

Disenfranchising Of Prisoners and Former Convicts Suppress Black Vote

by Dr. Henrie Treadwell

Atlanta, GA (BlackNews.com) -

When men and women are incarcerated for crimes, the jail and prison time is meant to be their penance. But in many states, prisoners and former inmates find that another severe penalty awaits — disenfranchisement. For decades,

America has struggled with how to reintegrate prisoners back into society. As the inmate population has exploded, so has that challenge. Clearly, the stigma of being an ex-convict impacts their ability to gain acceptance in their communities, and makes it difficult to find a job. But should these men and women also lose their right to vote, which is such a fundamental part of our society? For decades, America has struggled with how to reintegrate prisoners back into society. As the inmate population has exploded, so has that challenge. Clearly, the stigma of being an ex-convict impacts their ability to gain acceptance in their communities, and makes it difficult to find a job. But should these men and women also lose their right to vote, which is such a fundamental part of our society? Moreover, with African Americans comprising half of the nation's prison population, yet only 12 % of the general public, disenfranchising felons has emerged as a modern version of the Jim Crow era's poll tax — an effective way to suppress black votes.

When a handful of votes and Supreme Court intervention decided the presidency in 2000, it underscored the importance of everyone's vote. But about six million people can't vote today because of state laws restricting the voting rights of former convicts. In 2000, nearly 4.7 million Americans were ineligible to vote, by 2004 the number rose to 5.3 million and it continues to climb.



A large number of disenfranchised former convicts reside in four southern states — Alabama, Florida, Kentucky and Virginia. In those states alone, nearly 1.5 million people are prevented from voting. To put that number in perspective, it is roughly the same number of people whose votes weren't counted because of faulty voting machines in the shenanigans surrounding the 2000 presidential election.

America's discrimination against former inmates is unique in the world. Most other Western democracies

have national voting standards, rather than leaving it to states or provinces; other countries also don't restrict voting for men and women who have served their prison time. By contrast in America, there are 35 states prohibiting felons from voting while they are on parole; 30 states preventing felony probationers from voting; and 14 states precluding former felons who have completed their sentence from voting.

The state laws are so varied that from jurisdiction to jurisdiction there is no consistency on what convictions will trigger a loss of voting rights. Only 1.4 million of the people disenfranchised in 2004 were actually behind bars. The rest were living in communities, trying to re-establish their lives on parole, probation or after completing their sentence.

With race playing such a significant role in the criminal justice process, this added penalty is another blow to black communities. Data shows that blacks are prosecuted more often than whites who commit similar crimes, and blacks are offered less attractive plea bargains, leaving large numbers of disenfranchised men and women. By taking away their voting power, it weakens the clout of black communities not only on election day, but every time the communities advocate for policy changes. Even more troubling is evidence that the laws governing the restricting of voting rights to former inmates have been manipulated specifically as part of a pattern to suppress the votes of African Americans. Throughout the south, several states have revised their constitutions and criminal codes to target minorities by

Comptroller's Amnesty Program Snares More Than \$100 Million in Delinquent Taxes

(Austin) — Comptroller Susan Combs' tax amnesty program, Project Fresh Start, brought in more than \$100 million in unpaid taxes, including more than \$90 million in state taxes and more than \$10 million owed to local governments. "These successful results far exceed our expectations," Combs said. "The tax amnesty brought in \$47 million in sales tax, \$46 million in franchise tax and varying amounts of 19 other taxes." During the Project Fresh Start amnesty period, June 15 through Aug. 15, a total of 1,258 businesses reported and paid delinquent taxes. About 3 percent to 5 percent were taxpayers operating businesses without required tax permits and without paying state taxes. In exchange for their cooperation and payment, the new Comptroller waived penalty and interest charges normally added to delinquent taxes.

"Now that these businesses have a fresh start, I hope they will

continue to be honest, law-abiding taxpayers," Combs said. "The new businesses we have added to the tax rolls will generate revenues for the state and local governments for many years to come."

Only businesses with tax deficiencies that had not yet been discovered by the Comptroller's office were eligible for the amnesty. Businesses that were being audited and businesses the Comptroller's office had already contacted regarding delinquent taxes were not eligible.

"I want to thank and commend every business owner who did the right thing and came forward to clear up unpaid, underreported and overdue taxes," Combs said. "I am committed to seeing to it that every business meets its obligation to pay its fair share of taxes."

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