By Greg Abbott

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The Obama administration’s interference in Texas’ redistricting and voter-ID litigation does not protect voting rights. It protects the Democratic Party. Recall that just a few months ago, high-ranking Obama operatives launched a campaign to “turn Texas blue.” The administration’s foray into Texas voting rights litigation is just another page in that political playbook.

In redistricting, the Obama administration has aligned itself with Democratic state representatives and Democratic members of Congress who already are suing Texas. It is no surprise then that the legal position of President Obama’s attorneys seeks to improve Democratic candidates’ prospects. Of course, Mr. Obama’s attorneys conceal this partisan agenda with lofty rhetoric about minority voting rights. But it is no coincidence that every change to district lines supported by the administration benefits Democrats. Behind the empty allegations of racial discrimination lies one goal — helping Democrats in 2014.

The president’s partisan use of the Voting Rights Act actually hurts many minority voters in Texas. With the administration’s support, redistricting litigation already has unseated Texas state Reps. Jose Aliseda, Raul Torres, Aaron Pena and John Garza, as well as U.S. Rep. Quico Canseco. These representatives — all Republicans — won in 2010 in predominantly Hispanic districts. In 2011, however, the Obama administration and other partisan interest groups succeeded in getting a court to draw district lines so that only a Democrat could win these seats. As a direct result, all of these Republican Hispanic representatives lost their seats in 2012 except for Mr. Aliseda, who chose not to run for re-election. His district had been dismantled altogether at Democrats’ request.

The administration’s approach reveals the Democrats’ fear that Republican candidates were making inroads with Hispanic voters. Democrats could never “turn Texas blue” if that trend continued, so they got the courts to draw district lines that guarantee Democratic victory in predominantly Hispanic areas. What about the rights of Hispanic voters who preferred representatives such as Mr. Aliseda, you might ask? They apparently don’t matter to this administration.

Similarly, polling consistently shows that Hispanic Texans strongly support voter-ID requirements, another target of the administration’s litigious political strategy. Electoral fraud harms voters of all races, and voter ID is a simple, nondiscriminatory way to help stop it. Getting an ID is free of charge for any Texan who needs one. Voter-ID laws already have been upheld by the Supreme Court. Crying “voter suppression” is nothing but a cynical scare tactic designed to mobilize Democratic partisans, none of whom ever will be prevented from voting by these laws. The administration’s absurd claim that this common-sense fraud prevention device is actually a racist plot to prevent minorities from voting would be comical if it weren’t so depressing to see an American president stoop to that level.

The president’s attempt to put Texas’ elections under his thumb also disrupts the constitutional balance between federal and state governments. The Constitution makes elections the states’ business, not the federal government’s. The Supreme Court’s recent Shelby County, Ala., v. Holder decision threw out a requirement that certain states “preclear” their voting laws with the Department of Justice. On top of that, putting states like Texas back under federal oversight is unnecessary to protect voting rights. Although the Supreme Court has ended the preclearance requirement, the protections of the Voting Rights Act still apply. Anyone claiming discrimination by a state voting law can sue in federal court. In fact, that is exactly what has happened in the Texas redistricting litigation, where the Obama administration injected itself. If the courts find that a state law violates the Voting Rights Act, the law will not be enforced. These lawsuits cost the aggrieved voter nothing. There is a sizable cottage industry of lawyers who gladly take any legitimate — and many illegitimate — cases at no charge to the aggrieved voter.

After the Shelby County decision, the Voting Rights Act still works. It just no longer imposes an onerous and costly preclearance requirement that disrupts the state-federal balance of power enshrined in the Constitution. Instead of allowing the Voting Rights Act to work in a way the Constitution allows, the Obama administration is sowing racial divide to score cheap political points. The president is using the
legal system as a sword to wage partisan battles rather than a shield to protect voting rights. This overreaching action undermines the Voting Rights Act and the rule of law. Texas will not tolerate it. So far, neither will the Supreme Court.

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