

WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 1970

Mitchell Gives States to Aug. 3 to Act on Vote at 18

By CHRISTOPHER LYDON
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 14—Attorney General John N. Mitchell said today he was giving the states until Aug. 3 to pledge full compliance with the new Voting Rights Act that lowered the voting age to 18 years.

Mr. Mitchell said he was writing each of the 50 Governors, asking them to specify the steps by which they would register the young voters and, in addition, would eliminate literacy tests and residency requirements for Presidential elections.

States that do not respond to his inquiry will be challenged in court promptly, he said.

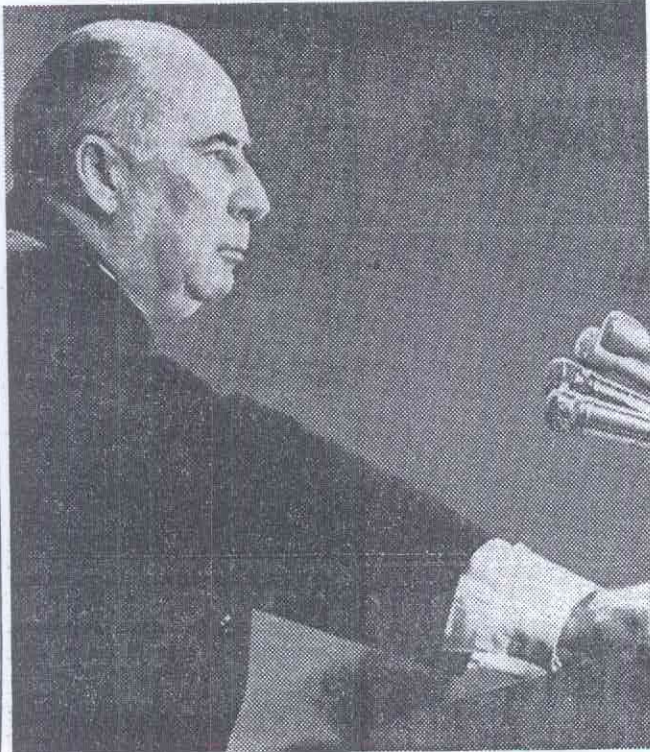
When President Nixon signed the law last month, he said that he would have preferred a constitutional amendment as a means for changing the voting age, and that he hoped for an early test of the law's constitutionality. But Mr. Mitchell emphasized today that the Government would be defending the law when the court test came.

New Mellow Humor

Mr. Mitchell announced the compliance deadline at his first general news conference in a year. The wide-ranging, 50-minute session gave the usually dour and conservative Attorney General many opportunities to display a new mellow humor and supple political style. Yet in detail, the news conference seemed to confirm his own assessment that what was new in the "new Mitchell" was mainly rhetorical emphasis.

Mr. Mitchell, who once urged critics to "watch what we do instead of what we say," declared today that the true message about the Justice Department's activities had not been getting out under that formula. Young people in particular "go more for rhetoric than the facts," he said, and so he has adapted his speeches accordingly.

In the last two and a half months, the Attorney General



The New York Times (by Mike Lien)

Attorney General John N. Mitchell at conference yesterday

has defended the Supreme Court from attackers, traveled to the Jackson State College campus in Mississippi to press the investigation of police shootings there, warned the police authorities generally about citizens' rights, and declared the Nixon Administration's broad encouragement of dissent.

Mr. Mitchell said today he thought he had a new rapport with young people, but he added quickly, "If there's been any change at all, it's been in recognizing that the things we've been doing and saying at Justice all along have not been getting through."

'Some New Vehicle'

"Perhaps we've found some new vehicles for expressing it," he said, but otherwise there is no change in the Department's management.

On specific policy matters he declared the following:

¶Changes in the school desegregation laws, such as his civil rights deputy, Jerris Leonard, seemed to be proposing yesterday, would likely run afoul of unspecified constitutional limits as to how far Congress can require states to go. Mr. Leonard told Senator Walter F. Mondale and a Senate study committee that swifter action against the subtle forms of school segregation might require new legislation, but referred policy questions on such a bill to his superiors. Mr. Mitchell said today he "would like to see Senator Mondale's thoughts spelled out" before he commented.

¶Investigative wiretapping, in court-approved use against organized crime, is up 100 per cent over the 33 active eavesdropping instances of a year

ago. More aggressive work by narcotics agents and anti-racketeering strike forces accounts for the difference, he said. Wiretapping in national security cases, thought to be much more extensive than the strictly criminal surveillance, has not changed significantly, Mr. Mitchell said.

¶In numerous cases since newspaper and television reporters resisted government subpoenas for their notes and unused film, the Justice Department has successfully negotiated with news organizations to obtain the same material without subpoena — especially, Mr. Mitchell said, in anti-riot cases. He did not specify cases or informants.

He is not worried that attacks by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, on the Black Panther party might be prejudicial to the rights of Panther defendants in New York, New Haven and elsewhere, because individual Panthers are being tried for specific crimes, not as members of the party. At the same time he stated that "we in the Department of Justice who are charged with prosecution of cases do not characterize organizations."

Mr. Mitchell smiled mischievously at many of the questions put to him, and won several hearty laughs with his responses. Asked about his status in the Nixon Administration, he said he had not shared the frustrations of Walter J. Hickel, Secretary of the Interior, who has complained of difficult access to the President. "I have not had any problem," Mr. Mitchell said.

After two of the men he had sponsored for the Supreme Court—Judges Clement F. Haynsworth Jr. and G. Harrold Carswell—were rejected by the Senate, Mr. Mitchell said that while he had never thought of resigning, "there are occasions on which one would love to be fired."

He closed the news conference with a triumphant smile and a wave, and said, "Hurry back, y'll."