

Don't Get Hoodwinked: Get Out and Vote

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Recently Missouri Governor Matt Blunt signed into law a Voter Identification bill that requires registered voters to show an additional form of ID besides their voter registration card to vote. This is shocking because it gives election judges the legal right to disenfranchise registered voters. How did this happen?

Unless you have been asleep under a rock for the past six years, you have heard about the scandals related to the November 2000 election. Beginning with the story of the hanging chads, the question of who really won the State of Florida and (for that matter) the popular vote, many so-called voter reforms have been put in place to prevent voter fraud. The effectiveness of these reforms and the possible ulterior motives of the politicians instituting their changes, however, need to be called into question.

This law is basically unconstitutional because it denies registered voters the right to vote based on an additional requirement. This law's real purpose is to make it harder for certain groups of people to vote. The Voter ID Law is no different from the poll taxes, literacy tests and grandfather clauses of yesteryear that were used to deny African Americans the right to vote. The proof of this motive is that the 170,000 Missourians who currently don't have state ID's are elderly, disabled, impoverished or belong to a minority, people least likely to support the majority party in the State Legislature.

As I have previously alluded to, this push for voter reform has been going on since 2000 when loopholes were discovered in our electoral process. Since that time, new voting machines, the Help America Vote Act and other measures have been introduced to combat the problem. It is strange, however, that the 1965 Voting Rights Act has not been reauthorized by Congress. Recently, National Urban League President Marc Morial joined with U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund President Theodore Shaw and Leadership Forum Chairman Joseph Lowery in urging

Congress to reauthorize the act. As of late, the act was taken off the House calendar before it could be voted on. Once again the St. Louis Urban League stands in agreement with the National Urban League and other civil rights leaders that the Voting Rights Act should be renewed and that the Voter ID law needs to be abolished. With this being said, it is imperative that not only African Americans but low-income, immigrant and senior populations work harder to protect our right to vote.

There is a provision in the new Voter ID law that states that after November 1, 2008 voters who do not have proper photo IDs and who are not disabled or elderly and do not have a religious objection, could still cast a provisional ballot. However, this ballot could not be counted until they returned with a state photo ID. As you can see, this law will go into full effect just in time for the next Presidential election.

In the current political climate, disenfranchisement is the key to illegally obtaining and maintaining political office. Family, the time has come for us to get serious about voting and becoming politically active in our communities before it is too late. Although many supporters of the Voter ID law are saying that it will prevent voter fraud, the greater fraud of disenfranchisement will take place when registered voters are turned away at the polls.