

State Senator

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Week of April 11, 2005

Protecting the Hallmark of Democracy

JEFFERSON CITY—Americans have fought to protect and expand the right to vote for more than two centuries. Voting has always been seen as an inalienable staple to the democratic process. Today, the United States upholds a democracy that is envied by many and paralleled by none. Voting enables governing by the people, a hallmark of the American way of life. No matter what way you look at it, illegal immigrants and non-U.S. citizens do not have the right to voice their political opinions at Missouri's polls. A citizen is a citizen, and if that citizenship does not exist, neither does the right to vote.

The Senate will soon be considering my Senate Bill 50, which addresses Missouri's blatant laxity in the voter registration process that allows non-U.S. citizens to dilute, and possibly threaten, American ideals. The bill also protects against identity theft and taxpayer abuse as voter registration cards are valid forms of ID to receive certain social services and other forms of ID.

The Missouri Constitution, Article VIII, Section 2 states:

All citizens of the United States, including occupants of soldiers' and sailors' homes, over the age of eighteen who are residents of this state and of the political subdivision in which they offer to vote are entitled to vote at all elections by the people

This means you must be 18 years of age, have an address in Missouri and be a U.S. citizen if you want to vote in Missouri. The last criterion seems so obvious, which is why I am floored with the slack in verifying citizenship status. When you register to vote, you must prove you are at least 18. You must show documentation of your Missouri residence. But you do not have to substantiate that you are a citizen of the very country that gives you the right to vote.

Chapter 15, Section 115.135 of Missouri Statutes declares that a “person applying to register with an election authority or a deputy registration official **shall present a valid Missouri drivers license or other form of personal identification at the time of registration.**” This means it is up to the discretion of the election authority on what is deemed as a valid form of personal identification. Valid forms of ID to use when at the polls are: a driver’s license, student ID, utility bill and bank statement. These are all obtainable without being a citizen of the United States.

My bill has stirred up a fair amount of opposition, which surprises me, considering that it simply protects the voting rights of U.S. citizens. Some have mistaken the requirement of an ID verifying citizenship as a hassle for married women. Registering to vote is a one-time process. Many female voters registered before they were married. For those who register after they change their name, all they have to do is have their marriage license handy. And the common sense of the intelligent election authorities does come into play. I have yet to meet a county clerk that has a problem with this legislation. They all understand and are proud to fulfill their sworn duties as election authorities, and this law allows them to legally verify the citizenship status of suspicious registrants.

Any added efforts it takes from county clerks or constituents are worthwhile because they prevent the loss of integrity, sovereignty and security for our state and our country. The convenience of the current law might make it easier for you to vote, but it also makes it easier for illegal immigrants to vote. That just doesn’t make sense. If America cherishes the right to vote, shouldn’t Missouri protect it?

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*Sen. Larry Gene Taylor represents the people of Ozark, Stone,
Taney, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald counties.*