

OPINION

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Put Voting Rights in the Constitution

Federal safeguards are missing

BY PENDA D. HAIR

Rarely, if ever, has an election captured global attention like this one. The race for the White House is a topic of conversation at dinner tables, in marketplaces and halls of worship and on news broadcasts around the world. Democracy is on full display and the message is hopeful, forward-looking and bright.

Registration and turnout are expected to reach historic highs.

But behind this encouraging - and even inspiring - display, there is a more troubling reality. Instead of one democracy, we have closer to 13,000 separate

sets of rules and regulations across the country about who can vote and how they do so.

The voting process is different state to state and county to county.

This year, millions of Americans will once again go to the polls believing that their legal right to vote is protected, but what you may find surprising is that it's not.

One of the most significant things we learned about our democracy in the Bush v. Gore contest of 2000 was the Supreme Court's insistence that Americans have "no federal constitutional right to vote." In

other words, the Court said that we (the people) have only the voting privileges our states choose to grant us.

We must be clear about the implications of living in a nation where federal law doesn't guarantee the right to vote to anyone.

Yes, our Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination in granting the franchise based on a person's race, sex, or (adult) age in the 15th, 19th, and 26th Amendments, but those protections are incomplete. States and other governments can and

do disenfranchise individuals and groups of citizens, legally, as long as they do it without provable bias.

Photo identification requirements in Indiana kept 12 nuns in their 80s and 90s without driver's licenses from voting in the primary there this May. In New York City, in 2004, Asian American voters were routinely asked for identification when

trying to vote—even though city laws didn't require voters to have an ID.

In Florida, in 2004, election officials rejected thousands of voter registration applications because potential voters failed to check a box on the application that duplicated information that had already been asked.

It is time to engage in serious constitutional politics on behalf of the right to vote. This is the only way to redeem the chaos of the 2000 presidential election and to begin to ensure that such an assault on democracy will never be repeated.

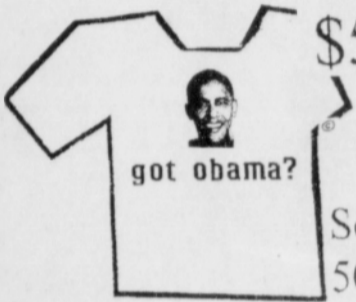
The vote is the bedrock of our democracy. No wonder the struggle to attain it has caused men and women to risk their lives - here and around the world.

We must be clear about the implications of living in a nation


where federal law doesn't guarantee the right to vote to anyone. Millions of eligible voters who cast votes this November may not get their vote counted because of the unnecessary rules in states throughout the country that impede the voting process.

It is time to rectify this patchwork of bizarre and erratic state customs. We need to put the right to vote in the Constitution. This would establish full voting rights so all Americans can help decide all laws that govern them. The right to vote must become a right guaranteed to all American citizens and not a privilege controlled by a few. It is time for a 28th Amendment to the Constitution.

Penda Hair is co-director of Advancement Project, a national civil rights organization



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Republicans Don't Abstain!

Hypocrisies in the sex-ed debate

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

When Republican Senator and presidential nominee John McCain named Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as his running mate, he not only made history by selecting just the second woman to run on a major party ticket and the first Republican to do so, he also exposed the deep hypocrisies of the Republican Party.

Palin recently admitted that her unmarried daughter was five months pregnant. The self-professed party of family values, Republicans rushed to support Palin, her daughter and her decision to not only keep the child but to marry the teen-aged father.

While the high schooler's choice was a difficult one to make, the decision, along with her privacy, should be respected. The Republican Party, however, does not get off so easily.

Now that one of its own has fallen victim to the abstinence-only education it supports, the GOP should finally admit that its sex-education curriculum is

not only limited but harmful.

For years, Republicans have fought the inclusion of a comprehensive sex education program in schools. In an ideal world, a child would be taught to wait a few years, until

The GOP should finally admit that its sex-education curriculum is not only limited but harmful.

they are emotionally ready to handle the consequences, before having sex while also learning about birth control and disease prevention.

In a Republican world, students learn about abstinence but don't receive information about or access to condoms or birth control. Governor Palin's daughter lives in a Republican world. Now, at 17, when she should be

thinking about prom and graduation, she is on the verge of marriage and motherhood.

Is her life ruined? Not by a long shot. Many teen mothers go on to do great things. But her life is forever changed.

A parent can instill good values in a child and give them all the love and attention they desire. From up high, the Repub-

licans fail to realize that, at some point, these children mature and begin to make their own decisions.

Indeed, good parenting goes a long way but it needs to be supplemented with information and access. The Republican platform of abstinence-only education leaves too much to chance and sets up many young people for failure.

Children born to teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty, less likely to graduate from high school and apt to be teen parents themselves. If a class that touches on the importance of condoms could prevent an unplanned pregnancy, why not add it to curriculum? Eliminating it doesn't deter young people from having sex. It does, however, enable them to have unprotected sex.

When conjuring up the image of an unwed teen mother, many conservatives have painted the picture of someone living in the inner city, someone black or brown, living off the government with no ambition and no family support.

It's interesting to see how quickly the party has rallied in support now that the face of teen pregnancy is one of their own. Politics as usual? Perhaps. But it's hypocritical just the same.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Protect Consumers on Auto Repairs

We need a right-to-repair law

BY KATHLEEN SCHMATZ

Skyrocketing fuel prices have impacted the cost of owning and operating a vehicle, and as the cost of vehicle ownership soars, the need for Right to Repair legislation has become

more critical in order to protect consumers from the added costs that would be created by a vehicle repair monopoly.

Vehicles technology is becoming increasingly complex with virtually every system either monitored or controlled by computers. Without full access to complete and accurate repair information from the car companies, neighborhood

shops will not be able to compete, creating a repair monopoly where the affordable and convenient repairs currently available to car owners are sacrificed to increase profits for the car companies.

The cost to consumers when they can only have their car repaired at the dealership is estimated to be as much as 25 percent higher with labor charges alone, according to a

study comparing dealer repair tags with those of an independent service center.


Without Right to Repair legislation, many motorists may forgo important vehicle repairs due to higher dealer repair costs.

To ensure that your neighborhood repair shop has the same access to safety alerts and repair information as the new car dealer network, Congress introduced the Motor Vehicle Owners' Right to Repair Act (H.R. 2694). They understand that if motorists are forced back to the dealer for service and repairs, convenient and affordable auto repair will become a thing of the past.

Right to Repair merely seeks to restore a system that has been in place since the invention of the automobile. Clearly, using advances in technology to deny consumers their right to choose where they have their car repaired is a misuse of these computers and certainly not in the consumer's best interest.

Please visit righttorepair.org to send a letter to your congressional representatives, urging them to support the Right to Repair Act.

Kathleen Schmatz is president and chief executive officer of the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association.




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