

VOTER REGISTRATION IN LOUISIANA PARISHES

LOUISIANA ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TO THE UNITED STATES
COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

This summary report of the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights was prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. Statements and viewpoints in the report should not be attributed to the Commission or to the Advisory Committee, but only to individual participants in the community forum where the information was gathered.

A SUMMARY REPORT

DECEMBER 1989

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and reestablished by the United States Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983, is an independent, bipartisan agency of the Federal Government. By the terms of the Act, the Commission is charged with the following duties pertaining to discrimination or denials of equal protection based on race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, or national origin, or in the administration of justice: investigation of individual with respect to discrimination or denials of equal protection; the appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to discrimination or denials of equal protection; the maintenance of a national clearinghouse for information respecting discrimination or denials of equal protection; and the investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

THE STATE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

An Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia pursuant to section 105(c) of the Civil Rights Act 1957 and section 6(c) of the United States Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983. The Advisory Committees are made up of responsible persons who serve without compensation. Their functions under their mandate from the Commission are to advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective States on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission; advise the Commission on matters of mutual concern in the preparation of reports of the Commission to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public and private organizations, and public officials upon matters pertinent to inquiries conducted by the State Advisory Committee; initiate and forward advice and recommendations to the Commission upon matters in which the Commission shall request the assistance of the State Advisory Committee; and attend, as observers, any open hearing or conference which the Commission may hold within the State.

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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Attached is a summary report of information received at a community forum conducted on May 12, 1989, by the Louisiana Advisory Committee in Baton Rouge on voter registration procedures in Louisiana parishes. By a vote of 11 to 0 the Committee approved submission of this report to you with the request that you authorize publication. It is hoped that the information provided will be of assistance to the Commission in its program planning.

Participants provided information and personal observations from a variety of perspectives on current voter registration procedures and proposed legislative changes. Though information received at the forum did not enable a comprehensive assessment of the Louisiana voter registration system, it did highlight issues which the Committee will continue to monitor.

/s/

Michael Fontham, Chairperson
Louisiana Advisory Committee

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Introduction

In keeping with its responsibility to monitor developments in the State, the Louisiana Advisory Committee conducted a community forum in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on May 12, 1989, to gather information on voter registration and voter-roll purging procedures in Louisiana parishes. Government officials, legislators, voter registrars, and representatives from political parties and community organizations made presentations to the Committee. An open session provided opportunity for the general public to participate. A summary of the information received at the forum is presented in this report.

Persons who participated in the forum were Cynthia Rougeau, a representative for the Governor's office and special counsel to the secretary of State; Jerry Fowler, commissioner of elections; Emile Bruneau, Joe Accardo, and Roy Brun, all State representatives; James Brady, chair of the Louisiana Democratic Party; Marcus Carson, director of the Louisiana Coalition on Voter Reform; Robin Rothrock, president of the Louisiana League of Women Voters; Ernest Johnson, general counsel for the Louisiana NAACP; Nathaniel Bankston, voter registrar for East Baton Rouge Parish; Louis Keller, voter registrar for Orleans Parish; Barbara Bates, voter registrar for St. Helena Parish; and Robert Poche, voter registrar for Ascension Parish.

As shown in a 1988 report of registered voters compiled by the Louisiana Department of Elections and Registration (appendix A), the State is divided into 64 parishes with a total of 2,190,634 registered voters, of which 572,133 (26.1 percent) are black. According to the 1980 census, 29.4 percent of the State's total population was black.

The Louisiana Election Code (R.S. Title 18 as amended through 1988) provides for a registrar of voters in each parish who is appointed by the governing body of the parish. Such appointments are for life and registrars can only be removed from office by vote of the State Board of Election Supervisors. In May 1989, at the time of the Advisory Committee's forum, all applicants for voter registration were required to appear personally before the registrar or deputy registrar of the parish at a designated place of registration. Subsequent to the forum, the State legislature, in July 1989 at its regular session, passed three bills affecting voter registration. H.B. 292 permits citizens to register to vote in State offices when they renew their driver's licenses, and H.B. 259 permits the use of volunteer deputy registrars when they are directly supervised by the voter registrar or the deputy registrar. H.B. 191 requires an annual canvass of the registration rolls to verify the residence eligibility of voters, whereas previously this was done every 4 years.

The Perspective of the Governor's Office

Cynthia Rougeau, special counsel to the Secretary of State, represented the Governor's office at the community forum. She explained that the Secretary of State is the chief elections officer of the State and works very closely with the Governor's office, the commissioner of elections, and local election officials. She reported that the Governor believes that fair and equal access to voter registration and voting are essential, and that the process must be opened up to increase voter registration, participation, and turn out. In this regard, she said that he supports pending legislation that provides for the use of volunteer deputy registrars who would be instructed by and act under the supervision of the registrar of voters. She noted that this legislation is

controversial and would involve working closely with election officials to make sure the program works. She said that the Governor also supports House Bill 1118, which would provide for voter registration at driver's license bureaus, despite financial problems involved with the necessary increase in the staffs of these bureaus.

Ms. Rougeau said the Governor is still studying H.B. 1115, which provides for mail registration, and that he recognizes problems in dealing with alternative methods of registration, such as possibilities for fraud and the mishandling of registration applications by volunteers. In summary, she stated that the Governor's objectives are to make voter registration easier and more accessible, to maintain the integrity of the elections process while doing so, and to encourage and inform an involved electorate.

In response to a question from the Advisory Committee, Ms. Rougeau replied that she did not know of specific problems involving widespread discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws regarding the privilege of voting because of race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, or national origin. She believed the registration process is currently open to all qualified voters, though perhaps not as open to all qualified applicants as it could be, and that the attitude of Governor Roemer will result in opening up the process.

The Perspective of the Department of Elections and Registration

Jerry Fowler, commissioner of the Louisiana Department of Elections and Registration, explained that he is an elected official and that the registrar of voter offices in each parish are under the supervision of his department as well as that of the police juries or local governing bodies

of each parish. The parish governments, he said, hire the registrars of voters and pay half of their salaries, the other half being paid by his department.

Mr. Fowler felt that some progress had been made in expanding voter registration but that the task has not been, and never will be, completed. Increased office hours and registration drives have been established in every parish with varying success. Such changes in procedures, he said, require approval by the U.S. Department of Justice and are sometimes cumbersome. He felt that overall the voter registration system is a good one, though it does have some weaknesses. As an example he cited the long distances people in some northern Louisiana rural parishes have to travel in order to register. He advocated a system that would allow all citizens an opportunity to register in the community where they live.

He pointed with pride to Louisiana's computer system which centralized voter registration throughout the State, a first in the United States. As a result, he said, Louisiana has cleaner voter rolls and more accurate data for voter registration. Mr. Fowler advocates easier ways for people to register to vote though, because of problems entailed, he doesn't agree with all the bills that have been proposed to accomplish this. He said that, for example, in other States that have registration by mail, 7 out of 10 of the cards received are illegible. He did support a bill for the use of volunteers. He said also that in opening up the registration process he felt that the system is strong enough to guard against fraudulent practices, and he did not know of any widespread discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws because of race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, or national origin.

Mr. Fowler explained that every 4 years voter registration rolls are purged of persons who have not voted during that period. In addition, one-fourth of the rolls are canvassed each year during the month of January to purge those persons who have moved out of the parish. He reported that in some of the smaller parishes, for political reasons, the police juries do not provide the required money to make the purges. Mr. Fowler said his goal was to avoid this by paying for the purges out of his office, but that this would cost the State \$350,000 - \$400,000. He reported that approximately 70 percent of eligible voters in the State are registered, and that 89 percent of the eligible voters aged 55-70 voted in the last presidential election, compared to 37 percent in the 18-25 age group.

The Perspective of State Legislators

State Representative Emile Bruneau, chairman of the House Governmental Affairs Committee, believed that Louisiana has a voter registration system that works well, and that it is easy to register to vote. In answer to a question from the Committee, he said that he knew of no widespread discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws regarding the privilege of voting because of race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, or national origin. He felt, however, that there is room for improvement and referred to H.B. 191, currently before the legislature, which provides for an annual canvass and would do away with the requirement to vote every 4 years. He thought bills submitted by what he termed the Voluntary Deputy Registrar Movement would provide opportunity for fraudulent practices, as had occurred in the 1979 gubernatorial elections and on other occasions. He said that he had presented a compromise bill that would permit the use of volunteer deputy registrars but require that they operate under the supervision of the registrar. This would enable more frequent voter

registration drives in schools and shopping centers, which he favored. He explained further that his bill would assure training for volunteer deputies, require direct supervision of their work by the registrar, provide criminal penalties for fraud, and provide for the selection of volunteers on an annual basis. This bill, he hoped, would enable volunteers to make a contribution to government but stop those who intended to perpetrate a fraud.

State Representative Joe Accardo, a member and former chairman of the House Governmental Affairs Committee, believed that Louisiana has the best election code in the country, and that there were no more corrupt officials in Louisiana than in any other State. He pointed out that in the 1979 gubernatorial election referred to earlier there was no finding of fraud as a result of the lawsuits and investigations that followed. He did not believe that the bills offered in the current legislative session would infringe upon the integrity of the election process. He felt that the voluntary deputy registrars bill that he had introduced had all the safeguards necessary, including all of those required for paid deputy registrars. The number of volunteers to be used, he said, would be determined by the registrar and their names drawn out of a hat. This would provide help that is not now available from the State or local government, would not cost the State any money, and would enable more frequent registration drives at various locations in the community.

Representative Accardo also described a bill that he had sponsored to allow citizens to register by post card on a notarized form. Verification of the applicant's identity would be by driver's license or other I.D. and a card mailed to the registrant's address. A third bill would allow voter

registration at the same time a driver's license is reviewed. The statewide computer network would preclude registration in multiple places, he said. He stated his belief that these three bills would not make it any easier for fraud to be committed. Reform of the law in the manner described, Mr. Accardo felt would open up the registration process, make it more convenient, and reduce the number of people in the State who are not presently registered to vote.

Representative Accardo did not believe that there was any conscious plan to deny people the right to vote because of race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, or national origin, but felt that the process is inconvenient and discriminates against the poor and uneducated, the large majority of whom are black. He believed that because it is made more difficult to register, those who are less mobile or less educated don't get to register to vote because they are intimidated by the process of having to go to a court house or public building. Many people, he said, do not have automobiles, or cannot afford to pay for transportation to register.

In response to a question as to what safeguards there would be in the proposed new provisions for voter registration to prevent illegal aliens from registering, Mr. Accardo replied that evidence of citizenship and residency would be required as it is now. In the case of post card registration, the notaries would be required to verify the identity of the person under penalty of losing their licenses. He said that misrepresentation of citizenship would be considered election fraud with significant penalties under the election code.

State Representative Roy Brun did not believe that present procedures had resulted in the erection of barriers to people exercising their right to vote in Louisiana. His concern with regard to additions to the

registration and voting process was for the possibility of politicizing the registrar's office and the risk of additional fraud and deception. The State, he said, has a history of voter fraud, and he pointed as an example to prosecutions from a congressional race in the fourth district that resulted in over 20 people being convicted of election fraud.

Mr. Brun expressed his concern that, though the proposed bill for the use of volunteer deputy registrars has safeguards to prevent politicization, there are many opportunities for revision of the bill in both the House and the Senate. He thought that there was a risk that people would volunteer to be deputy registrars to serve a political agenda, or to support a particular candidate or political party. He pointed out that this philosophy pervades both parties, and that both parties have registration drives, each choosing precincts that would help them most. The risk would be that political controversy would be brought into the registrar's office. He thought that some people might be hired by a candidate to become volunteer deputies in the same manner they are hired to haul people to the polls. Registration by mail, he felt, would open up the possibility of vote buying and for registering more than once.

Mr. Brun said that persons who are physically handicapped, and people to whom present procedures presented barriers to voter registration, are a relatively small percentage of the total number of those not registered, and that most of these have determined not to register to vote. It is the people who do not care enough to register to vote, he said, that are most susceptible to having their vote purchased. He felt that more could be done in the way of encouraging registrars to provide registration opportunities throughout the parishes, as is done extensively in Caddo Parish, but that many parishes already do provide such opportunities. He

said further that he would be concerned about any persons who might be denied the right to vote, or who encountered undue hardships in registering or voting.

The Perspective of the Louisiana Democratic Party

Darryl Gissell, executive director of the Louisiana Republican Party, was scheduled to make a presentation to the Advisory Committee at the forum, but was called away on business and was unable to do so. James Brady, chair of the Louisiana Democratic Party, believed that Louisiana has a real problem with voter registration that other States do not have. He was encouraged that bills before the legislature proposing changes to eliminate problems have gotten bipartisan support this year.

He said that in the past voter purges by affidavit have been a problem. Though he did not elaborate, he said that a serious incident in 1986, involving purging by affidavit and a blatant attempt to discriminate by persons engaged in a political campaign, affected several thousand people. A bill before the legislature this year would correct that problem.

Mr. Brady said the basic philosophy of his party is that it should be very easy to register, whether it increases participation or not. He felt that proposals to allow registration at driver's license bureaus and the use of volunteer deputy registrars would remove some of the present barriers. His party is on the record supporting these bills.

Mr. Brady provided current voter registration statistics based on census estimates for 1986 as follows:

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Total Population*</u>	<u>Number Registered*</u>	<u>Percent Registered</u>
18-34	1,300	799	61.5
35-44	576	453	78.6
45-54	392	316	80.6
55-64	359	282	78.6
65+	454	354	80.0
Total	3,081	2,204	71.5

*In thousands

When questioned as to what barriers there were to registering, Mr. Brady said that people are less inclined to register if they cannot conveniently get off from work to do so, or would lose pay if they did. This was particularly a problem in rural areas, where people live some distance from the parish seat. He felt, however, that the majority of registrars were supportive of efforts to make it easy to register to vote, but were restricted by statute or financial constraints in what they could do to make it easier.

In response to a question, Mr. Brady estimated that a disparity exists between the proportion of black and white registered voters of about 10 percent but would not speculate as to how much of this related to inaccessibility to voter registration. Complaints received by his office attest to the fact that there are still problems of access to the registrar of voters in a number of areas of the State. He said, however, that though there are subtle ways to discriminate, the last he had heard of someone being denied the opportunity to register, once they made it to the registrar, occurred in the early 1970s. Mr. Brady said that, though he didn't know whether it would be constitutional or not, he personally would be in favor of mandatory registration but that this would not be practical.

The Perspective of Community Organizations

Marcus Carson, director of the Coalition on Voter Registration Reform, said that, though everyone would agree that voter registration is meant

primarily to ensure the integrity of the voting process, we often get mired in the intricacies of how it is done and lose track of the purpose for the whole thing. He said that though voter registration lists may be used for a variety of things, such as jury selection, its purpose is not to serve as a test of motivation, education, transportation, work schedules, or anything other than to guarantee the integrity of the voting process. He felt that many of these other items become barriers whether they were placed there intentionally or not, and he pointed out that systems used in other States and other counties have removed many of those barriers. He believed that there is no reason why some of these systems could not be put into place in Louisiana.

In response to a suggestion that voter registration tends to be high in countries with very repressive governments, Mr. Carson reported that in nonrepressive governments, such as Australia, voter participation is at 94 percent, in Austria 92 percent, Denmark 88 percent, New Zealand 85 percent, Norway 81 percent, Sweden 89 percent, and West Germany 89 percent. He said that the governments in these countries use more active methods to register their voters than is done in this country. For example, in Sweden people are registered automatically through use of their social security number system, in England people who are not registered are sought out, and in New Zealand and Australia voter registration is a legal requirement. Yet in the United States, he said, voter registration is unnecessarily difficult, and prospective voters must actively seek out the voter registration system.

Mr. Carson said that the most frequent argument against improving the voter registration system in Louisiana is the spectre of fraud. He pointed out that some examples of fraud which have been used as argument refer to election fraud and have nothing to do with voter registration. He said,

for example, that vote buying and voter hauling are all done after the fact of registration.

He reported that a mail-in system, similar to one that has been proposed for Louisiana, is used successfully in 27 States and that the driver's license office registration procedure actually addresses many of the concerns raised about potential abuses of the registration system. Efforts by individuals and organizations to actively seek to register their own constituents, he felt, was a healthy part of a free, competitive democracy.

He believed that voter registration in conjunction with obtaining a driver's license, where positive identification of the applicant is required, would ensure against fraudulent registration, increase convenience, and alleviate the large influx of registrants just prior to elections. With regard to the suggestion that mail-in registration would require the additional inconvenience of using a notary public, Mr. Carson was convinced that this service would be offered as a public service by libraries, banks, and other places of business.

In response to a question as to what impact an increase in the number of registered voters would have on the percentage of people who actually vote, Mr. Carson speculated that if more people registered there would be a corresponding increase in the eligible voting population who actually vote. He agreed that there should also be an effort made to get people who are registered out to vote on election day. He said that, though there will always be people who actively choose not to register to vote for religious or other reasons, he estimated that registration rates would approach 90 percent or better with the added convenience of using driver's license offices.

In response to a question as to the possibility that discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, age, handicap, or national origin was a factor in keeping people from voting, Mr. Carson said that the system discriminates against people primarily on the basis of income and education, categories which include a high percentage of blacks and other minorities. He believed that discrimination does exist, but that inconvenience and difficulty in gaining access to the system and actual discrimination form a continuum, so that it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two. He agreed that problems he saw with the voter registration system do not fit cleanly into categories of discrimination that would be actionable under the Federal civil rights act. He did not believe that the present voter registration system was designed to exclude any category of people from registering, and he had heard no one complain of being discriminated against by the system.

Robin Rothrock, president of the Louisiana League of Women Voters (LWV), reported that her organization has been seriously involved in voter registration reform since its beginning in 1943. She said that its position is to support equitable registration and election laws that protect the right of every citizen to vote. At its first convention the LWV adopted a program to reform registration laws in Louisiana. This program, she said, has had many successes and few failures so that Louisiana does indeed have some good laws on the books. She enumerated some of the changes that have taken place. Due in part, she felt, to the efforts of the league, permanent registration has replaced the requirement to register every 4 years, and State residency requirements were reduced from 2 years to 1 year and then eliminated altogether. The registration application has been simplified considerably and questions referring to the

registrants' morality deleted. The league also opposed election measures related to taxes and bonds in which only property owners could vote and which were declared unconstitutional in 1971. In 1975 an open elections law in Louisiana precluded the requirement for closed primaries in which only party members could vote. The league also supported and helped to pass legislation reducing the time between primary and general elections, helped to ensure the confidentiality of absentee ballots and increase the categories of people entitled to vote by absentee mail, and successfully sued the State to make polling places accessible to the handicapped.

Ms. Rothrock said that currently the LWV supports mail-in registration, the "motor voter" concept, the use of volunteer deputy registrars, and same-day registration in order to increase accessibility to registration which would in turn ensure access to voting. In answer to a question, Ms. Rothrock said that she had no personal knowledge of discrimination against individuals because of race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, or national origin regarding the privilege of voting.

Ernest Johnson, general counsel for the Louisiana NAACP, stated that he saw the fight for voting rights as an ongoing struggle and that statistics don't tell the whole story. He believed that rules and regulations that have been in effect for a long time make it difficult for those rights to be exercised. He pointed out as an example that registration places must be certified by the Justice Department, and that only registrars or deputy registrars could register people to vote.

By way of historical background, Mr. Johnson reported that for 213 years whites in this country have had the right to vote and that, though there was a voting rights act in 1865, blacks have essentially been able to exercise that right only since passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

During all those years whites grew accustomed to going to the courthouse to register to vote, but blacks went to the courthouse to be put in jail, to try to get some of their people out of jail, or because someone was suing them for a debt. Consequently the courthouse is an intimidating place associated with discrimination that blacks continue to fear, subconsciously or otherwise. Mr. Johnson felt that, because of this, to continue to require registration in the courthouse is, in a sense, a denial of their right to do so. Because of psychological, sociological, and historical problems of discrimination, he advocated changing this requirement and providing for registration in driver's license bureaus. He also said that there are socioeconomic disparities that come into play, for whites may be able to leave work in the middle of the day, whereas blacks might be tied to 8:00 - 5:00 jobs. His plea was that voter registration be made easier for everyone.

Statistics regarding the proportion of people who are registered to vote, he said, are misleading because blacks historically have been undercounted in the census. It was his contention that, whatever the percentage is of people who are not registered to vote, the process can be improved.

In response to a question, Mr. Johnson said that he would not be in favor of eliminating the required Justice Department approval for voter registration drives, though a reduction in the time required for getting this approval might be a good thing. He also indicated that he would support mandatory voter registration, though there might need to be some exemptions required to accommodate objections of various religious organizations.

The Perspective of Voter Registrars

Yvonne Allison, registrar of voters for St. Tammany Parish and president of the Louisiana Registrar of Voters Association, felt that all registrars throughout the State were doing their best to register people to vote regardless of their race or color. She reported that in her own parish she and her staff of six, with help from parish organizations, conduct a highly publicized 2-week registration drive each year, visiting three locations per night throughout the parish. Locations include shopping centers, subdivisions, and black housing units in addition to visits to vo-tech schools, universities, and colleges. She said also that her office is accessible to the public, including being open on Saturdays, and on weekdays from 8:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. On the day registration closes for any particular election, her office stays open until 8:00 p.m. Because of its size Ms. Allison's parish is able to have a branch office in Slidell in addition to her main office in Covington. She said that the farthest municipality in her parish from one of these offices is 8 miles. She also reported that because of monetary constraints some offices are staffed only by the registrar, while several others have only the registrar and one other person.

Ms. Allison commended Jerry Fowler, the commissioner of elections, for putting a statewide computer system into place which enables the tracking of registered voters without waiting for the required 4-year purge of those who have moved. For this reason the registration rolls are clean and enable the compilation of accurate statistics. She estimated that between 60 and 70 percent of the voting age population in her parish was registered to vote.

She reported that the Registrars of Voters Association had objected to the idea of voter registration in driver's license bureaus because of the long wait that was already entailed in getting a driver's license. She felt that there is nothing, including voter registration, that can't stand improvement but she was reluctant to suggest any particular changes. She pointed out that, as voter registrar in her parish, she was responsible for administering the voter registration law and keeping the records, and that she would want to be assured of control over volunteer deputies if they were used.

In response to a question, Ms. Allison said that she has been voter registrar for 3 years and prior to that was chief deputy registrar for 26 years. She said that her appointment is for life, but that she could only be removed from office by the State Board of Election Supervisors for misconduct. She had no knowledge of that ever happening to a voter registrar. She also stated that she had no knowledge of anyone being denied access to voter registration, and that she felt black and poor people had as much access to her office as anyone. She pointed out that she went into black housing units at least once a year to register voters as well as other places. Most complaints, she said, relate to the 4-year canvass and persons who have moved without changing their mailing address.

Nathaniel Bankston said that he has been the voter registrar in East Baton Rouge Parish for 20 years and that his grandmother was in the office for 25 years prior to him. He reported that, as a member of the Louisiana Election Code Commission, he helped rewrite the State's election laws in 1973 and 1974.

With regard to Louisiana voter registration statistics he said that, statewide, 77 percent of the eligible voters were registered, and that in the East Baton Rouge Parish the figure was 86 percent. He reported the total number of registered voters in the parish as 179,791, of which 48,839 are black. Mr. Bankston said that, despite considerable opposition initially, his parish had initiated a computer system that was subsequently adopted by the entire State, and that has been of great help to the voter registration system.

Mr. Bankston said he had received complaints that, in implementing the voter registration canvass, more blacks were being taken off the rolls than whites. He recalled testifying in court, however, that of the 794 people challenged in East Baton Rouge Parish at that particular time 752 were white. He also said that 193 were Republicans, approximately 380 were Democrats and the rest had no party affiliation. He predicted that the roll-purging system will be changed with the passage of proposed legislation this year. This will provide for a canvass of the rolls each year, instead of every 4 years as now required, and allow for a fairer and more thorough purging process.

Mr. Bankston reported that as far back as 1974 he had long discussions with a representative from the U.S. Department of Justice before establishing hours and procedures for voter registration drives. These were set from 10:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. to allow persons with a wide variety of working hours to participate, were widely publicized in the media, and held in various locations. To assist in the registration of minorities and low-income persons, he said that voter registration drives are held in community centers at the time they give out food stamps. He pointed out that all registration drives require approval by the Justice Department, a

procedure that takes a minimum of 59 days and from the local governing authority which takes 30 days. This procedure, he felt, was no longer needed and provided an additional barrier to registration.

Last year, he said, 10 parishes cooperated in announcing longer office hours, closing at 7:00 p.m. during 3 weeks before closing the books prior to a major election. He also reported that for 6 months of every year his office was open every other Saturday to register voters. Though the law requires his office to be open from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., it is often open until 6 or 7 o'clock at night. Procedures he outlined for absentee ballots were intended to assure complete confidentiality during the voting process and when the votes are counted.

He felt that many positive things are happening in Louisiana with regard to voter registration, and pointed out that Louisiana ranks among the top 13 States with respect to registration of those who are eligible to vote. With regard to the proposal to register voters in driver's license offices, he didn't feel that it would help in his parish because his office in Baker was right next to a driver's license office. Furthermore, he said, the driver's license office in Baton Rouge serves persons from six parishes which would create additional problems for voter registration. Mr. Bankston said, however, that the door should never be closed on efforts to increase voter registration participation and that he would be in favor of some kind of volunteer deputy registration program as long as the registrars maintain control of it. However, he was not in favor of mail-in registration or same day registration because these methods would not allow the use of safeguards now available for preventing fraudulent registrations.

In response to a question, Mr. Bankston acknowledged that his urban parish had more staff and resources than some others to carry out voter registration outreach. Six parishes, he said, do not have deputy registrars and 19 parishes have only the registrar and one or two other employees. Voter registrars, he said, feel the necessity for providing registration opportunities outside of their offices and they, themselves, introduced legislation requiring outreach into high schools and parishes. He indicated that he would support legislation proposed this year that would permit the use of volunteer deputies and provide additional help to parishes that needed it for outreach programs. He did not favor reducing the 24-day registration cutoff period before elections because he felt this length of time was needed to take care of required administrative functions, such as preparing the rolls for election and taking care of absentee voting.

Louis Keller reported that he was appointed registrar of voters in Orleans Parish in 1988 and became the first black registrar of voters in Louisiana since Reconstruction. Prior to this appointment Mr. Keller served as chief deputy registrar. During his tenure the citizens of his parish had not been, nor ever will be, deprived of their right to register to vote by reason of their race, color, religion, age, sex, physical disability, national origin, political affiliation, or because of fraudulent practices. It is his policy, he said, to operate the office within the law, but to provide assistance to voters under circumstances where the law is silent.

Statistics provided by Mr. Keller showed that the 1988 population of Orleans Parish was 546,325 of which 238,149 or 44 percent were registered to vote. Blacks accounted for 54 percent of those registered to vote, 77

percent were Democrats and 15 percent Republicans. Staff of the voter registrar's office includes 22 full-time employees, with 7 vacancies at the present time. There are five permanent branch offices in his parish in addition to the main office. Mr. Keller reported that the main office in city hall operates 6 days a week Monday through Saturday from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., while the branch offices offer services during hours ranging from 8:30 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. during 5 days each week. In addition to visiting colleges, universities, and high schools twice each year, voter registration drives are conducted in major shopping centers and other locations upon request. General information about voter registration and the annual purge and canvass is provided by articles in the New Orleans Times Picayune. During his tenure as voter registrar, and previously as deputy registrar, Mr. Keller had received no complaints regarding the inability of people to register. He said that people are no longer turned down in the registration line because of their race, and even illiterate people can register.

In response to a question, Mr. Keller stated that he would favor any of the current legislative proposals to expand voter registration procedures if they can be shown to improve registration. He believed that registration hours should be limited on election day to assure that the new registrant has time to vote before the polls close. He felt that the use of volunteer deputy registrars, as provided for in one bill, will be a big help to the small parishes, though they would not be as useful in his own parish. He saw no problem with mail registration as long as the language of the bill is appropriate.

Barbara Bates, voter registrar for St. Helena Parish, explained that her parish is small and rural, with a total population of only 10,456, of

which 51.5 percent is black. Greensburg, the parish seat, is the largest community with 860 people. In her parish there are no interstate highways, commercial airlines, railroads, or public transportation systems. There is one bank, one hospital, and one each of elementary, middle, and high schools, but no colleges. There are no malls or shopping centers and only one driver's license bureau. In her office Ms. Bates and one deputy registrar are the only staff.

Ms. Bates said that in her parish 72 percent of the population is registered to vote, though the census figures show fewer people in the parish than there are registered voters. Fifty percent of those registered are black. A registration drive in 1983 to the high schools, before they were consolidated, and to grocery stores in two communities netted a total of 19 registrations. A 1986 registration drive netted 16 registrants and a registration drive in 1987 netted 37. Ms. Bates said that just before the 1988 primary election her office stayed open until 7:00 p.m. for 5 days but had no one register after 4:30 p.m. despite published announcements in the media. A purge of the rolls in 1987 removed only 15 voters who had not voted during the past 4 years.

Ms. Bates said that she would welcome the services of a volunteer deputy registrar though she felt that most everyone in her parish was registered and they might get bored sitting in the grocery stores waiting for registrants.

In the forum's open session Robert Poche, voter registrar for Ascension Parish, made the point that the registrars in many Louisiana parishes are not able to do all they would like by way of registering voters because they are strapped for funds. Funding comes from the parishes and many are economically depressed, making it impossible to raise

money for advertisements. His own parish, he said, is split by the river, necessitating the maintenance of two offices and it lacks the money to do many of the things being done by larger parishes. He felt, however, that registrars try to enhance registration to the best of their ability, and he pointed out that the Voter Registrars Association has gone on record supporting procedures that would do that, including a currently proposed bill to permit the use of volunteer deputies. Personally, he would not be opposed to the concept of voter registration in driver's license bureaus if the logistics of the procedure could be worked out satisfactorily.

Summary

Participants at the May 12, 1989, community forum were invited to provide information and suggestions regarding voter registration procedures in Louisiana parishes. Major points of discussion centered on the adequacy of current procedures, possible limitations of current practices, alleged barriers to voter registration encountered in some parishes, and the merits and disadvantages of proposed legislative changes in registration procedures. Proposals before the legislature at the time of the forum included provisions for voter registration at driver's license bureaus and the use of volunteer deputy registrars. A representative from the Governor's office informed the Advisory Committee that the Governor endorsed both concepts, and most voter registrars who participated favored the use of volunteer deputy registrars as long as they operated under the control and authority of the registrar of voters. The extent to which the revised procedures would encourage or permit fraudulent practices was a matter of disagreement.

Several of the participants pointed to extensive outreach programs in their parishes provided to enhance the accessibility of voter registration

to all citizens under current procedures. In other parishes limitations of financial resources and staff precluded some efforts to register voters that were felt to be desirable. There were no reports of any eligible citizen being denied the right to register to vote. However, some participants felt that the location of some voter registrars' offices, their office hours, and the limited amount of community outreach in some parishes placed low-income citizens, for whom transportation and work hours were a problem, at a special disadvantage.

This report does not purport to be an exhaustive review of issues related to voter registration in Louisiana. It does identify and provide information on concerns that the Advisory Committee may decide merit further investigation or analysis. The report will be disseminated to agencies and organizations in the State who have responsibilities or involvements with voter registration. It will also be made available to the news media and to the general public. The Committee hopes that the information presented will be of value to the Commissioners in its program planning.

APPENDIX A

Computer #s

PARISH CHECKLIST

1	Acadia	33	Madison
2	Allen	34	Morehouse
3	Ascension	35	Natchitoches
4	Assumption	36	Orleans
5	Ayoelles	37	Ouachita
6	Beauregard	38	Plaquemines
7	Bienville	39	Pointe Coupee
8	Bossier	40	Rapides
9	Caddo	41	Red River
10	Calcasieu	42	Richland
11	Caldwell	43	Sabine
12	Cameron	44	St. Bernard
13	Catahoula	45	St. Charles
14	Claiborne	46	St. Helena
15	Concordia	47	St. James
16	DeSoto	48	St. John
17	E. B. Rouge	49	St. Landry
18	E. Carroll	50	St. Martin
19	E. Feliciana	51	St. Mary
20	Evangeline	52	St. Tammany
21	Franklin	53	Tangipahoa
22	Grant	54	Tensas
23	Iberia	55	Terrebonne
24	Iberville	56	Union
25	Jackson	57	Vermilion
26	Jefferson	58	Vernon
27	Jeff. Davis	59	Washington
28	Lafayette	60	Webster
29	Lafourche	61	W. B. Rouge
30	LaSalle	62	W. Carroll
31	Lincoln	63	W. Feliciana
32	Livingston	64	Winn

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BY PARISH

***** REGISTERED VOTERS ***** ***** DEMOCRATS ***** ***** REPUBLICANS ***** ***** OTHER PARTIES *****

	TOTAL REG	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER
PARISH 01	34277	28279	5997	1	30513	24660	5883	0	2699	2638	60	1	1065	981	84	0
PARISH 02	12418	9975	2340	103	11129	8818	2225	86	859	797	55	7	430	360	60	10
PARISH 03	30910	24037	6813	60	25669	19239	6400	30	2881	2723	147	11	2360	2075	266	19
PARISH 04	13856	9497	4359	0	12574	8372	4202	0	790	713	77	0	492	412	80	0
PARISH 05	22815	17564	5221	30	20245	15258	4959	28	1401	1315	86	0	1169	991	176	2
PARISH 06	15791	13811	1937	43	12401	10598	1779	24	1892	1830	54	8	1498	1383	104	11
PARISH 07	10305	6053	4251	1	9250	5078	4171	1	765	712	53	0	290	263	27	0
PARISH 08	38037	32648	5324	65	24058	19123	4909	26	9151	8972	155	24	4828	4553	250	15
PARISH 09	121043	84339	36082	652	81313	47938	33122	253	28114	26890	1057	167	11616	9511	1873	232
PARISH 10	86536	68691	17542	303	68697	52212	16305	180	11057	10477	525	55	6782	6002	712	68
PARISH 11	8692	5637	1048	7	5644	4646	994	4	749	719	29	1	299	272	25	2
PARISH 12	6302	5931	365	6	5485	5146	336	3	357	352	4	1	460	433	25	2
PARISH 13	7685	5877	1794	14	6814	5090	1715	9	634	584	47	3	237	203	32	2
PARISH 14	9391	5482	3903	6	7718	4108	3807	3	1110	958	152	2	563	418	144	1
PARISH 15	12730	8532	4196	2	10736	6715	4019	2	1273	1195	78	0	721	622	99	0
PARISH 16	14591	8877	5123	591	12141	6623	4929	589	1273	1223	48	2	1177	1031	146	0
PARISH 17	186836	136395	50004	237	126123	79731	46323	69	41929	40491	1342	96	18584	16173	2339	72
PARISH 18	6098	2664	3400	34	5096	1912	3155	29	596	535	60	1	406	217	185	4
PARISH 19	10644	6205	3385	1054	8937	4738	3158	1044	1026	919	102	5	681	551	125	5
PARISH 20	21923	16522	5391	10	20453	15130	5316	7	1138	1075	62	1	332	317	13	2
PARISH 21	13395	9904	3487	4	11769	8381	3387	1	1301	1245	54	2	325	278	46	1
PARISH 22	10280	8880	1391	9	8579	7279	1297	3	1069	1016	50	3	632	585	44	3
PARISH 23	36499	28747	9710	42	28988	20155	8812	21	5004	4541	453	10	2507	2051	445	11
PARISH 24	19649	10914	8735	0	18179	9628	8551	0	842	765	77	0	628	521	107	0
PARISH 25	9422	6831	2582	9	8026	5533	2490	3	991	947	42	2	405	351	50	4
PARISH 26	209861	182337	25885	1439	134042	110729	22834	479	93004	91336	1118	550	22615	20272	1933	410
PARISH 27	17908	14815	3082	11	14968	12127	2832	9	1514	1454	59	1	1426	1234	191	1
PARISH 28	85245	69195	15913	137	56336	42903	13393	40	18068	17042	973	53	10841	9250	1547	44
PARISH 29	42145	38452	3645	48	35620	32292	3302	26	3848	3699	137	12	2677	2461	206	10
PARISH 30	9570	8735	745	90	8089	7315	692	82	946	918	22	6	535	502	31	2
PARISH 31	19629	12648	6852	129	13768	7497	6200	71	4029	3760	245	24	1832	1991	407	34
PARISH 32	36896	34522	2160	14	29233	27220	2005	8	3938	3890	47	1	3525	3412	108	5
PARISH 33	7777	3845	3918	18	5913	2247	3653	13	1280	1210	68	2	554	388	195	1
PARISH 34	16495	10863	5623	9	12696	7507	5185	4	2428	2291	133	2	1373	1065	305	3
PARISH 35	20042	12986	6821	235	16187	9809	6202	176	2297	2006	269	22	1558	1171	350	37
PARISH 36	248478	111879	134297	2302	192184	70364	120747	1073	36189	30876	4687	626	20105	10639	8863	603
PARISH 37	66284	49340	16934	10	43883	28387	15493	3	15126	14830	294	2	7275	6123	1147	5
PARISH 38	14527	10751	2779	997	12127	8595	2578	954	1610	1490	90	30	790	666	111	13
PARISH 39	14521	8776	5741	4	13141	7524	5614	3	844	812	32	0	536	440	95	1
PARISH 40	67200	51658	15170	372	49744	35781	13741	222	11523	10874	579	70	5933	5003	850	80
PARISH 41	6599	4347	2247	5	5723	3605	2113	5	431	402	29	0	445	340	105	0
PARISH 42	11729	8098	3617	14	9379	6114	3258	7	1646	1518	123	5	704	466	236	2
PARISH 43	13206	11272	1908	28	11309	9511	1779	19	1223	1152	68	3	674	609	59	6
PARISH 44	41901	40174	1713	14	35573	33952	1614	7	4316	4252	60	4	2012	1970	39	3
PARISH 45	23109	17710	5397	2	17596	12506	5089	1	3660	3555	105	0	1853	1649	203	1
PARISH 46	7782	3921	3861	0	6901	3225	3676	0	500	426	74	0	381	270	111	0
PARISH 47	13520	7219	6291	10	12451	6419	6025	7	597	479	117	1	472	321	149	2
PARISH 48	21455	13532	7897	26	16983	9553	7424	6	2552	2392	146	14	1920	1587	327	6

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	TOTAL REG	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER
PARISH 49	47859	28861	18916	82	41691	23930	17710	51	3987	3355	615	17	2181	1576	591	14
PARISH 50	25472	17420	8017	35	22933	15335	7580	18	1732	1447	279	6	807	638	158	11
PARISH 51	33520	23640	9814	66	25434	16456	8945	33	4588	4284	289	15	3498	2900	580	18
PARISH 52	70783	63954	6208	621	39963	34011	5671	281	21419	21053	193	173	9401	8890	344	167
PARISH 53	44840	33732	11030	78	35433	25476	9931	26	5382	4982	369	31	4025	3274	730	21
PARISH 54	4690	2416	2274	0	3941	1752	2189	0	616	565	51	0	133	99	34	0
PARISH 55	43691	36338	6791	562	32227	25751	6094	382	7228	6889	260	76	4239	3698	437	104
PARISH 56	12682	9452	3221	9	10569	7444	3122	3	1582	1525	54	3	531	483	45	3
PARISH 57	30139	26270	3826	43	26139	22658	3460	21	2002	1888	105	9	1998	1724	261	13
PARISH 58	19707	17830	1755	122	15236	13686	1519	31	2314	2175	86	53	2157	1969	150	38
PARISH 59	26805	19691	7091	23	23424	16622	6787	15	2094	1962	130	2	1287	1107	174	6
PARISH 60	22856	16534	6322	0	18505	12550	5955	0	2693	2572	121	0	1658	1412	246	0
PARISH 61	11397	7370	4021	8	9982	6141	3838	3	718	687	31	0	697	542	152	3
PARISH 62	6958	5971	980	7	5670	4758	906	5	1022	985	36	1	266	227	38	1
PARISH 63	5519	3073	2421	25	4550	2181	2348	21	541	509	32	0	428	383	41	4
PARISH 64	10312	7708	2604	0	8633	6214	2419	0	831	804	27	0	848	690	158	0
GRN TOTAL	2190634	1607627	572133	10874	1658713	1126256	525937	6520	349214	329976	17022	2216	182707	151395	29174	2138