

OCTOBER 1973

MEMORANDUM

FROM: CLARENCE MITCHELL, DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON BUREAU, NAACP

SUBJECT: HIGHLIGHTS IN THE VOTING RECORD OF CONGRESSMAN GERALD R. FORD, JR., WHO HAS BEEN NOMINATED TO SUCCEED SPIRO T. AGNEW AS VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The Washington Bureau lists the votes cast by Representative Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.) on matters of interest to the NAACP beginning in 1949. Mr. Ford became the Minority Leader of the House Republicans in 1965. A word about the circumstances surrounding his ascendancy to this position is appropriate.

Representative Joseph W. Martin (R-Mass.) served as Speaker of the House when the Republicans controlled that body and as Minority Leader when the Democrats came into power. Mr. Martin was a strong supporter of civil rights although he was widely classified as a conservative. In 1959 some Republicans, under the leadership of Chairman Charles Halleck (D-Ind.), started what might be described as a coup and ousted Mr. Martin from his position of leader. This aroused a great deal of animosity, especially among old guard Republicans who felt that Mr. Halleck had achieved his goal in a fashion that was not in keeping with party traditions. One of the leaders of this group who felt that something had to be done to oust Mr. Halleck was the late Clarence Brown (R-Ohio). In 1965 he and other conservatives joined in a kind of alliance with some of the Republican liberals and supported Mr. Ford for leader. This resulted in a defeat of Mr. Halleck. However, the strongest influence on Mr. Ford has consistently come from the conservatives.

On civil rights matters the conservative influence has been demonstrated by his consistent support for weakening amendments to civil rights bills. He has also been a supporter of anti-busing legislation. In most instances when the weakening amendments were defeated and the bill was up for final passage he would vote for final passage. This, as we know, is a standard procedure of some legislators on civil rights matters. They do what they can to weaken a bill but when they are frustrated in these attempts, they vote for final passage and assert that they are "for civil rights."

Perhaps the best evidence of Ford's fidelity to the narrow gauge approach on civil rights by the Nixon Administration came in 1969. At that time the NAACP and other organizations were waging a major fight to prevent Administration emasculatation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Normally the Administration would have gotten the ranking Republican member of the House Judiciary Committee to introduce its bill. Representative William McCulloch (R-Ohio) was the ranking member. He refused to support the Administration. Instead, he joined with Representative Emanuel Celler (D-N.Y.) and Chairman of the Committee in reporting an extension of the 1965 Voting Rights Act's key provisions which (1) ban literacy tests in areas with long histories of discrimination in registration and voting and, (2) prevent states and localities from putting restrictive registration and voting legislation into effect without prior clearance with the Attorney General of the United States or seeking a declaratory judgement in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

Representative Ford offered the Nixon proposal to emasculate the Voting Rights Act as a substitute on the floor. The Ford substitute won by a Teller vote (non-record at that time) 139 to 165. Later on a roll call vote the Ford version again won 203 to 203. We were able to defeat the Administration version in the Senate. Thereafter, the House accepted the Senate bill. The House first voted to accept the Senate bill 224 to 183. This was the crucial test. Representative Ford voted against acceptance of the Senate bill. The House then passed the bill 272 to 132. Mr. Ford voted for passage.