

# Nixon Statement on Signing Voting Bill

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WASHINGTON, June 22—  
Following is the text of the statement made by President Nixon today as he signed legislation extending the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and lowering the minimum voting age to 18:

On Wednesday, Congress completed action on a bill extending and amending the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and sent it to me for signature. As passed, the bill contained a "rider" which I believe to be unconstitutional: a provision lowering the voting age to 18 in Federal, state and local elections. Although I strongly favor the 18-year-old vote, I believe—along with most of the nation's leading constitutional scholars—that Congress has no power to enact it by simple statute, but rather it requires a constitutional amendment.

Despite my misgivings about the constitutionality of this one provision, I have today signed the bill. I have directed the Attorney General to cooperate fully in expediting a swift court test of the constitutionality of the 18-year-old provision.

An early test is essential

because of the confusion and uncertainty surrounding an act of doubtful constitutionality that purports to extend the franchise. Until this uncertainty is resolved, any elections—including primary elections, and even local referenda on such questions as school bond issues—could have their results clouded by legal doubt.

If I were to veto, I would have to veto the entire bill—voting rights and all. If the courts hold the voting-age provisions unconstitutional, however, only that one section of the act will be affected. Because the basic provisions of this act are of great importance, therefore, I am giving it my approval and leaving the decision on the disputed provision to what I hope will be a swift resolution by the courts.

## Opened Participation

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has opened participation in the political process. Although this bill does not include all of the Administration's recommendations, it does incorporate improvements which extend its reach still further, suspending literacy tests nationwide and also putting an end to the present welter of state residency re-

quirements for voting for President and Vice President. Now, for the first time, citizens who move between elections may vote without long residency requirements.

In the five years since its enactment, close to 1 million Negroes have been registered to vote for the first time and more than 400 Negro officials have been elected to local and state offices. These are more than election statistics; they are statistics of hope, and dramatic evidence that the American system works. They stand as an answer to those who claim that there is no recourse except to the streets.

The time has also come to give 18-year-olds the vote, as I have long urged. The way to do this is by amending the Constitution. Because of the likelihood that the 18-year-old vote provisions of this law will not survive its court test, the constitutional amendment pending before the Congress should go forward to the states for ratification now.

I therefore call upon the Congress to act now upon the constitutional amendment to avoid undue delay in its approval by the states should this provision of the new law be held unconstitutional.