

Voter ID attacks voting rights

Written by Lydia Howell
Monday, 15 October 2012 07:58

I WANT
YOU
TO NOT
VOTE



For decades, Minnesota has been #1 nationally for voter turnout. If Voter ID passes on Election Day, that will change for many reasons---*none of which appear on the ballot*: The number of people voting will shrink, further reflect the wealth gap and whiten. Implications for further corruption and discrimination ripple out beyond elections. Since juries are chosen from voter rolls, criminal justice system bias would deepen, as even fewer people of color and the poor are picked to judge their peers.

Post-Civil War amendments to the U.S. Constitution *expanded* rights. Mid-1860s : ended slavery and (at least legally) granted voting rights to Black men. 1920:women (of all colors) won legal voting. rights. U.S. Senators were selected by state legislators---not voters--until 1912.. District of Columbia residents vote for President since 1961; although the Black majority residents of our nation's Capitol still do not have either Representatives in Congress or Senators. Poll taxes eliminated, 1962; 18-year-olds vote since 1971. The 1965 Voting Rights Act made African-American voting rights in the South reality, continuing to open democratic process and including more people's voices.

However, states were (*and still are*) given the power to organize elections and that's where Voter ID amendments and other state election laws reverse progress and undermine democracy..

Voter ID supporters say, "We have to prevent voter fraud! You need a State ID to cash a check or fly, so, what's the problem?" But, people living in poverty often change residences multiple times a year and cannot afford to replace their ID with each move. College students often only have state ID from their parents' address---not the campus where they live on Election Day, yet, college ID won't count for voting purposes. With disproportionate poverty, many people of color, students, the disabled, all face losing their voting rights if Voter ID passes.

Every study shows actual "voter fraud" is practically non-existent. Why is this "solution" being

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pushed for a problem that doesn't exist? Since 2006, escalating since the 2008 election, Republican state legislators across the country have prioritized Voter ID and other voter restrictions that primarily target people who tend to vote Democratic. These voter suppression laws were crafted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a shadowy corporate lobbying group, that writes "model laws" that primarily Republican law-makers implement. ALEC also authored "Stand Your Ground" laws, that unleashed shootings of unarmed people of color mostly by whites who claimed a broader immunity under that law, as in the Trayvon Martin case. The ALEC agenda includes further eroding protections for public health and the environment, destroying workers' rights (including labor unions) and limiting ordinary people's access to the courts for redress of corporate abuses.

Currently, we can register and cast a vote on Election Day. Since identity can't be validated at the polls, after Voter ID, voters' would only cast a provisional ballot. Remember those in Florida in the 2000 Bush-Gore election? Procedures confirming provisional ballots are complicated, expensive, imperfect and will delay election results by weeks. Nationally on average *30% of provisional ballots are discarded*

. Currently, 500,000 Minnesotans register to vote at the polls.

What about absentee voters? From those in isolated rural areas without polling places to members of the military serving overseas, currently, 250,000 Minnesotans vote by mail. Passing Voter ID effectively eliminates absentee voting.

Minnesota's Secretary of State Mark Richie proposed a back-up system to insure voter integrity that doesn't result in eligible voters being disenfranchised: electronic poll books that would be updated just before Election Day, costing \$200,000--compared to at least \$2 million for Voter ID (and probably far more when legal challenges to discarded ballots are included). However, Republican legislators rejected Richie's alternative to Voter ID, more evidence that this is a brazenly partisan effort.

For doubters that this is a Republican effort to rig elections, consider that on October 4, authors of Voter ID State Senators Mike Perry (R-Waseka) and Scott Newman (R-Hutchison) filed a complaint with the Office of Administrative Hearings against Mark Richie accusing him of "multiple violations of his public office {Secretary of State}...using public funds to travel the state ...to promote his anti-Voter ID bias." Republicans charging Democrats with these kinds of violations are standard Karl Rove playbook that have succeeded in Democrats being fired from government jobs and even doing jail time.

Senator Newman told Minnesota Public Radio, "I don't view Mark Richie as some kind of election cop who's responsible for protecting the people of Minnesota from the legislators' bill...neither do I believe that in he using his position as Secretary of State to influence the voters on ballot initiatives."

But don't voters have a right to know what they are voting for? Richie has tried to educate the public, because what appears on the ballot is *incomplete* (as can be seen at the end of this article.)

None of the "side effects" of

passing Voter ID (ending same day registration and voting, ending absentee voting, plus

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potential mass purges of the voter rolls) are on the ballot. Don't voters have a right to know that the "problem" they are being told they are voting to fix, does not, in fact, exist? As far as this reporter knows, voter suppression laws' impact on jury selection hasn't been recognized by anyone.

The Brennan Center for Justice documents a wildfire of voter suppression laws sweeping the country. Since 2011, 16 states have enacted Voter ID and other laws threatening voting rights for millions. Currently, about 11 per cent of Americans do not have government-issued ID. That's *21 million* people purged from the 2012 election. Republicans' claim that our elections are plagued with "voter fraud" is a not born out by facts.

From 2002 to 2007, *the Bush Administration* searched for cases of voter fraud and found *only 86 in the entire country*

. Over that five years, the American Civil Liberties Union with the Brennan Center only found *sixteen*

cases. Voter ID is a false 'solution' to address a non-existent problem. Most ineligible voting is by

mistake: almost always

, people with felony records voting

before

completing probation or parole. The best solution to this is restoring voting rights when people leave prison, as part of re-integrating prisoners back into society. When challenged to find a

care of voter fraud in Minnesota, only *one person*

in the 2010 election was prosecuted.

Minnesota's tradition is to *encourage more voter participation* with voter registration on Election Day, early voting with absentee ballots and other measures. Republicans here and across the country are using various tactics from restrictive laws like Voter ID laws to replicating purges of voter rolls (as in Florida 2000) to threatening community groups that do voter registration drives with \$1,000 fines for each "unqualified" voter they register. Their goal is increasingly undeniable: discouraging or outright excluding voters---reversing 150 years of struggles to expand American democracy. Only We The People, as informed and engaged citizens can defeat Voter ID and we must. Now's the time for "each one, teach one" in overdrive.

Take Action Minnesota is organizing against Voter ID. To register to vote, find your polling place and more: www.mnvotes.org For information about candidates' record and positions on issues: www.votesmart.org Investigative reporter, Greg Palast's exposes attacks on voting rights nation-wide at: www.BallotBandits.org

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PROPOSED AMENDMENT 2

(Minnesota Session Laws 2012, Chapter 167)

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UNDERLINED TEXT IS WHAT IS PROPOSED TO BE ADDED TO THE MINNESOTA CONSTITUTION

Article VII, Section 1. (a) Every person 18 years of age or more who has been a citizen of the United States for three months and who has resided in the precinct for 30 days next preceding an election shall be entitled to vote in that precinct. The place of voting by one otherwise qualified who has changed his residence within 30 days preceding the election shall be prescribed by law. The following persons shall not be entitled or permitted to vote at any election in this state: A person not meeting the above requirements; a person who has been convicted of treason or felony, unless restored to civil rights; a person under guardianship, or a person who is insane or not mentally competent.

(b) All voters voting in person must present valid government-issued photographic identification before receiving a ballot. The state must issue photographic identification at no charge to an eligible voter who does not have a form of identification meeting the requirements of this section. A voter unable to present government-issued photographic identification must be permitted to submit a provisional ballot. A provisional ballot must only be counted if the voter certifies the provisional ballot in the manner provided by law.

(c) All voters, including those not voting in person, must be subject to substantially equivalent identity and eligibility verification prior to a ballot being cast or counted.