
CITIZENS' COMMISSION ON CIVIL ★ RIGHTS

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Citizens' Commission On Civil Rights Rates Clinton Administration's Midterm Civil Rights Record

Warns Of New Dangers Threatening Americans' Civil Rights

Washington, D.C. — Today, the bipartisan Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights issued a 300-page report, **New Challenges: The Civil Rights Record of the Clinton Administration Mid-term**, assessing the performance of the Administration and calling upon the President and Congress to strengthen federal guarantees of equal opportunity.

While the Commission, which is composed of former high-ranking federal officials, commended the Clinton Administration for a generally good start on efforts to restore federal civil rights enforcement, Commission Chair Arthur Flemming warns of new threats to civil rights. These include attacks on affirmative remedies for discrimination in education, voting and employment; threats to funding for education, job training and other social programs for the poor; efforts to cut off benefits for legal as well as illegal immigrants; and failures to develop policies to ameliorate the isolation of people by race and socio-economic status in certain areas.

As an example of new dangers, Dr. Flemming pointed to recent developments in California, including passage of Proposition 187 denying education and other benefits to illegal aliens, Governor Wilson's refusal to implement the Federal 'Motor-Voter' law designed to make it easier for citizens to register, and a new initiative to repeal affirmative action policies. "Over the past three decades," Dr. Flemming said, "all of us in this nation have benefited from civil rights laws and efforts to extend a helping hand to poor people. This is not the time to go back to an era when governors stood in the schoolhouse door to prevent people from gaining their rights, and cynical politicians set one group against another."

Specific dangers identified by the Commission include:

Challenges to proven affirmative remedies

- Supreme Court will hear challenges to school desegregation remedies in Missouri v. Jenkins, to minority opportunity redistricting in Louisiana v. Hayes, and to federal minority business contracting program in Adarand v. Peña.
- Initiative in California to repeal affirmative action policies.

Threats posed by Contract with America

- In the name of reducing the paperwork burden on private industry, the proposed Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act may prevent the collection of racial and ethnic data needed to enforce civil rights laws.
 - In the name of eliminating unfunded federal mandates to states, proposed legislation may relieve states of obligations that are essential to providing equal opportunity.
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Urban Policy

- The Administration has yet to formulate or articulate a comprehensive policy to provide opportunity to persons who remain trapped in poverty and discrimination in cities throughout the country.
- Proposed Congressional cuts in education, job training and other programs may undermine efforts essential to the exercise of rights.

Attacks on Civil Rights

- Proposals to repeal the Americans with Disabilities Act on grounds it is too costly.

The Commission also concludes that despite a slow start, the Clinton Administration scored several civil rights successes. They include the appointment of able and experienced people with a demonstrated commitment to equal justice under law to the Cabinet, to chief civil rights posts, and to the federal bench; enforcement actions dealing with the racially discriminatory practices of a major restaurant chain, and with mortgage discrimination by lending institutions; and legislative victories involving efforts to increase access to voting and to improve the conditions of women in the workplace.

Despite the progress made, William L. Taylor, Vice-Chair of the Commission, expresses concern that the Administration has failed to develop a comprehensive urban policy to provide opportunity to poor people. "The public discussion," Taylor states, "centers almost entirely on dealing with consequences of neglect and discrimination — more prisons, longer sentences, cutting off welfare benefits. While those are legitimate subjects for debate, President Clinton should be educating the American public on schools, nutrition, health and other measures that will give children a choice in life and ultimately save us many of the costs of pathology and wasted lives."

In addition to its call for a comprehensive urban policy, the Commission recommends that the President make clear his intention that all federal civil rights agencies have the tools needed to perform their mission effectively. Other recommendations call for the revitalization of the Equal Opportunity Commission with a commitment by the agency to increase use of mediation and conciliation processes; and the continued use of affirmative action, both as remedies for violations of the civil rights laws and as voluntary plans that promote opportunities for minorities and women. The Commission also urges Congress to take steps to ensure that legislation designed to reduce regulation or accomplish other legitimate legislative objectives does not impair civil rights programs and safeguards.

The Commission's report and recommendations draw upon the working papers prepared by leading civil rights and public interest experts which examine the Administration's record in such areas as education, employment, voting, housing, immigration, hate crimes, environmental justice, health, disability rights and the information superhighway. The report also includes in-depth analyses of minority poverty issues, the anti-regulatory agenda of the "Contract with America," and judicial and Executive appointments made by the Administration.

The 300-page report is available by calling the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights at 202-659-5565.

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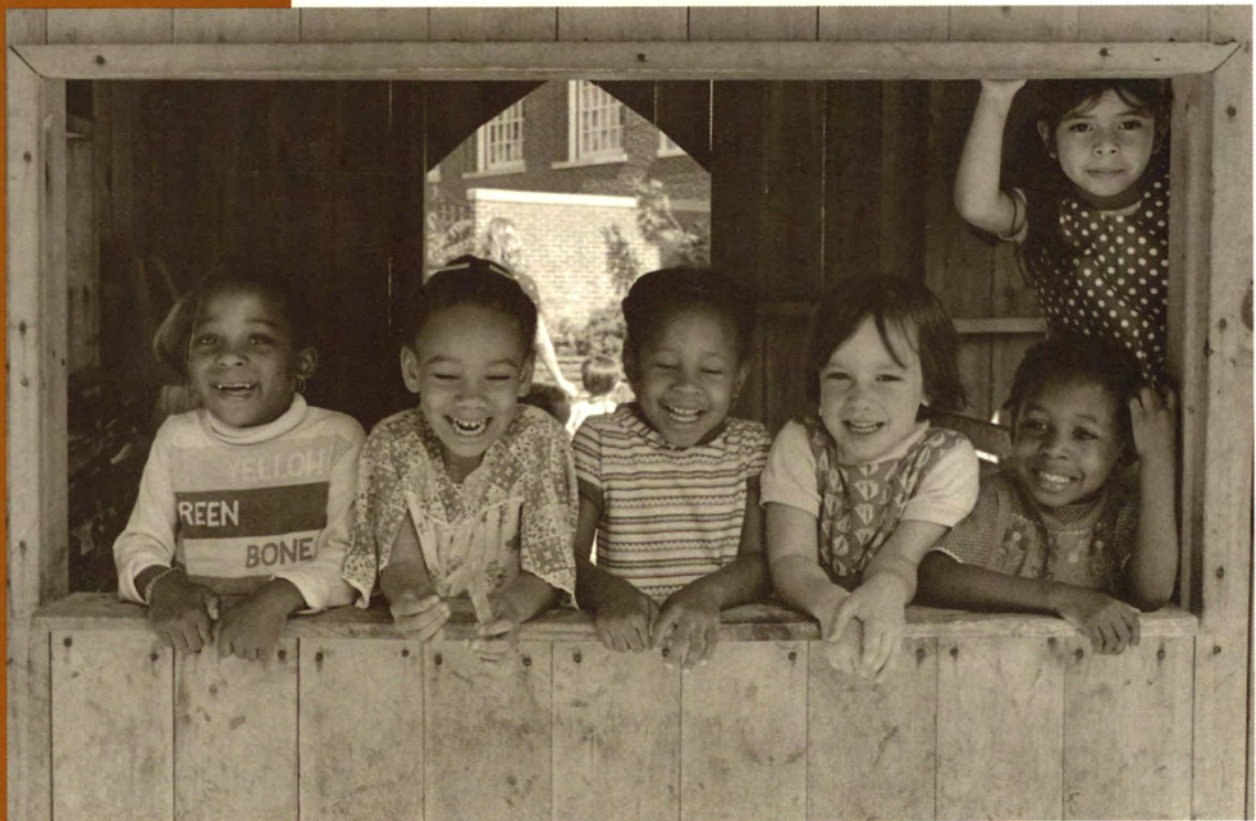
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New Challenges



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Rights Record
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