

The Texas Voter ID Law - A New 21st Century Poll Tax

Written by Congresswoman Jackson Lee
Thursday, 01 March 2012 08:44



An attack on the right to vote is under way across the country through laws designed to make it more difficult to cast a ballot. While couched in terms of voter fraud, these laws will actually have their greatest impact by limiting participation of African Americans, Latinos and the young.

Recently the Congresswoman presented Attorney General Eric Holder with a letter requesting that the Department of Justice review the US Department of Justice to ensure compliance with the Voting Rights Act (VRA). She urged the US Department of Justice to scrutinize new voting restrictions aggressively for discriminatory impact, refuse to pre-clear laws under Section 5 of the VRA that have a discriminatory purpose or effect, and to bring cases under Section 2 of the VRA in other states where necessary to challenge regressive voter laws.

A long, bitter, and bloody struggle was fought for the Voting Rights Act of 1965 so that all Americans could enjoy the right to vote, regardless of race, ethnicity, or national origin. Americans died in that fight so that others could achieve what they had been forcefully deprived of for centuries--the ability to walk freely and without fear into the polling place and cast a voting ballot. An election with integrity is one that is open to every eligible voter. Restrictive voter ID requirements degrade the integrity of our elections by systematically excluding large numbers of eligible Americans.

Not only is it unnecessary, but requiring a very specific type of photo ID discriminates against many classes of voters who do not possess the type of photo ID required - elderly whose licenses have expired, low-income voters who do not drive, disabled voters, young voters and college students. 11% of the entire voting-eligible population (21 million) does not have government issued photo-ID. 25% of eligible African American voters do not have qualified photo ID. Nationwide 18% of eligible voters over 65 lack an ID that would be suitable for voting.

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Ten percent of all people with disabilities do not have up-to-date state issued identification.

Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections, a Supreme Court case decided in 1966, outlawed the Jim Crow requirement that a citizen pay a poll tax in order to be allowed to vote in an election. In its decision, the Court said 'We conclude that a State violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment whenever it makes the affluence of the voter or payment of any fee an electoral standard.' However, with voter photo ID requirements, those who would suppress the rights of citizens to vote would have vote a way to implement a backdoor poll tax. Voters without valid, non-expired state or federal government issued identification documents will be burdened with the expenses of obtaining one of those prescribed forms of ID.

The right to vote is a critical and sacred constitutionally protected civil right. To challenge this is to erode our democracy, challenge justice, and mock our moral standing. I urge my colleagues to join me in dismissing this crippling legislation, and pursue effective solutions to the real problems of election fraud and error. We cannot let the rhetoric of an election year destroy a fundamental right upon which we have established liberty and freedom.{jcomments on}