

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

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* 18-year-old provision.

th

AN EARLY
~~A~~ swift test is essential because of the confusion and uncertainty surrounding an act of doubtful constitutionality that purports to extend the franchise. **UNTIL THIS** ~~Unless the uncertainty can be resolved,~~ **IS** any elections -- including primary elections, and even local referenda on such questions as school bond issues -- ~~in which persons franchised~~ **COULD** ~~by~~ **RESULTS** ~~be~~ 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.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has opened participation in the political process, ~~and~~ **ALTHOUGH** ~~and~~ this bill incorporate **DOES NOT INCLUDE ALL OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S** improvements which extend its reach still further, suspending literacy tests nationwide and also putting an end to the present welter of state residency requirements

RECOMMENDATIONS, IT DOES

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 ~~in the South~~ and ~~more than 400 Negro officials have been elected in the South~~. *more than 400 Negro officials have been elected to local & state offices.* These are more than election statistics; they are statistics of hope, and ~~clear~~ *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 ~~x~~ to give 18-year-olds the vote, as I have ~~long~~ *long* urged, ~~ever since I have been in public office.~~ The way to do this is by amending the Constitution. Because of the likelihood that the 18-year-old vote provision 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.

FSA that the rights