

SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 1959

12 vote-law changes approved—*B'ham News*

State return to cumulative poll tax proposed by legislative committee

MONTGOMERY, March 28—A proposal to reestablish Alabama's \$1.50-a-year cumulative poll tax has been overwhelmingly approved by the legislative revision of laws committee.

The cumulative poll tax proposal was one of 12 changes in the state's registration laws approved by the central committee late Friday.

THE CHANGES were recommended by the segregation subcommittee, headed by Sen. L. K. Andrews of Union Springs.

The poll tax recommendation would put back into effect the old cumulative feature which was removed in 1951 in a statewide election. Reenactment of the law would require a state constitutional amendment.

The proposal, admittedly designed to discourage mass Negro voting, would require the payment of back poll taxes at \$1.50 a year dating back as far as 24 years.

The central committee approved the proposal Friday by a 21-1 vote, with Sen. E. B. Haltom Jr. of Lauderdale voting against it.

Rep. Bob Gilchrist of Morgan said he was opposed to the measure, but he voted for it because the proposal again puts the issue before the people in the form of a constitutional amendment.

ANOTHER PROPOSAL ap-

proved by the subcommittee would sharply curtail use of the absentee ballot in Alabama elections.

As proposed by the subcommittee, only members of the armed forces, their wives if living with them, and veterans in VA hospitals would be allowed to vote by absentee ballot.

The central committee, however, did not want to be tied down to these exceptions alone, and left the recommendation open for final determination later.

Gilchrist pointed out he thought federal employees living in Washington should have the right to vote by absentee ballot.

All proposals given approval by the committee are subject to amendments when they come up for final approval at a later date.

The committee agreed to send to the segregation screening committee a proposal by Andrews that a system of having voter application questionnaires graded by machines be put into effect.

THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE also approved these suggested changes: Strengthening of laws against buying or selling votes to place a penalty on the person who buys a vote.

Provide a \$500 penalty for failure to designate exact boxes and precincts where voters must cast their ballots.

A statewide voter reidentification program.

Prohibit payment oftener than every two years for expense of preparing official voter lists.

Require court officials to report monthly to boards of registrars all convictions which would bar voters from casting their ballots.

Nearly 10,000 More Arkansans Pay Poll Tax Than Ever Before

By KENNETH JOHNSON

LITTLE ROCK, Nov. 7.—This year's poll tax purchasing forecasts some hot scrambling for votes in next summer's Arkansas primaries.

This year's purchases, made prior to the Oct. 1 deadline, set an all-time record high which may in part have been due to a misconception by some voters that they were qualifying themselves for voting in next year's presidential election.

Reasons For Increase

Actually, since the presidential voting falls in November, they're going to have to buy new receipts again before next Oct. 1 to be eligible for presidential balloting. However, now that they are qualified for next summer's state elections, candidates will have more votes to shoot at than ever before. Some 10,000 more, in fact.

This year's sales totaled

590,501 compared to the 580,645 residents bought to qualify in the 1956 general election, the last presidential year.

Another factor for this year's jump was the increased drive for Negro voter registration. Some Negro groups beat the drums prior to the Oct. 1 deadline and in a few counties may have had some success in persuading additional Negro voters to qualify for next year's elections.

And still another reason for the increase apparently was the fact that a few hot local races existed in last week's municipal elections, in which a new poll tax receipt had to be shown in order to vote. That was true, for instance, at Blytheville where a mayoralty election had generated considerable interest.

This year's increase was some 38,000 over last year's registration—a hefty increase. Last year's total of 552,250 how-

ever was perhaps an unusual low, since 563,978 had qualified in 1957.

Negroes May Vote As Bloc

In 1957, State Auditor Jimmie Jones made a breakdown of the voter registration by race, and came up with about 500,000 white voters to 63,000 Negroes registered.

There is no breakdown so far this year, but some Negro leaders believe that this year's poll tax purchases increased the Negro registration to about 70,000.

They also believe that Negroes next summer will vote more as a "bloc" than in previous elections—a conclusion based no doubt on division of sentiment and issues in the continuing integration issue.

Taken alone, the Negro vote as compared to white registration would mean nothing in an election, although if circum-

stances or issues split up the white vote, it could be a turning point in future elections. Assuming, of course, it does indeed turn out to be a genuine bloc vote.

As a matter of practical politics, the Negro vote in some Arkansas counties is a controlled vote, which goes the way county political leaders "pass the word" for it to go.

The integration issue also has served to solidify white voters more on the racial issue and some state officials believe that was another contributing factor to the heavy poll tax purchasing this year. Namely, that many additional white voters obtained the poll tax receipt as a "safeguard" against possible increased Negro registration.

And some supporters of Gov. Orval Faubus argue that the increase may have been due in part to determination of his backers to keep him in office.

A Central Arkansas Faubus political leader said recently he knew definitely that was a factor in his area—that they were "determined to put him back in office if at all possible."

As to his running again, for a fourth term, the Governor still hasn't said yea or nay and probably will keep 'em guessing for quite some time yet.

Unless some changes have been made in the last year or two, Arkansas is one of six states which still have the poll tax as a voting requirement. The proceeds actually go to support of the public schools in this state, a fact which has been an argument against attempts at repealing the tax.

According to records here in the Legislative Council, other states which still require payment of the poll tax as a prerequisite to voting are Alabama, Mississippi, Rhode Island and Texas and Virginia.