

## Political Grab Bag

By Steve Bagby, Sr., Political Action Committee Chair

For March, this article will focus on **Voting Rights** and **Women's History Month!** **We must continue to stay alert, mindful and vigilant** as we watch what is unfolding in various states throughout the United States. There are forces that continue their efforts to impact our rights, including our right to vote. In light of the "sea change" evidenced in several states which resulted in the election of Democratic candidates Joseph R. Biden and Kamala Harris, many states have proposed legislation to further "restrict" the right to vote instead of proposing legislation that would "enable" citizens to vote in an easier manner. Per the *Brennan Center for Justice Report* ([brennancenter.org](https://www.brennancenter.org)), dated February 8<sup>th</sup> and updated on February 21, 2021, "the 2021 legislative sessions have begun in all but three states, and state lawmakers have introduced hundreds of bills aimed at election procedures and voter access — vastly exceeding the number of voting bills introduced by roughly this time last year." "In a backlash to historic voter turnout in the 2020 general election, and grounded in a rash of baseless . . . allegations of voter fraud and election irregularities, legislators have introduced **well over four times the number of bills to restrict voting** access as compared to roughly this time last year." As of "**February 19, 2021**, state lawmakers have carried over, pre-filed, or introduced **253 bills with provisions that restrict voting access in 43 states** . . . (as compared to 35 such bills in fifteen states on February 3, 2020)."

"With unprecedented numbers of voters casting their ballots by mail in 2020, legislators across the country have shown particular interest in absentee voting reform, with more than a quarter of voting and election bills addressing absentee voting procedures. . ." "Also in reaction to 2020, seven states have proposed legislation that would modify how presidential electors are allocated, and fourteen states have introduced bills to adopt the National Popular Vote [Interstate] Compact," which would change the current Electoral College procedures to compel member states to award their electoral votes to the winner of the nationwide popular vote." So far this year, of the **43 states** that have

introduced, pre-filed, or carried over **253 bills** to restrict voting access, “the proposals primarily seek to: (1) limit mail voting access; (2) impose stricter voter ID requirements; (3) slash voter registration opportunities; and (4) enable more aggressive voter roll purges. These bills are an unmistakable response to the unfounded and dangerous . . . [allegations] about fraud that followed the 2020 election. Arizona . . . and Georgia lead the nation in [the number of] proposed voter suppression legislation in 2021” . . . to date.

I thank **Dr. Lawrence Harkless** for bringing to my attention a February 28, 2021 article written by **Charles M. Blow**, Opinion Columnist for the *N.Y. Times* (*nytimes.com*) entitled, **“Voter Suppression is Grand Larceny: We are Watching Another Theft of Power”** wherein he states: “that when it comes to voter suppression, ignoble intentions are always draped in noble language. Those who seek to impede others from voting, in some cases to strip them of the right, often say that they are doing so to ensure the sanctity, integrity or purity of the vote. However, when the truth is laid bare, the defilement against which they rail is the voting power of the racial minority, the young -- in their eyes, naïve and liberally indoctrinated -- and the dyed-in-the-wool Democrats.” Blow references quotes from Republican officials in Georgia and Florida where he highlights how they refer to their new restrictive voting proposals as being needed to “restore the sanctity of the vote” or to “strengthen election integrity.” However, Blow states: “They can use all manner of euphemism to make it sound honorable, but it is not. This is an electoral fleecing in plain sight, one targeting people of color. We are watching another of history’s racist robberies. It’s grand larceny and, as usual, what is being stolen is power.” That indeed says it all!! We must do our part and our best to thwart them in their efforts!

### **“FOR THE PEOPLE ACT” (HR 1/SR 1) –**

On February 25, 2021, **Stacey Abrams**, founder of **“Fair Fight Action,”** an organization founded to address voter suppression, hosted **“A Virtual Conversation on Voting Rights”** with U.S. Senators **Mazie Hirono** of Hawaii, **Elizabeth Warren** of Massachusetts, and **Cory Booker** of New Jersey. This virtual event was brought to my attention by **Valerie McDonald**, whom I thank as it was quite informative. The event was described as a: “Discussion on the fight for voting rights as depicted in the film, **‘All In: the Fight for Democracy,’** and why we must pass the **“For the People Act,”** and the urgent need to act to safeguard our

democracy.” In the virtual conversation, each of the Senators expressed their dismay with the number of bills proposed to restrict voting rights. **Senator Warren** (Massachusetts) said: “It is time to make our voting . . . easy, convenient and professional.” In expressing the need for Congress to enact **HR 1/SR 1**, a bill entitled “**For the People Act**,” which, amongst other things, expands voter registration, voting access and limits removing voters from voter rolls, Senator Warren said that “we need a uniform set of rules, and voting is so precious and sacred, we need to follow these rules.” In making reference to the 253 bills in 43 state legislatures drafted to restrict the right to vote, **many of which were put forth after the November election**, Senator Warren said “that the Republicans are trying to keep folks from voting to advance their own agenda and we need to protect the right to vote and root out corruption.” She encouraged citizens to focus on **HR 1/SR 1** and to contact their elected officials to encourage them to support the bill which also requires, amongst other things, the disclosure of ten years of tax returns for those who want to run for President and Vice-President.

**Senator Booker** (New Jersey) said that “each state should **not** have [its] own rules. We should crave to be an inclusive democracy . . . a full and vibrant democracy.” “When the standards are violating the common standards, individual rules per state are problematic.” “We need federal standards.” He stated that “Congressman John Lewis was beaten in the fight for voting rights and if we want to honor him, we do it by getting voting rights back.” He also expressed concern that D.C. is not a state, and, thus, they have no formal representation in the House of Representatives or the Senate although its residents pay substantial taxes. In the House of Representatives, the District is represented by a *delegate*, who is not allowed to vote on the House floor but can vote on procedural matters and in Congressional Committees. D.C. residents have no representation in the Senate. ([govtrack.us](http://govtrack.us)) Senator Booker thinks this whole process should change and that D.C. should be granted statehood.

**Senator Hirono** (Hawaii) stated that: “Voting is a habit,” and that we have to get in the habit of consistently voting whenever there is an election. She said that in Hawaii, “16 year olds can register to vote as long as they will be 18 when it is time to vote,” and that “16 year olds can work in the polls,” which helps to get them familiar with and sensitized earlier to the voting process/procedures. While referencing the number of states that have put forth bills to restrict the vote, she indicated that she definitely supported the “**For the People Act**.” In addition to

the voting rights issues, Senator Hirono also expressed concern **about the gerrymandering that will be taking place** following the federal census . . . [i.e.,] **the once in a decade redrawing of congressional districts**, which is a highly partisan affair typically controlled by state legislatures, and since Republicans control a majority of the state houses, that fact, coupled with the restrictive voting bills, could be problematic for the Democrats in the 2022 midterm elections. **HR 1/SR 1** would require that boundaries be drawn by independent commissions. She encouraged citizens to be “very grassroots oriented” and referenced how “young people need to get involved in the pipeline.”

The “**For the People Act**” was passed by the House of Representatives on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. It will now go forward to the Senate where it will likely require some Republican support to prevail, which in this current political climate may be difficult to obtain since Republicans are intent on making voting more difficult than less difficult. However, per the rallying cry of Senator Warren, we must do our part and make sure that we contact our Senators to encourage them to use their best arguments and negotiating skills to speak with their counterparts to ensure that the Act passes.

#### **VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965 --Argument Before the U. S. Supreme Court -**

On Tuesday, March 2, 2021, the U. S. Supreme Court heard what has been described as “one of its most important election cases in almost a decade, one that will determine what sort of judicial scrutiny [various voter restrictions laws] will face”-- Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee, which was consolidated with another case, Arizona Republican Party vs. Democratic National Committee for Tuesday’s argument. (N.Y. Times, nytimes.com, 2/28/21) Both Brnovich and Arizona Republican Party center on a crucial remaining provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Section 2, which prohibits voting practices that discriminate on the basis of race. “Civil rights groups are nervous that the court, now with a six-justice conservative majority, will use the opportunity to render that provision, Section 2, toothless.” Section 2 bars any voting procedure that “results in a denial or abridgment of the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race.” That happens, the provision goes on, when, “based on the totality of circumstances,” racial minorities “have less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choice.”

“Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act has taken on greater importance in election disputes since 2013, when the court in Shelby County v. Holder, effectively struck down the heart of the 1965 Voting Rights law, Section 5, which required prior federal approval of changes to voting procedures in parts of the country with a history of racial and other discrimination.” In writing for the majority, Chief Justice John G. Roberts’s opinion in the 5-to-4 decision said that “Section 2 would remain in place to protect voting rights by allowing litigation after the fact.” After Shelby County, the Supreme Court has never considered how Section 2 applies to voting restrictions until the current case before it, Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee. This case was filed by the Democratic National Committee in 2016 to challenge voting restrictions in Arizona. This Arizona case concerns two kinds of voting restrictions. One requires election officials to discard ballots cast at the wrong precinct. The other makes it a crime for campaign workers, community activists and most other people to collect ballots for delivery to polling places, a practice critics call “ballot harvesting.” The law makes exceptions for family members, caregivers and election officials. Since Shelby County rendered Section 5 unenforceable, Arizona was freed from the pre-clearance requirement, leaving Section 2 as one of the most powerful tools to challenge discriminatory vote-dilution schemes and voting policies, albeit after the fact. (*businessinsider.com*, 3/2/21) Lawyers for civil rights groups said “they hoped the justices would not use the case to chip away at the protections offered by Section 2.” “It would be just really out of step for what this country needs right now for the Supreme Court to weaken or limit Section 2,” said **Myrna Pérez**, a lawyer with the Brennan Center for Justice, which submitted a brief in support of the DNC. **Leigh Chapman**, a lawyer with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, which also filed a brief in support of the DNC, said the Supreme Court faced a crossroad. “Especially in the absence of Section 5,” she said, “Section 2 plays an essential role in advancing the federal commitment to protecting minority voters and ensuring that they have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.” (*nytimes.com*) “The stakes of this decision are elevated by lawmakers in . . . [numerous] states introducing . . . [hundreds] of bills aimed at restricting voting in [the] 2021 legislative sessions. Many of those bills have been filed in battleground states like Arizona, which President Joe Biden won in November by a margin of only .3% of the total votes.” (*businessinsider.com*) We need to all follow these cases very closely . . . we hope the Supreme Court does not completely gut the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In fact, “a second bill, [in

addition to the **“For the People Act,”**] named after the late Congressman John Lewis of Georgia [the **John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act**, which was previously passed by the House in 2019, but will have to be reintroduced in the current session of Congress], would restore key provisions of the Voting Rights Act that the Supreme Court struck down in 2013. [It would bring back the requirement in the Voting Rights Act that certain states must pre-clear certain changes to their voting laws with the federal government.] The House is expected to pass that bill in the spring.” (*L.A. Times* 3/4/21) Let us continue to advocate for its passage.

### **WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH –**

Per the article entitled, **“Celebrating Black Women Pioneers and Their Many Historic Firsts,”** by **A. Woods** (*NewsOne.com*, 3/1/21) and the article entitled **“Black Women to Celebrate. . . ”** by **Tai Gooden** (*Nerdist.com*, 2/11/21): “The month of March is recognized as **Women’s History Month** and is dedicated to the celebration of everyday women, as well as pillars and pioneers whose accomplishments have allowed for following generations to feel empowered to constantly break barriers.” “The month-long celebration of women dates back to 1980 when **former President Jimmy Carter** issued the first Proclamation, which declared the week of March 8, 1980 as National Women’s History Week, according to the National Women’s History Museum.” Per the Black Women’s Agenda (*bwa-inc.org*) “[b]y 1986, 14 states had already declared March as Women’s History Month. This momentum and state-by-state action was used as the rationale to lobby Congress to declare the entire month of March as National Women’s History Month. In 1987, Congress declared March as National Women’s History Month in perpetuity. A special Presidential Proclamation is issued every year which honors the extraordinary achievements of American women.”

**Black women have been extremely accomplished for centuries and *NewsOne*, *Nerdist* and the *L.A. Times* highlight some of these women and their feats.** Here is a list of a few Black women pioneers in history and present-day . . . **in no particular order:**

**\*Kamala Harris - First Black Woman and first woman** to be elected Vice President of the United States, January, 2021. Kamala Harris served as the **first woman** and

**first Black** District Attorney in San Francisco, 2004. She was the **first woman** and **first Black** Attorney General for California, 2011. She was also the **first Black woman** to represent California in the United States Senate, 2017.

**\*Stacey Abrams - First Black Woman** to be a Major Party Nominee for State Governor, 2018. She has been **nominated for a 2021 Nobel Peace Prize** for her voting rights activism. Ms. Abrams, who played a critical role in helping to register thousands of voters for the 2020 presidential election and Senate runoff election in Georgia, is **being nominated for her work to “promote nonviolent change via the ballot box.” “Abrams’ work follows in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s footsteps in the fight for equality before the law and for civil rights,”** said Lars Haltbrekken, a member of Norway’s Parliament who nominated her for the Prize.

**\*Juanita Millender McDonald** (Our late treasured member) - **First Black Woman** to Chair the U.S. House Administration Committee, 2006, as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives for California’s 37<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. Prior to her tenure in Congress, she served in the California State Assembly and prior to that, she was the **first Black woman** elected to the Carson City Council where she also served as Mayor Pro Tempore. Considered “[a] **fast-rising star in California politics,** Juanita Millender-McDonald won her seat in the U.S. House of Representatives just six years after capturing her first elected office.”  
(*history.house.gov*)

**\*Barbara Jordan - First Black Woman** elected to Congress from the South, 1972

**\*Yvonne Braithwaite Burke – First Black Woman** elected as a California Assemblywoman, 1966. She was the **first Black woman** elected to Congress from California, 1973. She was also the **first Black woman** elected as a Los Angeles County Supervisor, 1992, where she later became the **first Black woman** to chair the Board of Supervisors.

**\*Ever Lee Hairston** (Our own member) – **First Black Woman** President of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of California, 2009. She was the **first Black woman** elected to the NFB Board of Directors, 2010. She was the **Founder** of the Delaware Valley Chapter of the Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, Inc. (Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania), 1980. She was the **Founder and President** of the Garden State Chapter of the NFB of New Jersey, 1991.

**\*Jennifer King - First Black Woman** National Football League Coach, 2021

**\*Oprah Winfrey - First Black Woman** Billionaire, 2003, Media Mogul

**\*Mariya Russell - First Black Woman** Chef to earn a Michelin Star, 2019

**\*Mae C. Jemison - First Black Woman** Astronaut who traveled into space, 1992, on the **Space Shuttle “Endeavour.”** In the February 25, 2021 African American History Month Storytime program, excellently coordinated by our own **Nailah Malik** and presented by the Washington Irving Branch Library, children and youth from Second Baptist Church read books about African American heroes or books that were written or illustrated by African Americans. One such book about Dr. Mae Jemison's childhood was read by our high school junior and Howard University-bound student **Anayah Hayes**. Anayah read ***“Mae Among the Stars,”*** written by Roda Ahmed and illustrated by Stasia Burrington, 2018. **Dr. Jemison has written seven books**, including a book about her own fascinating life entitled, ***“Find Where the Wind Goes: Moments from my Life.”*** The second edition of this autobiography was just released on February 23, 2021.

**\*Mary W. Jackson - First Black Woman** Engineer for NASA, 1958. On February 26, 2021, the Headquarters in Washington, D.C. was officially renamed the **“Mary W. Jackson NASA Headquarters.”** The work of Ms. Jackson and others in the Computing Unit of NASA caught widespread national attention in the 2016 Margot Lee Shetterly book ***“Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race”*** and later the popular movie that same year. In 2019, Jackson and fellow “Hidden Figures” **Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Christine Darden** were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal – the highest civilian award – for their significant and historic work in aerospace. **Our own late member Daisy Alston**, (mother of **Howard Alston, Jr.**) also utilized her BS Degree in Mathematics to advance the space program by working at NASA for 30 years as a Data Analyst/Aerospace Technologist.

**\*Bessie Coleman - First Black Woman** Pilot, 1921

**\*Hattie McDaniel - First Black Woman** to win an Academy Award, Best Supporting Actress, 1939, for her role in ***“Gone with the Wind.”*** **Our own Vickilyn**



**Reynolds** wrote and performed an outstanding one woman musical journey depicting the life of Hattie McDaniel in “**Hattie McDaniel: What I Need You to Know.**” Vickilyn portrayed the life of the Academy Award Winner extremely well!

**\*Whoopi Goldberg - First Black Woman** to win Four Awards . . . an Academy Award, Emmy, Grammy and Tony (Academy Award, 1990), (Emmy, 2002 & 2009), (Grammy, 1985) and (Tony, 2002)

**\*Alice Coachman - First Black Woman** to win an Olympic Gold Medal in the High Jump, 1948. She was also the **first Black woman** to become a Coca-Cola spokesperson, which put her on the billboards alongside Jesse Owens.

**\*Rebecca Lee Crumpler - First Black Woman** to become a Doctor of Medicine in the U.S., 1864

**\*Madam C. J. Walker - First Black Woman** Millionaire, 1919, Entrepreneur

**\*Serena Williams - First Black Woman** to win a Career Grand Slam in Tennis, 1999

**\*Loretta Lynch - First Black Woman** to be U.S. Attorney General, 2015

**\*Stacye Harris – First Black Woman** Air Force Lieutenant General, 2016

**\*Christina Hopper – First Black Woman** Fighter Pilot to fly in wartime, deployed to Iraq, flying missions out of Kuwait, 2002

**\*Jane Bolin – First Black Woman to:** 1) graduate from Yale Law School, 2) join the New York City (NYC) Bar Association, 3) join the NYC Law Department, and 4) become a judge in the United States. Bolin took office in 1939 on the NYC Domestic Relations Court. (She was highlighted in the Association of Black City Attorneys’ Newsletter that was referenced in the February Political Grab Bag.)

**\*Dianne Durham – First Black Woman** to win a United States Gymnastics National Championship, 1983.

**\*Ida Grey Hampton -- First Black Deaf Woman** to graduate from *Gallaudet University*, 1957, the only liberal arts college specifically for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, founded in 1864.

**\*Barbara Johns – First Black teenage** civil rights activist whose statute is poised to take the place of the statute of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in the U.S. Capitol, which was removed just weeks before the January 6, 2021 insurrection. Barbara Johns is a Black girl who in 1951, at the age of 16, led her classmates in a strike over unequal conditions at Moton High, a segregated High School in Farmville, Virginia, which drew the attention of civil rights attorneys of the NAACP. The attorneys filed a federal case that became one of five cases that the Supreme Court reviewed in the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision, which declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional. (*L.A. Times*, 2/27/21)

**\*Dr. Kizzmekia “Kizzy” Corbett – First Black Woman** expert immunologist and leading scientists who was part of the team at the National Institutes of Health who worked on the Moderna vaccine, one of the vaccines that could help end the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020. (*L.A. Times*, 2/ 27/21)

During this **Women’s History Month**, I also want to acknowledge, as a collective group, **all of the wonderful women at Second Baptist Church** who are in leadership positions and those who, whether they have an official title or not, are working very hard in various capacities to keep the church moving forward, to keep the congregation together, to keep us spiritually involved and grounded, to keep our radio ministry in the forefront and to keep us all informed via newsletters, articles, special programs, the website, Zoom, email, Facebook and other forms of social media. We are blessed to have such talented and self-less women in our congregation and on staff, and we want to extend our thanks to all of you at this time. May the Lord continue to richly bless you as you are all indeed our treasured and valued members! Of course we never discount the contributions of our dynamic and capable men, so we thank all of you for your efforts as well. We are indeed a team!!

As I close, in reflecting on the voting rights theme of this article, I want to acknowledge the passing on March 1, 2021, of another noted civil rights leader, Vernon Jordan, Jr. Vernon Jordan was in a position of leadership in several organizations and had the ear of and access to many leaders . . . “he was a key campaign advisor to Bill Clinton during his first presidential campaign and co-

chaired Clinton's transition team . . . he was the first Black person to be assigned such a role." (*L.A. Times 3/3/21*) His life's work focused on many issues relating to civil rights as the **Georgia Field Secretary for the NAACP** and as the **Executive Director of the United Negro College Fund** . . . voter registration was one issue on which he focused. As the **Director of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council**, "millions of new Black voters were registered and hundreds were elected in the South." As the first lawyer **to head the National Urban League as President and CEO**, he broadened its "focus to include voter registration and conflict resolution between Blacks . . . and law enforcement." In commenting on the impact of Mr. Jordan, Stacey Abrams said that Vernon Jordan "battled the demons of voter suppression and racial degradation, winning more than he lost. He brought others with him . . . and left a map so more could find their way." (*L.A. Times 3/3/21*) What a testament to the life of this accomplished man! Vernon Jordan left a map for Stacey Abrams and others to find their way so as to keep advocating for our rights, including our right to vote . . . outstanding!!! As stated by the late Congressman John Lewis in 2018: **"Your vote matters. If it didn't, why would some people keep trying to take it away?"** Let us continue to advocate for our right to participate, without restriction, in the political process through our vote, as we remember and honor those who worked so diligently to pave the way!!

Thank you for reading!

(March 2021)