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End Racial Profiling

In February 2001, then-President George W. Bush told both chambers of Congress that racial profiling was “wrong and we will end it in America.” In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, however, racial profiling became standard practice. For the first time since those attacks, last month the Senate held hearings on racial profiling. Sen. Richard Durbin, D-IL, lamented the delay, saying, “In the national trauma caused by 9/11, we sometimes sacrificed liberty in the misguided notion that it would keep us safe.”

In testimony before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights in support of S. 1670, the *End Racial Profiling Act* (ERPA), witnesses criticized unequal treatment of individuals based on their perceived race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin as discriminatory, ineffective in identifying criminals, and corrosive of public trust in law enforcement.

In particular, racial profiling creates fear in minority communities and inhibits communication about crimes. According to Jessica González-Rojas, executive director of National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, “People of color, including immigrants, see their families torn apart by racial profiling and discriminatory policing every day. They call the police to report a crime, but instead of receiving help they find themselves face-down on the pavement, in a jail cell, or in deportation proceedings, too often losing their partners or children in the process.”

ERPA would create a federal prohibition against racial profiling, fund training on how to end this practice, and hold law enforcement officials accountable if they continue the practice. It would grant individuals injured by racial profiling the right to obtain declaratory or injunctive relief. It also authorizes the Attorney General to fund collection of data relating to racial profiling and to develop best practices.

Urge your legislators to support S. 1670, as well as H.R. 3618, the House version sponsored by Rep. John Conyers. For more information see: [*racial-profiling-hearing*](#).

Encourage Voter Participation!

Pressured by watchdog groups and civil rights organizations, numerous corporations such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Kraft Foods and Intuit ended their relationships with the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a conservative group of business interests and state legislators that

assists and influences state legislatures and promotes conservative initiatives. Facing further potential donor loss, ALEC announced Tuesday, April 17, that it was disbanding the task force that has been responsible for advancing controversial Voter ID laws. The task force has pushed voter suppression and anti-democratic Voter ID laws and restrictions on citizen rights to petition for referendums and constitutional changes that favor workers and communities. (For more information see: [alec-disbands-task-force](#))

Unfortunately, around the country there still exist voter suppression laws initiated by groups such as ALEC that pose grave danger to our democracy and could lead to the disenfranchisement of 5 million people. Five states - Pennsylvania, Indiana, Kansas, Georgia, and Tennessee - have strict photo ID requirements currently on the books. In Texas, South Carolina, and Mississippi similar laws might take effect before the November election. A total of thirty states have some form of voter identification requirements.

Ethical Culturists should be asking the question posed by Elisabeth MacNamara of the League of Women Voters: "Why aren't our elected officials looking to see what is behind these state laws that could make it harder for millions of eligible voters to participate in Election 2012?" Although proponents of restrictions claim that reducing voter fraud is their mission, there is no evidence that such fraud occurs with any regularity in U. S. elections. While non-photo identification methods - such as, using utility account bills or signature matching - offer alternatives to acquiring photo ID's, the reality is that voter ID laws disproportionately impact the elderly, youth, and minority communities most at risk of marginalization.

What can you do? Keep the pressure on ALEC to follow through with their dismantling of their voter suppression apparatus by signing and distributing a *Color of Change* petition found at this link: [colorofchange](#). Consider working in your region to help the potentially disenfranchised obtain the necessary identification in time to vote. Write a letter to Attorney General Eric Holder demanding that the federal government assure voting rights in each of the 50 states and all territories. His address is the U.S. Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20530-0001.

Support Comprehensive Progressive Immigration Reform

Almost everyone agrees that our immigration system is broken. At a February 9 hearing before the House Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement, Rep. Zoe Lofgren (CA) said that the current system was "a mess" needing overhaul. Approximately ten million immigrants live in the United States, building lives and contributing to our economy. Border and enforcement resources are wasted in pursuit of immigrant workers and would be better spent if focused on criminals, violent drug smugglers, national security threats, and unscrupulous employers taking advantage of an exploitable workforce.

Some suggest that we ignore the issue of immigrants currently in the United States and address our employment needs by relying on "guest workers" programs. Two such proposals currently being considered by Congress are the *American Specialty Agriculture Act* (HR 2847) and the *Legal Agricultural Workforce Act* (HR 2895). They are opposed by many groups. According to the Friends Council for National Legislation, neither of these bills: 1) offer paths to citizenship; 2) increase potential of employment; 3) provide for transportation challenges to and from country of origin; or, 4) protect the existing American agricultural work force.

Guest worker programs are also unjust. Rep. Charles Rangel called one such domestic program "the closest thing I've ever seen to slavery." The current H-2 program brings in workers for jobs in forestry, seafood processing, landscaping, construction and more who are systematically exploited and abused. They are bound to the employers who "import" them and they may not change jobs if they are mistreated. Complainers face deportation and blacklisting.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, H-2 workers are routinely cheated out of wages, held virtually captive by employers or labor brokers who seize their documents, forced to live in squalid conditions, denied medical benefits for on-the-job injuries, and have no access to legal help to address these injustices. (For more information see: [Close to Slavery](#))(Opens a pdf file)

Most importantly, however, guest worker programs do not address the issue of the one million undocumented agricultural workers currently in the U.S. For that reason urge your representative to support Senator Robert Menendez's *Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2011* (S. 1258). The bill provides a program for legalizing undocumented immigrants, updates the family-based and employment-based immigration admissions systems, contains the DREAM Act and AgJOBS legislation, and provides resources for the integration of immigrants into our society. Let's do what's best for both our economy and the human beings yearning to build a positive, constructive life in the United States. (*For more information see: [immigrationforum](#) and [questworker](#)*)

Reduce Carbon Emissions

Lisa Jackson, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Administration, deserves praise for her willingness to address climate change and defend the Clean Air Act. In March she announced the Carbon Pollution Standard, the EPA's first limits on carbon dioxide emissions from new power plants. The move essentially bans construction of traditional coal-fired power plants since facilities must now produce less than 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per megawatt-hour.

Unfortunately, this is only a tiny step since, as she admitted, "we have no plans to regulate existing sources." Without extremely expensive retrofitting, decades-old coal-power plants will continue to emit noxious chemicals and carbon into the air. The new carbon pollution regulation exempts carbon pollution that is created by burning biomass which can have higher greenhouse gas emissions than coal.

As advocated by *CREDO Action* (see: [credoaction](#)), the best practical solution is to institute a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade program. Without Congressional support and more leadership from the White House, however, there is little the EPA can do to move this strategy forward. Burdened by obstructionism to basic science and responsible climate change policies, we drift closer to environmental catastrophe.

Other countries are making strides forward. Last month the Mexican House of Representatives passed a climate law, which – when approved by the Mexican Senate – will put Mexico in an elite global club along with the UK. The law puts Mexico on track for a cleaner, greener future, one with 50% less carbon by 2050. And as reported in the *Guardian* last month (see: [china-climate-change](#)), even China - long accused of inaction concerning climate change - recently adopted a plan to promote energy efficiency and carbon intensity targets. Rob Elsworth reports that China has "embraced the need to set absolute caps on emissions."

Consider marking May 5, 2012, *350.Org's* Climate Impacts Day by hosting or attending an event. On May 5th, communities around the world will be connecting the dots on the impacts of climate change. Protest, educate, document and volunteer along with thousands of people around the world to support the communities on the front lines of the climate crisis. (See: [climatedots](#)). For more information see: [carbon-emissions](#).

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