

See also this file 26 May 71.

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MITCHELL DETAILS VOTING LAW PLAN

Offers Guidelines to Enforce
Key Section of '65 Act

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WASHINGTON, May 30—Attorney General John N. Mitchell has given the details of a plan for enforcing the section of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that is designed to block discriminatory election law changes in the South. Since Mr. Mitchell personally opposed extension of this program by Congress, the 34 pages of guidelines he issued last week came generally as a pleasant surprise to civil rights organizations in both their orientation and scope.

A major new feature of the guidelines is the establishment of a registry in the Justice Department to insure that civil rights organizations are notified each time a proposed state election law is submitted to the Attorney General for clearance.

Under the Voting Rights Act, no state or local law affecting registration or voting, directly or indirectly, can go into effect in eight southern states until it has been screened as nondiscriminatory by the Attorney General or a federal court in Washington.

Any individual or group that asks to be listed in the registry will be notified when a state law is submitted to the Justice Department and given an opportunity to offer evidence of its own as to whether the new law would result in diluting the black vote.

The guidelines also provide personal protection for anyone who reports discriminatory activity resulting from new state election laws to the Justice De-

partment.

"Whenever it appears to the Attorney General," the regulations read, "that disclosure of the identity of an individual who provided information regarding a change affecting voting could jeopardize the personal safety, employment or economic standing of the individual, the identity of the individual shall not be disclosed to any person outside the Department of Justice."

To insure further the widest public knowledge of each case coming before Mr. Mitchell, the guidelines provide that the file on each questionable statute will be open for inspection and copying, except for confidential communications.

The number of these voting rights cases to come before the Attorney General is about twice as large this year as last, reflecting recent court decisions that included reapportionment and annexation statutes as requiring review for possible discriminatory effect.

If the guidelines are strictly applied, they could resolve one of the serious problems under the law: States that begin enforcing their election law changes before they have been cleared in Washington.

The guidelines require the state or local official sending a proposed change to Mr. Mitchell to include "a statement certifying that the change affecting voting has not yet been enforced or administered."

One objection that civil rights attorneys have had toward enforcement of the Voting Rights Act is that the Justice Department has not exercised its power to compel the affected Southern states to comply, preferring to confer with them rather than going into court.

Under the guidelines, the Attorney General "may bring suit to enforce compliance" where a state has not submitted a questionable new law for clearance and has begun enforcing it, but there is no further assurance he will.

One civil rights lawyer said that the guidelines represented a large improvement over an earlier "terrible" version of three months ago but declined to give the Justice Department any particular credit for what he said had been achieved by outside pressure.