

We must save affirmative action programs

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As you may all know, there is a petition being distributed throughout the state of Missouri to “support civil rights.” What you may not know is that by signing this petition you are actually endorsing to end all affirmative action programs in the state.

Deceptively called the “Missouri Civil Rights Initiative,” this measure calls for a ban of state and local government affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment in public contracting, employment or education based on race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin, unless these programs are necessary to establish or maintain federal funding or comply with an existing court order.

This measure is primarily supported by Ward Connerly, a former University of California Board Regent who successfully campaigned Proposition 209 to end affirmative action programs in California. Following Proposition 209’s passage, Connerly promoted and won a series of ballot initiatives to end affirmative action in Washington and Michigan. Currently, Connerly is planning a “Super Tuesday for Equal Rights” on November 4 with plans to eliminate affirmative action in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma in 2008.

Notwithstanding, the effects of ending affirmative action in the states have been horrendous.

As a result of Proposition 209, black enrollment in public colleges and universities has plummeted and several minority businesses were shut down in California. According to Newsweek magazine, the law school at the University of California at Berkeley enrolled only one African American out of 268 students after the passage of Proposition 209. In 2006, only 96 out of 5,000 freshmen were African-American at the University of California. Additionally, contract dollars to women and minority owned businesses in California fell by 22 percent after affirmative action was banned.

Four years after the passage of I-200, Washington State’s anti-affirmative action initiative, Seattle public works contracts awarded to minority- or women-owned firms decreased by more than 25 percent.

In Michigan, where the initiative was recently passed, minority subcontractors working on city projects fell from 31 to 18 and the number of women subcontractors dropped from 18 to six in 2007. The total number of dollars received by minority firms decreased from \$2.6 million to \$1.2 million last year. Although subcontracting opportunities have severely declined for Michigan’s

women and minorities, the number of subcontracts to white male-owned companies has jumped from 56 to 147 in 2007, with the value of these subcontracts soaring from \$6 million in 2006 to \$30 million last year.

Consequently, a lawsuit has been filed against Proposal 2, Michigan's anti-affirmative action measure that passed in 2006, by several groups including the NAACP, American Civil Liberties Union, and By Any Means Necessary.

The bottom line is: Minorities need fair access to post-secondary education in order to succeed economically; Missouri's companies need a well-educated populace from which to hire qualified employees; and, female and minority entrepreneurs need fair access to business opportunities in order to survive.

Affirmative action was founded on the principle that certain groups of people in our nation have been denied the opportunity to progress due to past and current discrimination. As we have seen in the states of California, Washington and Michigan, in the absence of legal remedies to prevent discrimination, racism and sexism persist and thrive.

In Missouri, we cannot allow ourselves to pass a racially charged initiative that will set back women and minorities in progress. It also will hinder our state as a whole as we seek to encourage diversity and racial cooperation for the greater good of our society.

Now is the time for us to educate our families, churches, group members, coworkers and friends about the dangers of signing or voting for a deceptive "civil rights" petition. We should also contact our local, state and federal legislators to get their public support to soundly defeat the Missouri Civil Rights Initiative.

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