

Forum

Motor-Voter bill unfair to minorities

Under the guise of increasing the number of persons registered to vote across the United States, there is a bill now pending in the Congress that would radically undermine the Voting Rights Act. This would be disastrous for millions of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans and others who are socioeconomically marginalized. The "Motor-Voter" bill S.874, sponsored by Senator Wendell Ford, Democrat of Kentucky, would require states to register eligible voters when they apply for a driver's license or renewal. It will also provide for systematic purging of current voters from voting registration rolls.

Everyone should be for increased voter participation in the nation, but not according to a law that would systematically discriminate against racial and ethnic communities, as well as the poor. Unfortunately, the House has already passed its version of the bill. Now, as the Congress rushes to complete the 1990 legislative agenda before adjournment for the November elections, the Senate may quickly vote in favor of the "Motor-Voter" bill.

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund states, "the National Voter Registration Act presents problems so severe to the civil rights community that its enactment should not be supported." The Legal Defense Fund warns that on the one hand, the passage of this bill would disproportionately register whites, middle and higher income individuals and on the other hand, disproportionately remove minority and low income voters from the rolls as a result of the onerous provisions of voter purging.

We must rally the supporters of voting rights and civil rights to immediately contact all 100 senators to urge their vote against the Motor-

Voter bill. We take exception to a recent New York Times editorial entitled "Motor-Voter Bill: Good for Democracy." The Times misstated the truth when it declared, "...90 percent of voting-age Americans drive" and

whatever reason (lost in the mail, etc.), the voter is placed in a state of suspended registration. The voter can only maintain his or her registration by appearing at the polling place during or before the next presidential



CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BENJAMIN CHAVIS JR.

that "Democracy will surely be expanded if the Senate swiftly rebuffs ill-considered opposition" to this bill.

As a result of the Republican amendments to the "Motor-Voter" bill authorizing unprecedented voter purging, this legislation is tantamount to institutionalized racism camouflaged in language and procedures that are supposed to increase voter participation but, in fact, discriminate under the cover of law.

For example, in the state of Louisiana about 31.3% of African-American households have no motor vehicles for household use. The disproportion in access to a motor vehicle is similar in other states. Although the bill also expands registration opportunities at other state agencies is not automatic, and thus still relies on the voter's initiative.

The bill, S.874 also targets subjectively voters for removal from the rolls, if a state determines that a registrant may have changed his or her residence. It includes no standards to govern how a state makes this determination. It then shifts the burden to the voter to rebut this assumption by receiving, reading, and understanding a letter and mailing back a postcard. If the postcard is not returned -- for

election with confirmation (which is undefined in the bill) of his or her address. Also, the bill does not limit the number of times a voter can be targeted for such a purge. This means that a state is authorized to engage in repeated, unlimited mail purges. Mailings could be sent on a yearly, monthly or even weekly basis, thus multiplying the opportunities for error and unfairness, asserts the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Congress should not be enacting federal legislation authorizing or requiring federal purges. State laws currently in full force and effect, govern purging practices. There has been no fact-finding that these states are inadequate.

Moreover, S.874 would supersede Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and authorize a system of purging voters which, in other instances, would violate Section 2.

Let's get the word out now before it is too late. Stop the "Motor-Voter" bill in the Senate. Ensure voting rights not for some, but for all.

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. is executive director of the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ.

Internal fighting aids continuation of racism

An Associated Press report out of South Africa last weekend says African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela and South African President F.W. deKlerk have concluded that a "hidden hand" is provoking the black vs. black fighting there in an effort to repress the movement to end apartheid.

The report quotes deKlerk as saying unidentified (white) groups are trying to sabotage the government's effort to end apartheid and draw up a new constitution free of racial discrimination.

In their book, "Black History for Beginners," Denise Dennis and Susan Willmarth remind us of a similar tactic used by slave owners in this country: "There were two groups of slaves -- those in the field and those in the main house. This created a hierarchy...Because they were closer to the 'massa,' house slaves weren't trusted by those in the field..."

"Dividing blacks and making them distrustful of one another was one way to maintain control."

It doesn't take an Einstein to see that the similarity in tactics is no coincidence.

Neither does it take an Einstein to look at blacks in America today and see that we are acting like house slaves and field slaves: We don't trust each other, we're envious of each other and, sadly, we seem oblivious to the truth that our worst

enemy is the person in the mirror.

I will be the first to agree that we are victims of a racist system in America, but racism is as effective

We can see these things from afar, but we fail to see that in our own country we are caught in the same trap by those proponents of



AGAINST THE GRAIN

By ROOSEVELT WILSON

as it is because we accommodate it. Because we are in danger of losing a generation of young black men to homicide, drugs, and the criminal justice system, it is easy for some of us to point a finger and say blacks are victims of a plot being orchestrated by white America.

That's a copout. Hitler couldn't eliminate the Jews with his more direct approach, and there is no force in this country, including the armed forces, powerful enough to eliminate black America.

We can look at South Africa today and see clearly that if the blacks pull together apartheid would end almost overnight. From afar we can see also that blacks fighting blacks is apartheid's biggest friend. Likewise, from afar we have been hoping South African blacks would stop fighting each other, so the negotiations to end apartheid can continue.

racism. Black-on-black crime in this country is out of control, black factionalism is the rule and the only beneficiaries of all this are those who prefer to maintain a racist system.

It is imperative that we stop turning on each other and turn to each other. It is imperative that we understand that distrust and envy are not inherent in our character, but are vestiges of the mentality created during slavery.

What our oppressors feared -- and fear -- most is our coming together and acting as one. They realize that what is inherent in our character is a bonding that is stronger than any system of oppression. It's a pity they realize and we don't.

Roosevelt Wilson teaches journalism at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Fla.

White House proposal a dumb idea

It's not often that Jesse Jackson's National Rainbow Coalition shares a common cause with the American Medical Association, the Industrial Biotechnology Association and the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association. But Jesse -- along with the leaders of those organizations and others, including the National Black Caucus of State Legislators and the National Black Nurses Association -- last month asked the Budget Summit negotiators not to balance the budget on the backs of the poor.

Apparently the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) decided money could be squeezed out of the Medicaid pro-

GUEST COLUMN

By OFIELD DUKES

gram by requiring pharmacists to switch patients' prescriptions to completely different drugs without the knowledge of the patients' physician. Under OMB's plan, pharmacists couldn't be held liable if patients were hurt because of the switch. It was a dumb idea, and OMB has asked the Department of Health and Human Services to come up with a better one.

But Medicaid's not off the hook yet. OMB got the idea from a bill introduced by Senator David Pryor of Arkansas that comes up for hearings on September 17. In

Pryor's bill, pharmacists have to call the doctor before they can switch drugs, which sounds fine if they can reach them. Alicia Georges of the Black Nurses Association points out that many Medicaid patients are treated by hospital emergency room physicians who are not always easy to get hold of. Meanwhile, the patient waits, and waits or returns to the hospital -- and waits some more -- to see a different physician, wasting another half a day.

Congress should find another place to save money.

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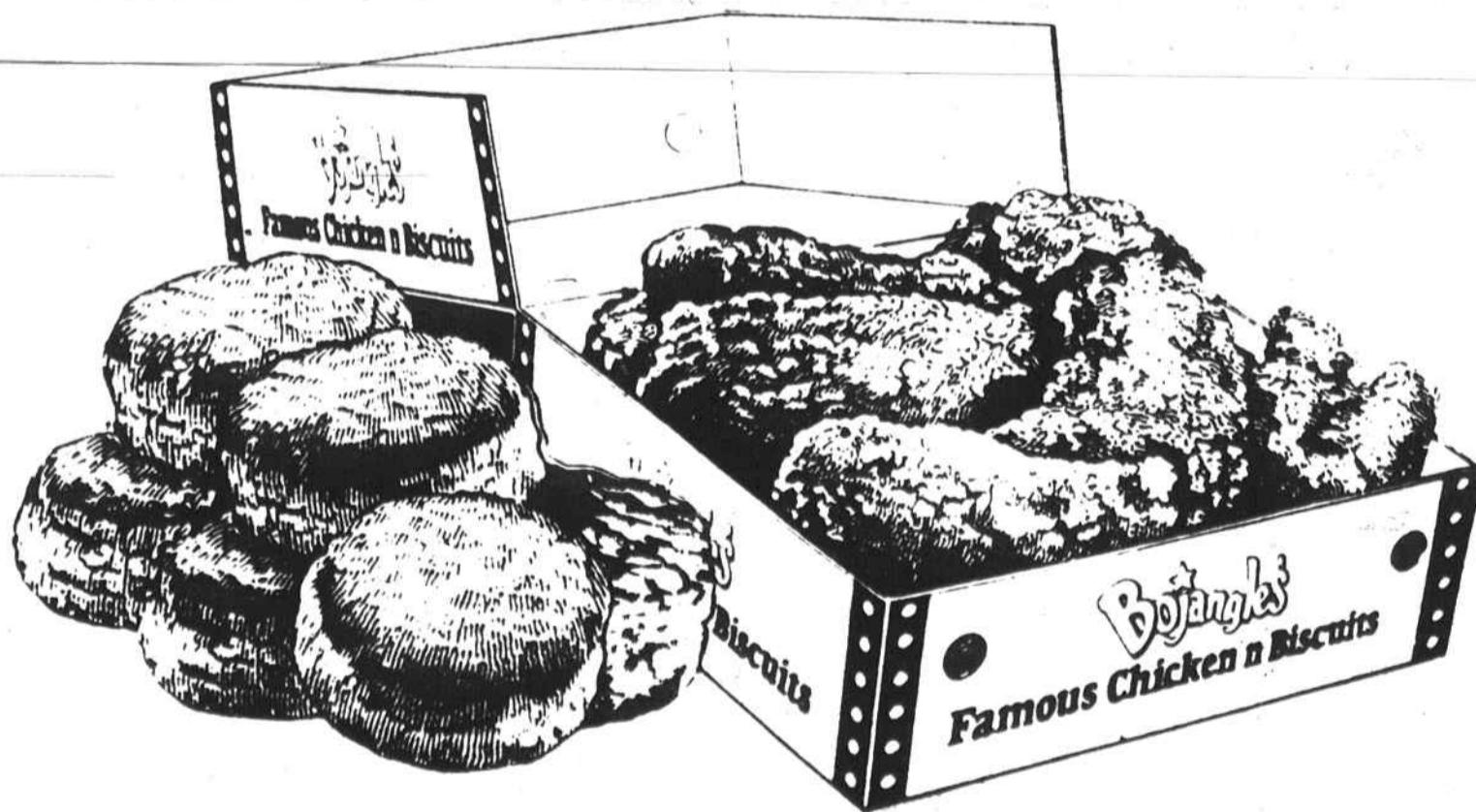
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