

Ellison: Stop voter ID

Written by Ivan Phifer, Staff Writer
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Shortly before the 2012 presidential elections, the Minnesota Republican legislature is introducing a bill that would amend the state's constitution to require Minnesotans to show a driver's photo ID, state issued photo ID, or tribal issued ID to be instantly scanned to determine voting eligibility and precinct accuracy.

But opponents of the proposed legislation say the Voter ID Amendment would further disenfranchise elderly, disabled, young, and minority voters. The Voter ID Amendment completely disenfranchises American troops; under the proposed amendment, military IDs would not be accepted at voting polls, thus creating the oxymoron that those defending American's constitutional right are themselves unable to vote. The proposed Amendment would also end absentee voting and same day voter registration.

US Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Mpls) in a press conference on voter suppression and fair elections held Monday, Jan. 30, at Take Action Minnesota said, "This is a primary issue to me. We are going to organize around this."

"It's absolutely a partisan plan," said Dan McGrath of Take Action Minnesota. "What's been missing from the dialogue is who stands behind it and why. This is not about the mechanics of voting and voting fraud. It's about a power play being made in 38 different states as a reaction to what happened in 2008," he said.

Republican supporters and sponsors of the bill include State Representatives Bruce Vogel, Wilmar; Rep. Mary Kiffmeyer, Big Lake; and State Senator Warren Limmer, Maple Lake.

"We live in a state where, for example in the case of Sen. Al Franken, elections are won and lost by 312 votes. If you can knock out 140,000 people from the ranks of seniors, students, communities of color, low income people and veterans, you can reshape the direction of the state," Ellison said.

According to Take Action data, 18% of elderly citizens do not have government issued ID. That data also show 15% of people earning less than \$35,000, 18% of citizens 18- 24-years-old, 10% of voters with disabilities and 25% of voting age African Americans do not have a government issued ID.

Ellison pointed out the history of voter disenfranchisement. "When this country was founded, it was not good enough to be a white male to vote," Ellison said. "You had to be a white Protestant male 21 years of age who owned property. The reality is, a very small number of people were able to cast a ballot. The Jacksonian Revolution came allowing white males who did not own property to vote; the Civil War came, Black men could vote for ten years until after Reconstruction, and the present day Civil Rights era black men's rights are restored and women can now vote," he said.

The voter ID laws only prevent voter impersonation, a crime no one in Minnesota has been convicted of. This amendment would be more restrictive than South Carolina's voting laws.

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“Right now South Carolina is the worst state in the union for voter disenfranchisement. Minnesota has always prided itself in having one of the fairest elections. The only difference between us and South Carolina is, actively serving military people would not be able to vote, making us the worst, should this bill get passed,” said Will Hailer, Campaign Manager for Ellison.

The cost of this bill is reported between \$20-40 million dollars, a significant amount that would be impact to local government. Last year, a total of 38 voter fraud cases were reported, most of which were felons who have not had voting rights restored following convictions.

“They were not imposter voters, or people who presented an ID in a name other than their own; they were people who had prior felony convictions who under our law are not allowed to vote. The reality is, if you’re a felon or on probation, you have to have ID, so that would not stop them,” Ellison said.

“It’s the 99% narrative versus the 1% narrative,” Greta Bergstorm, Take Action communications director said. “A guy who has \$5 or \$10 million that can give unlimited amount to a super PAC, has an outsized influence while diluting the power of the individual vote. Most people don’t have millions of dollars, all they have is their one vote in November and the primary,” she said.

“This represents for the first time in about 200 years a retraction in voting,” Ellison said. This [amendment] is about power and excluding people, not including people. The trajectory of voting in America has only been to include people.”