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Alaska State Legislature

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CHAIRMAN
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Labor and Commerce
State Affairs
Finance—Subcommittee Administration

Representative H. A. "Red" Boucher

TO: STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

FROM: H.A."RED" BOUCHER

DATE: MAY 13, 1987

RE: HB 308 AN ACT RELATING TO VOTER REGISTRATION

The major feature of the "motor voter" bill is to provide additional means for people to register to vote, update their existing registration, or cancel a registration in another state -- while they are applying for a driver's license. Motor Voter legislation has been adopted in Arizona (1983), Colorado (1985) and Michigan (1975) with an increase of 16% to the registered rolls.

The procedure for registering would not consume much time (less than 2% in Arizona) or place an excessive burden on Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) personnel. Both Division of Elections and DMV require the same information. DMV personnel would post signs, help with the forms, and forward the forms to the Division of Elections for verification.

Currently in Alaska, voter registration forms are available in some DMV offices, but not in Anchorage or Fairbanks. Where the forms are available, DMV does not assist in filling out the forms nor does it forward the forms to Division of Elections. Approximately 60% of Alaskans are registered to vote, although Division of Elections has no firm numbers on this.

MOTOR VOTER LAWS: MAKING PROGRESS TOWARD UNIVERSAL VOTER REGISTRATION

Introduction

by Linda Davidoff, Executive Director, Human SERVE Campaign and David D. Schmidt, Executive Director, Initiative Resource Center

Despite the voting rights gains of the 1960's, the United States has a long way to go before the ideal of a universal right to vote for all eligible citizens becomes reality. Hampered by the 50 states' patchwork of registration and purge laws, fully a third of eligible citizens are not registered to vote, and are therefore barred from voting on election day. While 85 percent of those on the registration rolls do vote, the high rate of non-registration results in an overall voting rate of only about half of all adult citizens. This is in sharp contrast to the experience of other democracies, which provide automatic, universal voter enrollment services for their citizens (see page 15).

Federal laws designed to broaden the franchise, such as requiring states to provide mail-in registration forms and to open the polls to registration on the day of election, have been stymied in Congress for a decade or more. Some states, however, have moved to eliminate registration barriers. Among the reforms adopted around the country, "Motor Voter" laws, permitting eligible citizens to register to vote at the same time they register to become licensed drivers or receive an official identification card, have been successful in increasing the number of eligible citizens who get on -- and stay on -- the voting rolls. "Motor Voter" laws have resulted in notable voter registration gains, especially in Michigan, Arizona, and Colorado.

Quietly and continuously, Motor Voter programs register hundreds of eligible citizens each day, and thousands each week. In just 18 months prior to the 1984 election, Arizona's Motor Voter program registered 112,000 citizens. In Colorado, the first year of Motor Voter, 1985-86, saw 175,000 voter registration transactions in Motor Vehicle Offices. Michigan has seen even larger gains over the decade Motor Voter has been in effect there.

The secret of Motor Voter's success in these three states is simple: Employees at driver's licensing bureaus are required to ask every adult citizen who applies for a license, renewal, or identification card if he or she would like to register to vote (or re-register at a new address)*. If so, the citizen fills out a registration form along with the license, renewal, or ID card form**, and returns both forms to the licensing bureau employee. The licensing bureau forwards the registrations to election officials.

Human Service Agencies and Voter Registration

Motor Voter is a special case of a broader approach to voter registration in public agencies. A comprehensive voter registration system -- one that will insure voting rights for the entire eligible citizenry-- should incorporate registration services into all public agencies which serve large numbers of citizens. Since low registration rates are common in the low-income and minority communities, it is critical for registration services to be offered in those public offices which see the largest number of low-income and minority clients. These include: housing, employment, health, food stamp, and income-support offices.

Agencies at all levels of government have begun to institute voter registration services, including but not limited to, motor vehicle offices. The city of Chicago, IL and Trenton, NJ; the states of New York, Ohio, Texas, Minnesota, Montana, and Vermont; and counties in New Jersey, Texas, and California have all implemented voter registration programs in public offices. Governors and Mayors have issued Executive orders and state and city legislators have enacted programs. The strategy of public agency voter registration has been endorsed by the US Conference of Mayors, the US Conference of Black Mayors, the Joint Center for Political Studies, and the National League of Cities.

If many more states adopt Motor Voter and other effective means of including all citizens who come into contact with their public agencies on the voter registration rolls, the United States can move closer to the ideal of universal enrollment for all eligible citizens.

*An ideal system would go further, providing that every citizen whose eligibility to vote is established by his or her motor vehicle license, Medicaid, or other state services application form, is automatically registered to vote.

** Colorado uses a single form for driver's license and voter registration. See Appendix

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT "MOTOR VOTER" LAWS

Q. What is "Motor Voter"?

A. Motor Voter is the voter registration system that registers people to vote when they get their driver's license or non-driver identification card from motor vehicle agencies.

Q. Is Motor Voter needed in a state that already has mail-in registration and/or deputization of volunteer registrars?

A. Yes. Neither postcards nor volunteer deputies reach the vast majority of eligible citizens. Motor Voter gives a chance for citizens to find and fill out the mail-in forms, or to be registered by a conveniently available deputy.

Q. Will Motor Voter skew voter registration rolls toward upper-income groups, since these are most likely to have driver's licenses?

A. Upper-income people are more likely to be registered regardless of a state's voter registration methods. Motor Voter reduces this bias, since it reaches not only the upper and middle-income groups, but a larger number of lower-income people as well: Among the poorest one-third of U.S. households, fully two-thirds own at least one motor vehicle.* In addition to reaching low-income drivers, Motor Voter reaches non-drivers who get identification cards from licensing agencies.

To reduce the income-level bias of voter registration rolls still further, Motor Voter should be supplemented by registration services at health and welfare, and employment agencies.

Q. Does Motor Voter increase the potential for vote fraud?

A. No. People who register through Motor Voter must meet positive identification requirements at least as stringent as other voter registration systems in the same state.

* Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Transportation Energy Conservation Data Book: Edition 4, chart showing "Motor Vehicle Ownership by Selected Household Characteristics 1977."

Q. Does Motor Voter increase the "deadwood" (deceased or moved voters) on registration rolls?

A. Motor Voter reduces "deadwood," because at the same time it encourages more citizens to register, the program also gives those already registered an opportunity to change their registration address if they have moved.

Q. Does Motor Voter create longer waiting lines at driver's licensing offices?

A. During the initial implementation period, longer lines may result. Once in effect, Motor Voter saves citizens time by eliminating the necessity of another trip to another agency to register or re-register. Such trips are particularly time-consuming when the last-minute pre-election rush creates long lines at the city hall or county courthouse.

Q. Does Motor Voter make driver's licensing clerks' jobs more time consuming?

A. Experience with Motor Voter shows that the extra work required is minimal, and can usually be handled with no additional staff.

Q. Does Motor Voter result in staff layoffs in the offices of elections officials?

A. No. Elections officials still process the applications and maintain registration lists. The workload shifts from overseeing applicants filling out forms, toward processing completed forms -- because Motor Voter substantially increases total registration.

Q. How does Motor Voter deal with persons who don't want to register to vote, or are ineligible?

A. Motor Voter offers a chance to register for those who wish to do so. Persons are free to decline. Each license and registration form is designed to weed out ineligible persons such as those under 18, convicted felons, and non-citizens; the system is the same under motor voter and other registration methods.

Q. Why should government spend tax dollars on voter registration when political parties, candidates, and others do it for free?

A. Because:

- Partisan and special interest group voter registration drives are not free -- and "he who pays the piper calls the tune." A 1985 Republican-sponsored registration drive called "Operation Open Door" cost \$7.50 per voter registered. Such registration drives pinpoint and register only those segments of the population sympathetic to the groups paying for them. A system that encourages this puts voting rights up for sale to the highest bidder.
- Most democratic governments throughout the world actively identify and register all eligible voters - and consequently have much higher rates of election participation than the U. S.
- Campaigns which rely on volunteers are sporadic and episodic
- Fair elections are the essence of democratic government. Mechanisms which ensure electoral fairness and promote participation therefore deserve the highest priority.



"Motor Voter" in Michigan

MICHIGAN: BIRTHPLACE OF MOTOR VOTER

Motor Voter has been available in Michigan for more than ten years. Public Act 28 of 1975, establishing the program, was signed into law by Governor William G. Milliken in April of that year. Before 1975, voter registration fell under the sole authority of 269 city clerks and 1242 township clerks. These clerks often kept irregular hours, particularly in rural areas.

Motor Voter requires that all 179 Secretary of State Branch offices actively offer voter registration services to the public. These branch offices issue and renew drivers license and non-driver identification cards, vehicle registrations, and license plates. They are all open five days per week, eight hours per day, and some are also open on Saturdays.

Public Act 28 had broad support when it was enacted in 1975. A diverse coalition of public interest, labor, religious, and student organizations, in addition to public officials, endorsed it. The coalition included the Michigan Department of State, Association of Counties, Farm Bureau, Catholic Conference, League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, Education Association, Federation of Teachers, United Auto Workers, Building and Trades Council, AFL-CIO, and Student Government Council of the University of Michigan.

Voter Registration Made Simple

With each transaction, branch office clerks are required to ask clients, "Would you like to register to vote in Michigan (or update your voter registration)?" If the answer is yes, applicants, not the employees, complete the voter registration forms away from the counter and return them to the clerk along with their drivers license or ID card forms. In the more heavily trafficked offices, a separate voter registration window is staffed to receive registration forms. In other offices, a clerk walks down client queues asking clients to indicate the nature of their business. Anyone interested in registering to vote is handed an application form to complete while waiting in line.

Voter registration adds only a minimal amount of time to each client's visit.

HOUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

(7)

Date referred: 5/8/87

FURTHER REFERRALS:

DATE: 5-13-87
HB 308

The State Affairs Committee has considered
"An Act relating to voter registration."

RECOMMENDS:

- replace with CSHB 308(SA) the same title
- attached amendment(s) a new title
- do pass
- do not pass
- no recommendation
- individual recommendations
- additional referral to the _____ Committee

ADOPTS: _____ letter of intent

ATTACHES NEW FISCAL NOTE(s):

- fiscal impact same as previous fiscal note published _____
- zero fiscal note same as previous zero fiscal note published _____
- zero with analysis

SIGNING DO PASS:

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]

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SIGNING OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cliff Davidson no rec

[Signature]
Chairman's signature

Original sponsor: Boucher

1 IN THE HOUSE

BY THE STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

2 CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 308 (State Affairs)

3 IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

4 FIFTEENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

5 A BILL

6 For an Act entitled: "An Act relating to voter registration."

7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

8 * Section 1. AS 15.07.070 is amended by adding a new subsection to
9 read:

10 (g) The director shall provide voter registration forms prepared
11 under (b) of this section to the Department of Public Safety for
12 distribution to the public under AS 28.05.045.

13 * Sec. 2. AS 28.05 is amended by adding a new section to read:

14 Sec. 28.05.045. VOTER REGISTRATION. A person applying for a
15 driver's license in an office of the division of motor vehicles who is
16 18 years of age or older, or who will be 18 years of age or older
17 within 90 days. shall at the time of application be advised by the
18 department that the person may also register to vote. The department
19 shall use a form for voter registration prepared by the division of
20 elections and shall forward completed forms to the division of elec-
21 tions. The department shall prominently display notice of the right
22 to apply for voter registration at each place that the public may
23 apply for a driver's license.

**STATE OF ALASKA 1987 LEGISLATIVE SESSION
FISCAL NOTE**



REQUEST: _____

Bill Version: _____

Publsh Date: _____

Revision Date: HB #308

Agency Affected: Office of the Governor

Title: "An act relating to voter reg."

BRU: Division of Elections

Sponsor: Boucher

Components: II

Requestor: Boucher

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 87	FY 88	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL	-0-					
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
CAPITAL						
REVENUE	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL						

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME						
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Prepared by: Linda Edgeworth
 Division: Elections *Linda Edgeworth Director*

Phone: 465-4611
 Date: 5/12/87

Approved by Commissioner: Carol P. Kertlin
 Agency: Office of the Governor

Date: May 12 1987

- Distribution (by preparer):
- Legislative Finance
 - Legislative Sponsor
 - Requestor
 - Office of Management and Budget
 - Impacted Agency(ies)
 - Senate Secretary