

Challenges Continue To Florida Vote

by Michele Steinberg

According to evidence filed in a class-action lawsuit by civil rights organizations led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), there is no recount that can redress the November 2000 Florida vote fraud. That is because thousands of black voters in the state were illegally turned away from the polls because of illegal “purges” of voting records, failure to adequately search for valid voter registrations, and other malfeasance by Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris and other election officials.

The NAACP suit was filed in the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of Florida on Jan. 10, one day before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights began its first hearing on the Florida irregularities. After two days of hearings, the head of the Civil Rights Commission, Mary Frances Berry, termed Harris’s sworn testimony “laughable.” Berry charged that Gov. Jeb Bush, who also testified before the commission, is the ultimate authority responsible for all the irregularities, and worse, that occurred on Nov. 7.

Harris’s conduct at the hearings is just one indication that the Bush apparatus is intent on keeping the lid on the massive disenfranchisement which occurred. On Jan. 8, State Senator Daryl Jones (D-District 40) participated in a press conference which criticized the fact that a commission established by Bush in Florida to review the voting irregularities was scheduling its proceedings at times and places that made it impossible for witnesses to provide their evidence to the commission. After a strong intervention, the commission was forced to change its procedures.

Thousands Excluded from Voting

The NAACP suit is one of the strongest challenges to broad-based vote fraud and irregularities filed in the United States in recent history. Filed on behalf of black voters in Florida, and on behalf of 77 NAACP branches, the suit picks up on a crucial issue raised by *EIR* and by former Democratic Party Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche: the illegal purging of the voter rolls by a private company, Choicepoint, Inc., also known as Database Technologies, Inc. That firm, named as a defendant in the suit, is charged with having “failed to exercise appropriate diligence and care to ensure and to verify the reliability and accuracy of the list of ineligible voters” sent to polling places throughout the state.

There is no question that the number of disenfranchised

alone was more than the margin of victory claimed by George W. Bush in the election.

According to the NAACP suit, “The number of Black citizens of Florida who were denied the right to vote . . . or whose right to vote was abridged or impeded . . . is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable. On information and belief, tens of thousands of ballots in counties and precincts where substantial numbers of Black citizens reside were not counted in that election. . . . [And] *thousands of Black citizens were denied registration, wrongly purged from the voter rolls, and denied opportunity to vote in that election*” (emphasis added).

Voter after voter on Election Day, where a record number of African-Americans had come out to cast their ballots, were told they could not vote because of their “felony convictions.” But, as the suit demonstrates, these voters never *had* a felony conviction. In fact, some of the disenfranchised had never even been arrested.

The faulty information came from Choicepoint, Inc., but that was just a small piece of the overall pattern. The suit claims that there was “racial disparity in election administration in Miami-Dade County,” “wrongful purging of voters from official lists of eligible voters,” “failure to timely and correctly process voter registration applications or address information,” and “unequal access to inactive list” information, where disputed voter registrations could have been located, allowing voters to cast their ballots.

Bush Team Stonewalls

According to the Jan. 13 *Washington Post*, the first round of hearings by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights focussed on exactly these allegations that Florida voters were improperly removed from voting rolls. The *Post* also reported that “that there was an unusual heavy police presence at some predominantly black precincts, and that inadequate assistance was given to disabled voters and those who needed help with English.”

Christopher Edly, a Democrat appointed to the commission by the U.S. Congress, charged, “It seems to me there has been some systematic disenfranchisement of voters . . . because people haven’t cared enough to spend the money to have good voting systems and voter education.” He harshly criticized Florida officials for covering up the failures. Victoria Wilson, another commission member, said that Harris was “on a merry-go-round of denial” about the fraud.

The NAACP lawsuit is limited in that it exclusively looks at Florida, while vote irregularities occurred nationwide. A broader solution lies in the call for a National Commission to investigate the November 2000 election, an initiative sparked by LaRouche, which has received nationwide support from elected officials, especially among African Americans. LaRouche also sparked the opposition to the nomination of John Ashcroft to Attorney General, which has become the leading political fight in Washington.