

MEXICAN AMERICAN FEDERATION-WASHINGTON STATE  
2912 West Chestnut Street, Yakima, Washington  
September 10, 1968

News Release

ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1968, A COMPLAINT WILL BE FILED IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT IN YAKIMA CHALLENGING THE LITERACY REQUIREMENT AND LITERACY TESTING LAWS AND PRACTICES IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON.

THE SUIT IS BROUGHT BY THE MEXICAN--AMERICAN FEDERATION, A NON--PROFIT CORPORATION ORGANIZED IN NOVEMBER OF 1967 TO PROMOTE THE INTERESTS OF MEXICAN-AMERICANS, AND BY FOUR ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ FARM WORKERS RESIDING IN YAKIMA COUNTY, CESARIO JIMENEZ, SIMON RAMOS, JENNIE MARIN AND MARTA CANTU. DEFENDANTS IN THE CASE ARE EUGENE NAFF, YAKIMA COUNTY AUDITOR, MAURINE SEEFELDT, TOPPENISH CITY CLERK, AND CHARLES SKINNER, ZILLAH CITY CLERK. IN ADDITION, THE COMPLAINT SEEKS TO HAVE ALL VOTING REGISTRARS IN THE STATE OF ~~THE~~ WASHINGTON JOINED AS DEFENDANTS.

THE COMPLAINT ALLEGES THAT THE PROVISION OF THE WASHINGTON STATE CONSTITUTION REQUIRING ~~YAKIMA~~ THAT CITIZENS BE ABLE TO READ AND SPEAK THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, AS A CONDITION OF ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE, IS AN UNREASONABLE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE WHO ARE ABLE TO READ AND SPEAK SPANISH BUT NOT ENGLISH, AND THAT IT IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

IT IS ALSO ALLEGED THAT THE LITERACY TESTS ARE NOW BEING ADMINISTERED IN YAKIMA COUNTY IN A MANNER PROHIBITED BY THE FEDERAL VOTERS' RIGHTS ACT OF 1965: THE TESTS ARE NOT WRITTEN, ARE NOT UNIFORMLY ADMINISTERED, AND ARE NOT GIVEN TO EVERY APPLICANT.

THE COMPLAINT ALSO ALLEGES THAT THE ~~K R~~ WASHINGTON LAW AUTHORIZING VOTING REGISTRARS TO ADMINISTER LITERACY TESTS PROVIDES THEM WITH NO OBJECTIVE STANDARDS, AND ESSENTIALLY ALLOWS THEM TO ESTABLISH ELIGIBILITY

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STANDARDS FOR MEXICAN-AMERICANS ON AN AD HOC BASIS, AND THAT IT IS FOR THAT REASON, UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

FINALLY, IT IS ALLEGED THAT BECAUSE OF THE LITERACY TESTING REQUIREMENTS IN YAKIMA COUNTY HAVE RESULTED IN A PATTERN AND PRACTICE OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE REGISTRATION OF VOTERS, AGAINST SPANISH-SPEAKING AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN PEOPLE.

THE SUIT ASKS TO HAVE A THREE JUDGE FEDERAL COURT CONVENED TO ENJOIN THE CONTINUED USE AND ENFORCEMENT OF ENGLISH LITERACY REQUIREMENTS AND TESTS, AND TO HAVE ONE OR MORE SPANISH SPEAKING REGISTRAR APPOINTED FOR YAKIMA COUNTY, TO CORRECT THE REGISTRATION IMBALANCE AMONG MEXICAN-AMERICAN CITIZENS OF YAKIMA COUNTY, RESULTING FROM PREVIOUS DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES.