



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

February 26, 1982

Mr. Benjamin L. Hooks
Chairperson
Leadership Conference on
Civil Rights
2027 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Hooks:

I am writing in response to your letter of February 9, which was also signed by Mr. Neas. That letter concerned the position of certain civil rights groups during the past year on the question of extending the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

After President Reagan requested me to undertake a comprehensive review of the Act and to examine the need for any changes in it, I met personally with representatives from numerous civil rights groups to consider the pertinent issues. As I trust you will remember from the meetings you attended, the discussions focused on section 5 and the need to extend the special preclearance provisions applicable only to selected jurisdictions. Indeed, the statement was made on several occasions that section 5 is the Voting Rights Act. The question of amending section 2 as proposed in the bill which has passed the House did not figure in the discussions at all.

Indeed it is only recently that the significant issues concerning section 2 have begun to be critically examined. The issues in this area were not fully explored in the House. Several congressmen have expressed surprise upon being informed that the House bill did not simply extend the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act which were due to expire, but rather worked dramatic changes in the permanent provisions of section 2. Certainly nothing adduced during the House hearings justifies the dramatic amendment of section 2 in the House Bill.

It is my hope that the question of amending section 2 can be fully and dispassionately considered on the merits. The Voting Rights Act has been extremely successful. While there exists a need to extend it, the case has not been made for drastic changes in its permanent provisions.

Thank you for sharing your views with me.

Sincerely,

William French Smith
Attorney General