

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

MEDIA ADVISORY

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CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION FINDS DOJ VOTING RIGHTS OBJECTIONS HAVE DECLINED DRAMATICALLY

Commission offers a factual record for considering reauthorization of VRA's temporary provisions

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights today approved its watershed new report, “Voting Rights Enforcement and Reauthorization: The Department of Justice’s Record of Enforcing the Temporary Voting Rights Act Provisions.” As Congress determines whether to reauthorize the temporary provisions of the venerable Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Commission concludes that the Justice Department enforcement record demonstrates that the percentage of objectionable proposed voting changes has declined so steadily and dramatically as to have become vanishingly small.

The Commission’s study found that objections as a percentage of submitted changes from covered jurisdictions have declined markedly over 40 years to the point that during the last decade, objections have virtually disappeared. In particular, the study examined three legislative periods, 1965–1974, 1975–1982, and 1982–2004, and found that the proportion of objections to submitted changes decreased from 5.5 percent in the first period to 1.2 percent in the second, and to 0.6 percent in the third. Significantly, the ratio of objections to submitted changes was less than 0.1 percent in the period 1995–2004.

“It is significant that the Justice Department’s enforcement record has shown sharply diminishing activity over the last forty years during both Democratic and Republican Administrations. The percentage of objections interposed has become vanishingly small over the last decade,” said Gerald A. Reynolds, Commission Chairman.

The Commission passed the report at its May 4, 2006 meeting by a vote of five to two. Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chair Abigail Thernstrom and Commissioners Jennifer C. Braceras, Peter N. Kirsanow, and Ashley L. Taylor, Jr. voted in favor, while Commissioners Arlan D. Melendez and Michael Yaki voted against. The report includes a concurrence by Vice Chair Abigail Thernstrom and a dissent by Commissioners Arlan D. Melendez and Michael Yaki.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chairman Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Jennifer C. Braceras, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan D. Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, Jr. and Michael Yaki. Kenneth L. Marcus is Staff Director. Commission meetings are open to the media and general public.