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT - Lawyers for 12 nieces and nephews of civil rights icon Rosa Parks have filed an official objection to her will.



Parks

The family members, who have been feuding for years with the people Parks appointed to handle her affairs, filed the legal challenge Friday. They had until Sunday to make the objection in order to proceed with their case.

"We still are very open to talk settlement in this case, if for no other reason than both sides have a deep respect for Ms. Parks," Frederick Teba Jr., a lawyer for the family members, said Monday.

A pretrial conference is set for May 9 before Wayne County Probate Judge Freddie G. Burton Jr.

Parks' family members have said they started legal proceedings in December to protect her legacy in a fight for control of the legal rights to use Parks' name, photos and other yet-to-be-determined intellectual property that rises from her stature as an American civil rights icon.

In the legal complaint, lawyers alleged that Parks' longtime friend Elaine Steele, who handled her affairs, exerted undue influence over Parks.

"They said Parks was subjected to threats, misrepresentations and coercion to overpower her free will. They also said Parks was suffering from a mental condition that

caused her to not understand her estate and assets at the time the will was dated in 1998.

But an estate planning lawyer said Parks was in full control of her mental faculties when the will was signed in 1998.

"I think the allegations are totally without merit," Jon Gandelot told the Detroit Free Press. "I met with Mrs. Parks for a period of several hours, and there is no question that she was not under any mental incapacity. I questioned her at length, and she knew what she wanted."

Parks' relatives, all sons and daughters of Parks' brother, Sylvester, have said Steele and retired Detroit Judge Adam Shakoor have misused their aunt's name since she gave them control of

her affairs, about the same time she began suffering from dementia.

Parks died in October at age 92 in Detroit, where she had lived since 1957.

Relatives also have complained about Parks' representatives suing the Atlanta-based hip-hop duo OutKast and its record company for \$5 billion over the use of her name in a song. Parks, they said, would never have sued for such an outlandish sum.

Shakoor has said he and Steele sued OutKast because the song's lyrics are derisive to women, something that Parks would never allow in her presence.

The lawsuit was settled last year for an undisclosed amount.

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