



ILLINOIS BALLOT INTEGRITY PROJECT

Make Every Vote Count . . . Count Every Vote

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Robert A. Wilson
State Chairman

Via Facsimile

May 25, 2007

Honorable Barak Obama
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Amendment (SA 1170 to bill S 1348)

Dear Senator Obama:

Senators Mitch McConnell and Christopher "Kit" Bond have introduced the above-referenced amendment which attaches a photo ID requirement to the present immigration bill. This pernicious amendment, unrelated to the basic purpose of the proposed immigration legislation, would amend the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) to impose a nation-wide requirement for restrictive photo voter Identification for all Federal Elections. Specifically, the amendment calls for a renumbering of §§ 304 and 305 and insertion of a new § 304 as follows:

SEC. 304. IDENTIFICATION OF VOTERS AT THE POLLS

(a) In General.--Notwithstanding the requirements of section 303(b), each State shall require individuals casting ballots in an election for Federal office in person to present a current valid photo identification issued by a governmental entity before voting.

(b) Effective Date.--Each State shall be required to comply with the requirements of subsection (a) on and after January 1, 2008.

We have seen no proof, absolutely no evidence, that non-citizens have been trying to vote in significant numbers. The question posed by the photo ID requirement is not whether only citizens should vote, but whether only those with extra time and money should vote.

It costs between \$10 and \$45 to get a certified copy of a birth certificate, it cost Between \$10 and \$20 to get a drivers license, it costs \$20 to get certified naturalization papers, and it costs \$85 to get a passport. And, it can take weeks to get any of these documents. Why must citizens pay what is in effect an indirect poll tax that this documentation would require before voting?

When you make it more difficult to register and vote, those that get excluded are the oldest, the youngest, the poorest, minorities, the disabled and those who have difficulty speaking English. And that's exactly the intent of this amendment. People, like Senators McConnell and Bond, who want to make voting more difficult know that these are exactly the people that will be disenfranchised.

People like to argue that we have to show ID to get on a plane or drive a car, and that voting is just as important as those activities. And we agree. Voting is not just as important as driving, in fact, it's more important.

That's why voting, unlike driving, is enshrined in the Constitution as a *fundamental right*: a right that everyone must have access to, a right that is not just for those who can afford it -not just for those who can purchase a photo ID - a right that is for all our citizens.

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Voter ID requirements and proof of citizenship requirements open the door to discrimination against people who attempt to exercise their right to vote.

- A Wisconsin study found that nearly one-quarter of people over 65 do not have ID.
- The US Department of Justice found that blacks in Louisiana are 5 times less likely than whites to have ID.
- Georgia has 159 counties and only 56 places to obtain an ID, needed to vote – yet not one of those places is in Atlanta.

If you are poor, if you are elderly, if you move often, if you are a student, or if you are a person of color, if you are a naturalized citizen, then these voter photo ID requirements are designed to disenfranchise you. If you care about equal access to democracy and you believe in the principle of “one person, one vote,” then these voter photo ID requirements are designed to silence you.

In fact, the only purpose of a voter photo ID requirement is to keep people from participating in our democracy. And the voter photo ID requirement has become part of a playbook that is being executed in every state in the nation. Full participation in democracy should not be a partisan issue, but it has become one. The conventional wisdom is that bigger turnouts help Democrats, so Republicans have chosen to make voter suppression and turnout depression one of their key plays.

The biggest threat to democracy today is the same as the biggest threat to democracy yesterday. It is the threat of discrimination and disenfranchisement, of voter suppression and poll taxes and literacy tests.

These same old threats to democracy have been dressed up in the style of our times, they have been called necessary to guard against terror, against fraud, and against corruption. But these are just fancy names for the same tools that have always been used to take votes away from the working poor, the disabled, the elderly, the students, and people of color.

Discrimination and disenfranchisement are not new threats, but we have to be newly vigilant against them. We have to take a stand against photo ID requirements that are designed to prevent participation. We have to demand, again, that everyone have equal access to our democracy.

The Illinois Ballot Integrity Project opposes voter ID requirements in any form other than verification by signature; and we strongly oppose the very onerous photo ID requirement proposed in SA 1170. We ask your assistance in defeating this amendment. We must work together to make it clear that we will not accept discrimination in democracy, and we will not rest until the right to vote is treated as a *right* and not a privilege.

Sincerely,



cc: IBIP Executive Committee