

COMMENTARY

Act still protects

By HOWARD BURRELL
All that I know about Scott Garrett leads me to believe that, as an individual, he is a decent person. However, his political views are clearly to the extreme right, and not representative of the views and values of the great majority of the people of Sussex County and the 5th Congressional District.
Garrett and other like-minded individuals who currently control the United States Congress are the reason that 73 percent of those questioned in the most recent AP-Ipsos poll say that they disapprove of how Congress is doing its job.
The latest evidence that Garrett's views are extreme and out of the mainstream is revealed in his vote last week against our nation's Voting Rights Act.
While 390 members of the House of Representatives voted to reauthorize the nation's Voting Rights Act, 33 members, including Garrett, voted to oppose it. None of the other Republicans or Democrats in the New Jersey Congressional Delegation voted against the Act. This anti-democracy vote by Garrett is only the most recent indication that his views are not only out of step with the views of the people of Sussex County and the 5th Congressional District, but also the rest of the New Jersey Congressional Delegation.

More blessed to give than receive

In a week and two days, I'll fly into winter, south of the equator, with 10 close friends on what has become an annual trek through the Andes Mountains in Peru.
After a seven-hour flight and an eight-hour overnight bus ride, we'll arrive tired and achy in the city of Huaraz, the shining star of the Callejon de Huaylas, the broad valley that lies at approximately 11,000 feet MSE and divides the Andes into two mountain ranges, the Cordillera Blanca and the Cordillera Negra.
Here in Huaraz is the Wycliffe Language Institute, a missionary outpost established to translate the Bible into the Huaylas dialect of Quechua. After years of hard work, that job is almost accomplished; the Huaylas Quechua Bible will be dedicated next summer.
Our role in all of this every year has been to trek along trails and through high mountain passes, sometimes over 15,000 feet, to bring portions of these scriptures to the small villages that dot this region, many of which are only accessible by walking for several days.
Each year's trek presents different surprises and different challenges.
In 1999, the first year I went, we walked the Santa Cruz trail — a popular 50-mile circuit that crosses the continental divide through a 15,500-foot pass called Punta Union. We handed the school teacher a New Testament in the village of Vaqueria that year and watched as she wept, thankful that we had come such a long way to present the Gospel to her and the 30 or so children in her school.
Last year's trek through the Cordillera Negra took us into two villages, Huambo and Canchirao, where each had different problems.
In Huambo, community leaders had threatened to tie up the school teacher and whip her on the "Pole of Justice" for spreading her version of Christianity. She is an evangelical Christian and they were Roman Catholics. We walked into this village dispute and did what we always do. We shared Bibles in a non-confrontational fashion. We showed "The Jesus Film" to a large crowd of Quechua, some of whom had walked miles just to come and watch.
"The villagers were impressed with the fact that a small group of trekkers from the U.S. was bringing the Good News of God's Word to everyone,

For example, Garrett was also the only member of the New Jersey Congressional Delegation to:

- Vote against an extension of employment benefits.
- Vote against funding for special education.
- Vote against funding for vocational education.
- Vote against aid for the Hurricane Katrina victims.
- Vote against child safety locks on handguns.
- Vote against a crackdown on price gouging by oil companies.
- Vote for increased foreign ownership of U.S. airlines.

As an American of African descent who lived and grew up in the southern state of Mississippi prior to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, I found Garrett's vote against the Act to be especially disgraceful and offensive. For me and others who were not of the "right" race, color or religion or from an "acceptable" national origin, the pre-Voting Rights Act period was an awful time in which I could fight and die for democracy in foreign lands, but because of the color of the skin that God had given me, I could be prevented from voting by the powers that exercised complete control of that state's political system.
The Voting Rights Act eliminated many of the simply wrong and illegal obstacles that denied so many Americans one of the most basic constitutional rights. In fact, the positive changes that have resulted from the Voting Rights Act are so profound, that the practices that existed prior to the period before the Act's passage might seem un-

Voting Rights Act renewal

imaginable to anyone who didn't live through this period in our nation's history.

While many things have changed, efforts to suppress the voting rights of some of our citizens persist. For example, the all-white government of the small town of Kilmichael, Miss., canceled town elections in 2001 when it appeared that black candidates might win council seats. Citing the Voting Rights Act, the Justice Department stepped in and forced Kilmichael to hold elections as scheduled. The vote resulted in Kilmichael electing its first black mayor and three black councilmen.
The thing that embarrasses me as an American, and stabs me personally in the heart, is the fact that Garrett knew and understood this, and still voted against reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act.
Garrett's votes during the almost four years that he has been in Congress clearly show that he is out of touch with the sensible, fair-minded people of Sussex County and the 5th Congressional District.
We certainly deserve better.

Howard Burrell is the Sussex County Democratic party chairman.

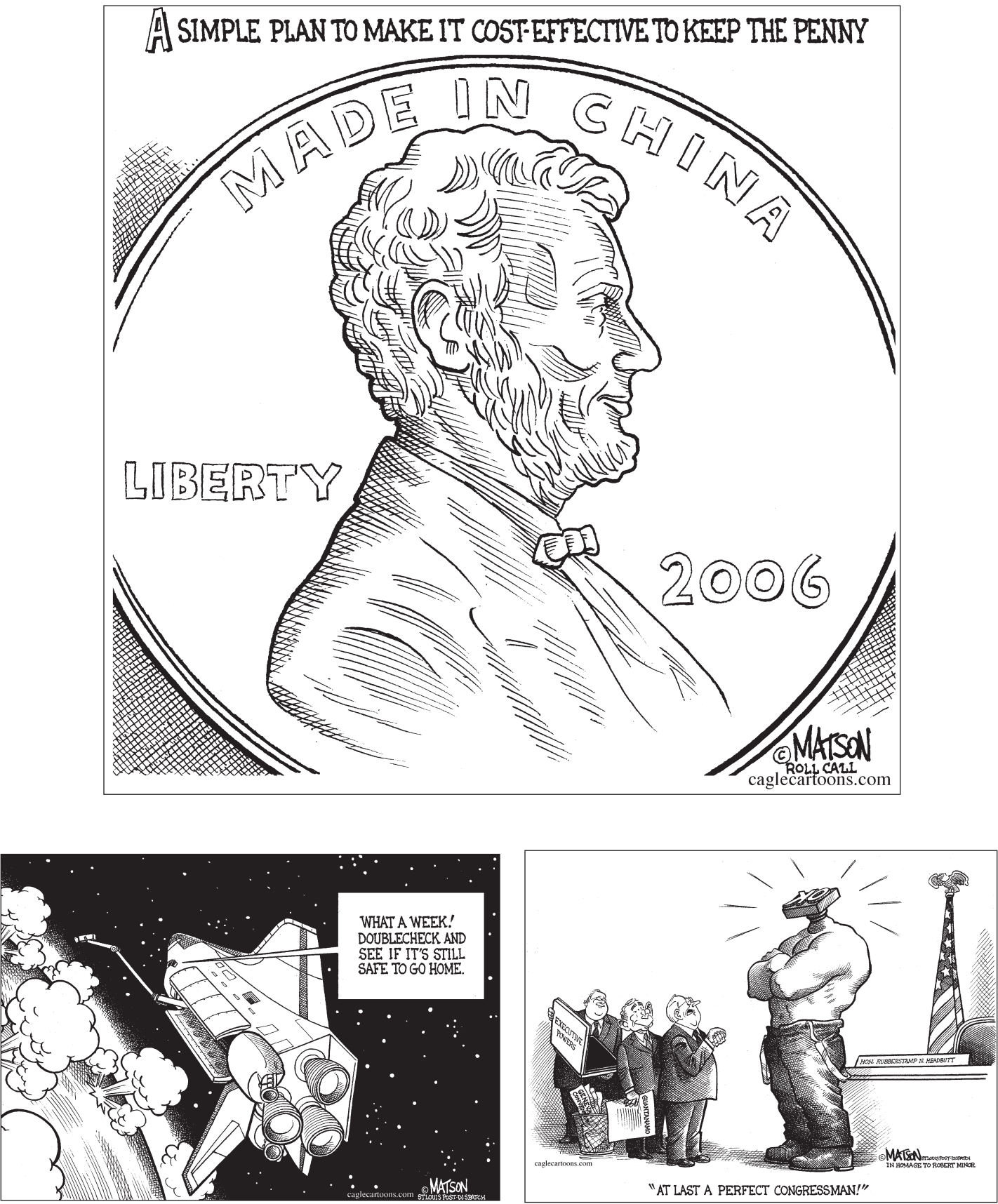
Bill vote flawed

By E. SCOTT GARRETT
In 1965, three young civil rights activists were brutally murdered in Mississippi for committing a grand act of patriotism, registering African Americans to vote. Ninety-five years after the 15th Amend-ment gave African Americans the right to vote, they were still largely living a second-class life and too often unable to exercise that most all-American of rights — expressing yourself at the ballot box.
Also in 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act (VRA), to guarantee the promise of the 15th Amendment. As part of that Act, several states and localities with records of discrimination at the polls were placed under a strict system of surveillance and pre-clearance by the U.S. Department of Justice. Federal attorneys would ensure that those jurisdictions would never

again require poll taxes, enforce literacy tests, or commit other unthinkable acts in a thinly veiled attempt to block access to voting.
Today, nine states and a handful of counties in other states are still required to pre-clear their election activities with Washington. Most are in the South. None are in New Jersey.
In 2007, the provisions of the VRA expire. But in their rush to bolster their own political image in an election year, Congressional leaders from both parties orchestrated a reauthorization of the VRA a year early. The bill they brought to the floor had serious flaws, including provisions imposing mandates based on suspect data on New Jersey townships with no history of discrimination at the polls.
I abhor racism and vehemently defend the right of every American to vote freely. But, I could not vote for this flawed bill just for the sake of political expediency.
In its current form, the bill will require New Jersey localities, for the next 25 years, to print multilingual ballots when 5 percent of their voting population might speak a foreign language. The threshold is extrapolated from survey data and allows profiling based on foreign-sounding surnames. Current law already permits anyone who needs help reading a ballot to get it, including use of a translator.
I offered a commonsense compromise to reduce the reautho-

rization period for multilingual ballots to six years. This would allow Congress to review this unfunded mandate after a full cycle of survey data and redistricting to determine the effectiveness and necessity of the multilingual ballot provisions. House leadership blocked my amendment for fear it would upset the delicate balance of appearance over substance.
It should be noted that to become a naturalized citizen, current law requires that an individual demonstrate proficiency in English as a unifying, common thread for all immigrant groups throughout the generations. So, while a naturalized or even American-born voter with a name like Rodriguez might speak, read, and write perfect English, under the provisions of this bill she is unjustly profiled as English-illiterate.
It should also be noted that under current law, there is nothing to prohibit a township from deciding to print a bilingual ballot because that is the will of township voters. It is ironic that a bill trumpeted as protecting minorities' voting rights actually removes from minority voters the ability to choose how they wish to vote as a local community. I trust those voters to decide how they want to vote, and I couldn't support this bill out of respect for them.
Scott Garrett, R-5, represents Sussex County in Congress.

WEEKEND GALLERY



Bush keeps the press laughing

Voices

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vulnerable on Department of Homeland Security report of more than 77,000 potential terror targets in the United States.
Included on the list issued Tuesday was Amish Country Popcorn in Berne, Indiana. Forget the lolling farmland name; did you know that this was one of the nation's leading popcorn suppliers? (According to its Web site, that is.) Can you imagine the havoc wreaked upon this country if the popcorn supply routes were shut down suddenly? Movie theaters would collapse. Brangelina would have no income to support their booming U.N.-style family.
Indiana has over a third more sites on the list than the state with that little metropolis along the Hudson. (You remember, the one hit by those two terrorist-driven planes.) And cheeseheads, beware! Wisconsin isn't far behind Indiana. ...
Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., told The New York Times that, "This report is the smoking gun that thoroughly indicts the system." He's right. ...
Back to that bizarre list. Amish Country Popcorn owner Brian Lehman offered The New York Times a possible explanation as to why his business made the list. "Maybe because popcorn explodes?"
His guess is as good as any.

AUSTIN, Texas — Never let it be said our president does not provide laughs, even as we wobble on the rim of war in the Middle East.
Look what a good time Vladimir Putin had with him. Bush, responding to questions from the international press corps on his conversation with Putin the previous evening, said, "I talked about my desire to promote institutional change in parts of the world like Iraq, where there is a free press and free religion, and I told him that a lot of people in our country, you know, would hope that Russia would do the same thing."
Putin, with a fairly straight face, replied, "We certainly would not like to have the same of kind of democracy they have in Iraq, I'll tell you that quite honestly." Don't you hate it when the international press corps laughs at what a stoop Bush is? Bush, who fancies himself something of a fast-reply artist, said, "Just wait." Heh, heh.
I think the problem is the rest of the world doesn't understand

Dekes (Delta Kappa Epsilon). We need a Deke short-course in embassies around the globe.
Another citizen looking a bit nonplussed at the G8 Summit was Tony Blair, listening as Bush, noisily chewing with his mouth open, said, "See, the irony is what they need to do is get Syria to get Hezbollah to stop doing this s-t, and it's over: I feel like telling Kofi to get on the phone with Assad and make something happen."
Could he possibly believe that? You could probably suggest unleashing Israel on Syria, except the Israelis don't seem interested in the program. One, they don't know who would replace President Assad. And two, it could get them stuck there for years — kind of like, oh, you know, that great democracy "what'sitsname."
Meanwhile, the nation needs to take a break from FOX and get a grip — the 24/7 drumbeat for war is silly.
Back to politics for comic relief. The most luckless candidate so far this year is Katherine Harris,

now 30 points behind Democrat Bill Nelson in the Florida Senate race. Three campaign managers have quit on Ms. Harris, not to mention a dozen or so other staffers. The latest defector, Glenn Hodas, said her "tantrums were uncontrollable." Another former campaign manager, Jamie Miller, said no one from Florida would work for her: "It's a nuclear wasteland in there. Anyone who goes in is going to be tainted."
Some of them are upset by the fact that she's involved with a corrupt defense contractor who showed up in the Duke Cunningham scandal. Ms. Harris also loaned her own campaign \$3 million, but then took back \$100,000 so she could refurbish her house in Washington, D.C.
Also providing comic relief

these days is Holy Joe Lieberman, senator from Connecticut, Al Gore's 2000 running mate, and the most annoyingly sanctimonious person in politics. Lieberman has more than miffed Connecticut Democrats by backing the war in Iraq and other Bush policies, setting off a big primary fight. Lieberman now threatens to run as an independent if he loses the primary, thus opening the seat to a Republican and further alienating Democrats.
Brother Ralph Reed, alas, tanked in Georgia. Do you think he knows Baptists don't approve of gambling? Meanwhile, in Texas, we're all excited about the possibility of having Tom DeLay back on the ballot in his old district. You must admit the Republicans have lost their moral compass since DeLay quit. Now, if we could just have a free press and free religion like Iraq!



IVINS

Molly Ivins is a syndicated columnist.