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Voter ID bill would chill voting

By Victoria Middleton

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NOV. 6, 2009 -- A lot of our fellow citizens went to the polls to vote in local elections this week. In some municipalities, the turnout was disappointing. One way to discourage still more people from exercising their constitutional right to vote would be to pass [H. 3418](#), the so-called "Voter ID" bill. In this case, our legislators would best serve the public interest of South Carolina citizens by not acting on this legislative solution in search of a problem.

On the surface, H. 3418 seems deceptively uncontroversial: it links a proposed Voter ID requirement to an early voting bill. Almost everyone in South Carolina has a valid driver's license, right? Wrong. In reality, this flawed legislation would make it impossible for an estimated 350,000 already-registered voters in our state to exercise their most fundamental democratic right – to make their voices heard during an election.



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In a state with 4.4 million people, where 3.3 million are eligible to vote, only about 2.5 million are registered. It is a shame that approximately 1 million South Carolinians are eligible to vote but fail to register. But suppressing the votes of 350,000 responsible citizens who meet state eligibility requirements and are already registered to vote is to disenfranchise voters. Rather than erecting hurdles that prevent South Carolinians from voting, lawmakers should ensure that every eligible voter can vote, and that every vote counts.

"Adding an additional hurdle to voting in the form of a Voter ID, as proposed in H. 3418, would be a step backwards in our quest for a more open and democratic society."

Think that Voter IDs protect the "integrity of the process" of voting? Wrong again. They add an expensive and unneeded burden. South Carolina election commission officials have stated that our recent history holds no examples of impersonation of voters, no evidence that anyone has tried to steal another citizen's vote.

The real threat of vote theft comes from the undue impact of Voter IDs on minorities, limited-income persons, and seniors. People who belong to these groups are less likely to have access to the documents required to obtain a photo ID, and the birth certificates, passports, and other documents required to get an ID are not available free of charge. The added requirements will

exclude voters in key constituencies -- low-income, racial and ethnic minority voters, senior citizens, voters with disabilities, students, and others who lack a photo ID or the means to acquire one.

If H. 3418 were passed, the state would have to fund new training for poll workers and election officials to avoid adding wait time for voters on election day. The state would also have to mount a public education campaign to alert people of the new ID requirement. Surely we have more pressing needs for scarce tax dollars in the current economic climate than to add an additional bureaucratic layer to the voting process.

The right to vote is protected by more constitutional amendments – the First, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-Sixth – than any other right we enjoy as Americans. The history of the U.S. is that of the expansion of voting rights to include most Americans. The right to vote protects all our other rights. Adding an additional hurdle to voting in the form of a Voter ID, as proposed in H. 3418, would be a step backwards in our quest for a more open and democratic society.

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