

The new poll attacks

Fayette News - October 30, 2018 - Opinion

"The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men." — Lyndon Johnson

If this statement from LBJ is to be believed, then no wonder Brian Kemp is trying so hard to prevent thousands of Georgians from exercising their right to vote. He believes neither in its sanctity nor in the sanctity of the long fight that we Americans have endured in order to enfranchise the common man.

We started this endeavor of being our own nation, because we didn't quite like not being able to vote when it came to matters that affected us in our everyday lives, from taxation to quartering soldiers in our homes to being allowed to say what we think about the government. We dumped the King's tea into the sea and told the British, after a long, bloody eight years, to get the hell out.

Granted, the road after that was anything but smooth. We were only able to set up our venerated Constitution by including a provision that an enslaved black person should only count as three-fifths of a person when sizing up a state's population.

Even after we fought another, bloodier war to ensure that slavery was eradicated, black people in this country were prevented at every turn from voting to improve their own lives for another hundred years. And those in power got downright nasty in thinking up ways to do so.

There were literacy tests and poll taxes. There were tactics like the "jelly-bean test" in which someone registering to vote would be forced to guess the number of jelly beans in a jar. Somehow the white applicants would get the correct number while the black applicants could never quite do so.

There were also more nefarious and unsavory ways of preventing blacks from voting. Intimidation and physical violence, including murder, were not off the table. In many parts of the country, the threat of black people having a say in their own destinies was so upsetting that terrorism by the majority was considered the proper course of action to prevent it.

With the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, things began to change and it looked as if we as a nation might be headed towards something like equality. These anti-voting methods were targeted by the act and had been largely eradicated by 2013.

So that's when the Supreme Court, in its infinite wisdom, chose to gut that same act, claiming that the Southern states had learned their lesson and oversight was no longer necessary. Boy, did that get Brian Kemp's mouth salivating. Since that ruling, Georgia Secretary of State Kemp has become the national expert in voter suppression.

His strategies are masterful, varied, and thorough. Due to his efforts, thousands upon thousands of Georgia voters have been declared ineligible to vote. In other words, he has stolen their voices.

He has purged countless names from the Georgia rolls, most of them black and Latino. Nearly 90 percent, in fact. His draconian "exact-match" system makes it possible to remove someone for a misplaced hyphen in their name or the failure to write out a middle name instead of initializing it. Many are purged because they failed to vote in the last election, not realizing the fact until they arrive at the polls and are turned away.

In just the past two years, Kemp has purged about 11 percent of eligible voters from the rolls. Approximately 340,000 voters were purged because it was assumed by the Secretary's office that they had moved out of state. While this was true for some, for many it was not. They still lived at the same address or somewhere within the Georgia borders.

In all, about a million and a half voters have been disenfranchised by Brian Kemp since 2012. On one notorious night in 2017, he purged over 600,000 Georgia voters from the rolls.

Kemp has also been closing polling places across the state. Since 2013, over 200 polling places have been padlocked, increasing the difficulty of voters in those areas to reach a convenient polling place, which are now often prohibitively crowded. And surprise, most of these closed locations were located in areas with large minority populations.

Another suspect practice of Mr. Kemp includes his reluctance to address the hacking vulnerability of Georgia's voting machines. He was the only Secretary of State in the entire country to refuse help from the Department of Homeland Security prior to the 2016 election to help safeguard the electronic voting machines. He has gone to court to prevent there being a paper record of a person's vote and other protections against hacking. His indefensible position on this issue prompted the judge in the case, Amy Totenberg, to admonish the Secretary of State for having "buried his head in the sand."

Georgia's voting machines run on Windows 2000, and Kemp sees no problem with that. Microsoft no longer even supports Windows 2000.

Kemp is not averse to using intimidation and sowing confusion in order to achieve his ends. As groups have arisen that are dedicated to registering African-American voters, he has initiated investigations into these groups, accusing them of fraud. After months of harassment, no charges or indictments were brought against any of the groups due to lack of evidence.

That hasn't deterred legal harassment against individuals though. One such member of a voting registration activist group, Debra Dennard, was prosecuted for helping her partially blind father with his vote. This sort of activity has the intent of intimidating and dissuading certain groups of people (i.e. minorities) from participating in the election process.

Former President Jimmy Carter, the winner of a Nobel Peace Prize due largely to his work in ensuring fair election practices worldwide, has now officially called upon Kemp to resign from his position as Secretary of State, because of the massive conflicts of interest of someone running for office who is also in control of the voting systems.

When Casey Cagle ran against Brian Kemp in the Republican Primary he admitted that the two were seeing "who could be the craziest." But it's not crazy, it's calculated. It's immoral. It's anti-democratic and selfish. Brian Kemp is a man who believes that not everyone in this country should have the right to vote, and he does all he can to ensure that his vision is realized. His own ambition is more important than the rule of law and more important than the countless Americans who have sacrificed their health, safety, and lives over the centuries of our existence to prove that not only the aristocracy be allowed a voice. He betrays that fundamental American value of at least striving to be better, more egalitarian.

I dare say that Kemp's got more in common with King George III than with George Washington. And sadly, those who insist on supporting this man, Brian Kemp, knowing what we know, would likely have sided with the British Empire during the Revolution and their red-coated thugs.

