

Politically minded help boost voter registration numbers

■ **MOTOR VOTER:** Election will be first test to see if voter participation increases

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — There's Kevin Cox, perpetually mad at the Charlottesville, Va., City Council. There are college students carting registration forms to football games. There's the Christian Coalition. And the NAACP.

Just about anyone with a pen, a pack of cards and a passion for politics is hard at work registering new voters in the biggest effort to expand the rolls in two decades.

By the Nov. 5 election — the first national test for the motor voter law — some 20 million Americans will have registered or updated addresses, mostly through the driver's license bureaus that gave the law its name.

A breakdown isn't available on how many of those are new registrants, but everyone involved agrees the number is substantial.

And the early evidence, con-

trary to many predictions, suggests the law is helping Republicans as much or more than Democrats.

The national totals would be even larger if some of the biggest states — including California, Pennsylvania and Illinois — hadn't resisted implementing the law. They fought the federal government in court and lost.

Now the effort is up and running in every state that requires advance registration, allowing people to sign up at a variety of state agencies and via mail.

"As soon as motor voter passed, I was out there," says Charlottesville's Cox, a self-described gadfly who suggests that politicians have forgotten the poor and the powerless. "I was accosting people on the street, in elevators. Wherever I went, I took forms with me."

The flexibility helped the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People register 59,000 people at 36 branches in the Southeast.

And in Louisiana, the Christian Coalition distributed 100,000 motor voter forms in almost 1,000 churches, hoping to defeat a statewide pro-gambling issue. The issue passed, but the Coalition hopes its new voters will support conservative candidates for local, state and national office this fall, said state chairman Sally Campbell, of Slidell.

Like many Republicans, Mrs. Campbell opposed the motor voter bill.

"We were very much afraid the liberals were going to use this as an opportunity to pass much of their agenda," she said. "We have turned that around and made a positive of it."

That was the reasoning in Georgia, where the Christian Coalition has registered some 20,000 voters through church drives, said executive director Jack Gibbs.

"We even have rolls of stamps and tell them where the nearest mailbox is," he said.

Efforts like this have helped

boost Georgia's voter rolls by 650,000 since the law took effect on Jan. 1, 1995. About 155,000 voters were registered in March, April and May alone — compared with 85,000 in all of 1994.

In Columbus, Ohio, students registered 750 voters at last month's Ohio State-Pitt football game. They set up tables at entrances, had messages flashed on the scoreboard and made the rounds at tailgate parties.

"We tried to avoid people who looked rowdy drunk, but there were plenty that weren't," said Steve Martin, a senior at Ohio Wesleyan who is organizing efforts in Ohio.

It's part of what could be the largest national student registration drive, said David Warren, president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, which is coordinating the effort.

"What's new and different in 1996 is we have the motor voter law," he said. "It allows you to reg-

ister wherever you work, wherever you work out or wherever you worship."

The law requires states to offer registration cards at public assistance agencies, but Republicans who suggested there might be a rush of poor people have been proven wrong. About 10 percent of new voters have come from welfare offices, according to a national study by the New York-based voting group Human Serve.

In fact, evidence suggests that the new law is helping Republicans, as voter rolls in the once heavily Democratic South continue their shift toward the GOP.

Nationwide, the National Republican Congressional Committee says, Republican Party enrollment has increased 2.9 percent since 1994 while Democratic registration has dropped 1.2 percent.

"These new voters could have registered as Democrats, but they didn't," crowed the committee's chairman, Rep. Bill Paxon, R-N.Y.

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Vaccine test brings hope to MS sufferers

■ **EXPERIMENT:** Author says vaccine cannot yet be called a cure for patients

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — An experimental vaccine enabled multiple sclerosis patients to build up a police squad of blood cells to stop vandalism in their nervous systems, and that kept sufferers from getting sicker, an Oregon study found.

Scientists tested the vaccine against a kind of MS that gets progressively worse over months or years. None of the six patients who built up police-like cells in the blood got worse during the year-long study, while 10 of 17 other patients did.

The study had so few patients that it couldn't prove the vaccine would be useful.

"It's not a universal treatment at this point and should not be considered so until we have evidence in a lot more patients," said the study's author, Arthur Vandenberg, of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Portland, and the Oregon Health Sciences University.

About 300,000 Americans have MS. They have symptoms such as unusual tiredness, loss of balance and muscle coordination, slurred speech, and tremors. In severe cases, they experience paralysis.

The vaccine was tested against chronic-progressive MS, which accounts for about 15 percent of cases.

Nobody knows what causes MS. But scientists do know that the immune system mistakenly attacks the protective sheath around nerves in the brain and spinal cord, which causes the symptoms. The assault is caused by certain blood cells called T cells, which gang up at the sites of destruction.

His vaccine was aimed at getting the immune system to churn out more of these police T cells. Patients got the vaccine or a placebo injected weekly for four weeks, then monthly for 10 months. Researchers tracked them for a year.

Five of nine patients who received one form of the vaccine showed a rise in their levels of policing T cells.

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