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VETO—S. 2104

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

RETURNING

WITHOUT MY APPROVAL S. 2104, THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1990

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To the Senate of the United States:

I am today returning without my approval S. 2104, the "Civil Rights Act of 1990." I deeply regret having to take this action with respect to a bill bearing such a title, especially since it contains certain provisions that I strongly endorse.

Discrimination, whether on the basis of race, national origin, sex, religion, or disability, is worse than wrong. It is a fundamental evil that tears at the fabric of our society, and one that all Americans should and must oppose. That requires rigorous enforcement of existing antidiscrimination laws. It also requires vigorously promoting new measures such as this year's Americans with Disabilities Act, which for the first time adequately protects persons with disabilities against invidious discrimination.

One step that the Congress can take to fight discrimination right now is to act promptly on the civil rights bill that I transmitted on October 20, 1990. This accomplishes the stated purpose of S. 2104 in strengthening our Nation's laws against employment discrimination. Indeed, this bill contains several important provisions that are similar to provisions in S. 2104:

Both shift the burden of proof to the employer on the issue of "business necessity" in disparate impact cases.

Both create expanded protections against on-the-job racial discrimination by extending 42 U.S.C. 1981 to the performance as well as the making of contracts.

Both expand the right to challenge discriminatory seniority systems by providing that suit may be brought when they cause harm to plaintiffs.

Both have provisions creating new monetary remedies for the victims of practices such as sexual harassment. (The Administration bill allows equitable awards up to $150,000.00 under this new monetary provision, in addition to existing remedies under Title VII.)

Both have provisions ensuring that employers can be held liable if invidious discrimination was a motivating factor in an employment decision.

Both provide for plaintiffs in civil rights cases to receive expert witness fees under the same standards that apply to attorneys fees.

Both provide that the Federal Government, when it is a defendant under Title VII, will have the same obligation to pay interest to compensate for delay in payment as a nonpublic party. The filing period in such actions is also lengthened.

Both contain a provision encouraging the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

The congressional majority and I are on common ground regarding these important provisions. Disputes about other, controversial pro-

visions in S. 2104 should not be allowed to impede the enactment of these proposals.

Along with the significant similarities between my Administration's bill and S. 2104, however, there are crucial differences. Despite the use of the term "civil rights" in the title of S. 2104, the bill actually employs a maze of highly legalistic language to introduce the destructive force of quotas into our Nation's employment system. Primarily through provisions governing cases in which employment practices are alleged to have *unintentionally* caused the disproportionate exclusion of members of certain groups, S. 2104 creates powerful incentives for employers to adopt hiring and promotion quotas. These incentives are created by the bill's new and very technical rules of litigation, which will make it difficult for employers to defend legitimate employment practices. In many cases, a defense against unfounded allegations will be impossible. Among other problems, the plaintiff often need not even show that any of the employer's practices caused a significant statistical disparity. In other cases, the employer's defense is confined to an unduly narrow definition of "business necessity" that is significantly more restrictive than that established by the Supreme Court in *Griggs* and in two decades of subsequent decisions. Thus, unable to defend legitimate practices in court, employers will be driven to adopt quotas in order to avoid liability.

Proponents of S. 2104 assert that it is needed to overturn the Supreme Court's *Wards Cove* decision and restore the law that had existed since the *Griggs* case in 1971. S. 2104, however, does not in fact codify *Griggs* or the Court's subsequent decisions prior to *Wards Cove.* Instead, S. 2104 engages in a sweeping rewrite of two decades of Supreme Court jurisprudence, using language that appears in no decision of the Court and that is contrary to principles acknowledged even by Justice Stevens' *dissent* in *Wards Cove*: "The opinion in *Griggs* made it clear that a neutral practice that operates to exclude minorities is nevertheless lawful if it serves a valid business purpose."

I am aware of the dispute among lawyers about the proper interpretation of certain critical language used in this portion of S. 2104. The very fact of this dispute suggests that the bill is not codifying the law developed by the Supreme Court in *Griggs* and subsequent cases. This debate, moreover, is a sure sign that S. 2104 will lead to years—perhaps decades—of uncertainty and expensive litigation. It is neither fair nor sensible to give the employers of our country a difficult choice between using quotas and seeking a clarification of the law through costly and very risky litigation.

S. 2104 contains several other unacceptable provisions as well. One section unfairly closes the courts, in many instances, to individuals victimized by agreements, to which they were not a party, involving the use of quotas. Another section radically alters the remedial provisions in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, replacing measures designed to foster conciliation and settlement with a new scheme modeled on a tort system widely acknowledged to be in a state of crisis. The bill also contains a number of provisions that will create unnecessary and inappropriate incentives for litigation. These include unfair retroactivity rules; attorneys fee provisions that will discourage settlements; unreasonable new stat-

utes of limitation; and a "rule of construction" that will make it extremely difficult to know how courts can be expected to apply the law. In order to assist the Congress regarding legislation in this area, I enclose herewith a memorandum from the Attorney General explaining in detail the defects that make S. 2104 unacceptable.

Our goal and our promise has been equal opportunity and equal protection under the law. That is a bedrock principle from which we cannot retreat. The temptation to support a bill—any bill—simply because its title includes the words "civil rights" is very strong. This impulse is not entirely bad. Presumptions have too often run the other way, and our Nation's history on racial questions cautions against complacency. But when our efforts, however well intentioned, result in quotas, equal opportunity is not advanced but thwarted. The very commitment to justice and equality that is offered as the reason why this bill should be signed requires me to veto it.

Again, I urge the Congress to act on my legislation before adjournment. In order truly to enhance equal opportunity, however, the Congress must also take action in several related areas. The elimination of employment discrimination is a vital element in achieving the American dream, but it is not enough. The absence of discrimination will have little concrete meaning unless jobs are available and the members of all groups have the skills and education needed to qualify for those jobs. Nor can we expect that our young people will work hard to prepare for the future if they grow up in a climate of violence, drugs, and hopelessness.

In order to address these problems, attention must be given to measures that promote accountability, and parental choice in the schools; that strengthen the fight against violent criminals and drug dealers in our inner cities; and that help combat poverty and inadequate housing. We need initiatives that will empower individual Americans and enable them to reclaim control of their lives, thus helping to make our country's promise of opportunity a reality for all. Enactment of such initiatives, along with my Administration's civil rights bill, will achieve real advances for the cause of equal opportunity.

GEORGE BUSH.

THE WHITE HOUSE, *October 22, 1990.*

[MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT]

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL,
Washington, DC, October 22, 1990.

S. 2104, THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1990

This memorandum sets forth my views, and those of the Department of Justice, on S. 2104, the "Civil Rights Act of 1990." Although the bill contains some provisions that we both would like to see become law, S. 2104 is fatally flawed.

On May 17, 1990, in a Rose Garden speech marking the reauthorization of the Civil Rights Commission, you outlined the principles that would guide the approach of your Administration to civil rights legislation. You stated that: (1) civil rights legislation must