

Supreme Court Rules on Three Major Rights Issues

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

The United States Supreme Court made decisions on three major rights cases this week.

On Monday the court released a decision on education policy for minorities. But, the high court chose not to give a final ruling on the policy known as affirmative action.

The case involves a young white woman, Abigail Fisher, who was rejected by the University of Texas. Her lawyers argued that universities should not be permitted to consider race when trying to accept a diverse class of students. They said that considering someone's race in the admissions process violates their constitutional right to equal protection under the law.

Seven of the nine justices voted to return the case to a lower court saying it had not fully studied the university's actions.

Opponents praised the Supreme Court for ordering the lower court to enforce a narrower version of the school's affirmative action plan. Civil rights activists welcomed the decision because it did not cancel the policy.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court did cancel a part of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Congress passed the law to ensure that African Americans in southern states could vote. The court decision ends federal supervision of election laws in states with a history of voter suppression.

The law was aimed at nine states and some cities and counties in seven other states. These states were required to seek approval from the Justice Department to make changes to their election laws. Congress has repeatedly extended the law, most recently in 2006.

A divided court ruled by a vote of five to four. In the majority opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote that widespread violation of the rights of black voters no longer exists. The majority ruled that the method used to decide which areas require federal supervision violates the rights of states. It said Congress must decide on a better method.

Several states announced they would begin new voting requirements that had been blocked by the Justice Department soon after the ruling.

Cherilyn Infill is with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

“Make no mistake about what has happened.”

Speaking to a crowd near the court, she said the court has decided that it stands in a better position than Congress to determine how to protect against voting discrimination.

“The 15th amendment to the constitution makes clear that it is Congress that has that power.”

On Wednesday morning, a different crowd waited outside the court building. Supporters of same-sex marriage cheered when the Supreme Court canceled a federal and a state law on the issue.

The court said the 1996 federal law called the Defense of Marriage Act violated the rights of same-sex couples. The court said that the government could not prevent same-sex couples from getting the same tax, health and retirement benefits as traditional husbands and wives. Supporters of the laws promised to continue efforts to limit marriage to legal unions of one man and one woman.

And that's In the News from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.