

Seeks to Exempt Alaska from Voting Rights Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, today introduced an amendment to the Voting Rights Act to exempt Alaska from the provision in the

bill requiring written voting information for all language minorities.

Several Native groups in Alaska have oral or written languages

which make printed ballots impossible. The State government has instituted a voter assistance program that includes interpreters for groups that have an unwritten

language.

“Alaska has already taken care of its language minority groups with the voting assistance statute,” Gravel said, “and it’s working well.” The statute also helps Alaskans register to vote and encourages voters to get to the polls on election day.

The Voting Rights Act was passed by the Congress in 1965 to overcome numerous state laws that infringed on individual voting rights. The Senate is now considering a 10-year extension of the act and an increase in its coverage.

The success of the act since 1965 has been significant. English literacy requirements that were discriminatory have been repealed in many states, and voter registration drives have been conducted to increase voter participation.

But, Gravel said, “many abuses still exist that must be dealt with. Continuation of the Voting Rights Act will make that possible.”

Last month, during hearings on the bill by the Judiciary Committee, Gravel testified in favor of extending the act and explained the unique language situation in Alaska.

A vote on the bill is expected in late June or July.