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Column for Week of:
February 20, 2006

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Voter Protection Act Reduces Fraud and Protects the Rights of All Missourians

It used to be joked that in certain parts of the country people could vote long after they were dead. The voting controversy in Florida in the 2000 presidential election also provided ample opportunity for comedians to lampoon the act of voting. But in reality, undermining the integrity of the election process is no laughing matter. In fact, Missouri has experienced its own election troubles. A 2001 report found that 1,233 people in Missouri who were not qualified to vote nonetheless obtained court orders to vote in the 2000 election. The report also showed that, among other improprieties, 68 people voted more than once and 14 dead people managed to cast ballots.

Our form of government is built on the belief that every vote matters and that the votes we cast will actually be counted. This confidence is eroded by reports of inflated voter rolls and fraudulent petition signatures in our state—illicit acts that discount the votes the rest of us cast.

Reports of past abuses have led me to believe that it is time we crack down on voter fraud. That is why I am supporting legislation requiring Missourians to show photo identification at the voting booth.

Senate Bill 1014, the Voter Protection Act, requires Missourians to show their drivers licenses or other government-issued photo ID that includes a name that matches their voter-registration record—a significant step in reducing fraud.

The right to vote is important for all our citizens, and we want to make sure that any Missourian that would like to vote has easy access to a photo ID card. So SB 1014 requires the state to issue free voter IDs to Missourians who cannot obtain a driver's license. This will help to provide for those who are elderly and who no longer drive or who cannot afford a driver's license or ID card. Further, the bill allows people without photo IDs to cast provisional ballots at their voting station as long as they return with a valid ID before polls close.

While this bill works to reduce voter fraud by requiring photo identification, it will also decrease voter intimidation by restricting campaigning at polling stations. The legislation increases the distance that must be kept from the voting booth by those distributing campaign literature, posting signs or conducting exit polls. These provisions are needed to ensure Missourians never have to face harassment when they go to cast their ballot.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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