



# OUR FOCUS

**CHICAGO DEFENDER**

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## Guest Editorial

# The wrong man for the job

More than 40 years ago, John Lewis and Hosea Williams, along with hundreds of everyday Americans, left their homes and churches to brave the blows of Billy clubs and join a march for freedom across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Thousands of anonymous foot soldiers - Blacks and whites, young and the elderly - summoned the courage to march for justice and demand freedom. A few months later, the Voting Rights Act was signed into law.

It's because of the sacrifice of these American heroes that we've come so far today. But there's more work to be done. Recent elections have shown unprecedented intimidation of African American, Native American, low income and elderly voters at the polls. We've seen political operatives purge voters from registration rolls for no legitimate reason, distribute polling equipment unevenly, and deceive voters about the time, location and rules of elections.

So today more than ever we need to have confidence that those in government responsible for overseeing our voting system will uphold the right to vote for every single American.

This is what's at stake in the United States Senate today. President Bush has recently nominated Hans von Spakovsky to serve on the Federal Election Commission. It's the job of the FEC to regulate elections and disclose campaign finance contributions. So it goes without saying that the FEC needs strong, impartial leadership that will promote integrity in our election system.

Hans von Spakovsky is not the right person for this job, and I strongly oppose his nomination. From 2001 to 2005, von Spakovsky served as an official at the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division where he amassed a record of undermining voting rights, creating restrictions that would make it harder for poor and minority communities to vote, and putting partisan politics above upholding our civil rights.

Take what happened in Georgia. In 2005,

Georgia was trying to require photo identification to be presented by all voters. Even though Georgia's voter ID law was being reviewed by von Spakovsky's office at the DOJ for violating the Voting Rights Act, he anonymously published an article supporting the restriction, arguing it did not affect minority voters disproportionately. He undoubtedly drove the DOJ's decision to approve the law - a law later overturned by a federal judge.

In 2000, while sitting on the Fulton County Registration Board in Georgia, von Spakovsky endorsed the idea of "purging" election rolls of felons and joined a Republican group called the Voting Integrity Project. This group helped remove voters from election rolls in Florida - denying countless legitimate Democratic voters in Florida their right to vote.

This year, a group that worked with von Spakovsky at the Justice Department wrote a letter to the Senate Rules Committee expressing their concern about his nomination. In it they called him the "point person for undermining the Civil Rights Division's mandate to protect voting rights." History proves them right. In 2003, von Spakovsky overruled the career professionals on his staff and upheld Tom DeLay's 2003 Texas redistricting plan - a plan the U.S. Supreme court determined violated the rights of Latino voters.

Hans von Spakovsky's record speaks for itself. He should not serve on the panel responsible for protecting the integrity of federal elections. The United States Senate must stand firm in our commitment to fighting the disenfranchisement of minority voters and reject this nominee.

We must ensure that all eligible voters can vote - and that their votes will be counted. Our brave civil rights leaders gave too much for partisan nominees to chip away at this right.

*Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), is a 2008 candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination.*