

Republicans Undermining the Right to Vote

By Lee A. Saunders
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There is no right more precious in our nation than the right of citizens to cast a ballot on Election Day. That is why generations of Americans have sacrificed and even died in efforts to expand the right to vote. Yet across the country, powerful corporate interests and the right-wing politicians who do their bidding are working hard to make it more difficult for citizens to vote. In more than two dozen states this year, bills have been introduced to restrict the right to vote; and in several states where Wall Street-backed Republicans control both houses of the legislature, governors have signed these fundamentally misguided measures into law.

As a result of these cynical attempts to turn back from the progress America has made in expanding voting rights, millions of voters are in for a surprise when they go to the polls. They will find new requirements that have never before existed, requirements that have been put in place to keep particular voters – students, minorities and senior citizens – from having their voices heard

in our democracy.

In Ohio, for example, Gov. John Kasich and the Republican-controlled Legislature pushed through a measure that limits early voting and places new burdensome requirements on absentee ballots. “I think it is very calculated,” said State Sen. Nina Turner of Cleveland. The corporate-backed restrictions on voting are designed to reduce the ability of low-income and minority voters to cast a ballot, particularly by forcing boards of elections to close their doors on the weekend

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before Election Day. Voters whose jobs, family responsibilities or disabilities make it difficult for them to stand in long lines, often for many hours, will now find it harder to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

Ohio is not alone in enacting voter suppression laws. In Florida, Gov. Rick Scott pushed through a vast set of new and burdensome regulations that are designed to restrict the ability of working middle-class voters to cast a ballot. The period for early voting shrinks dramatically, and voters who have moved to a new county or have married and changed their names in the months prior to an election will not have their ballots counted on Election Day. Since the 1960s, Florida voters have been able to change their address or name at their precinct during early voting or on Election Day. But now they will only be given provisional ballots which may or may not be counted.

In Wisconsin this May, Gov. Scott Walker and his corporate-backed cronies in Madison enacted a law that will require every

voter to show a government-issued identification card before they are able to cast a vote. Hundreds of thousands of Badger State voters will be denied their right to vote. A study conducted by the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee determined that this change in Wisconsin’s law will have a serious impact, particularly on students and minorities. More than 50 percent of the

African-American men and 49 percent of African-American women in the state do not have a driver’s license or passport. More than three out of every four young African-American males in the state lack such state-issued identification.

That shouldn’t surprise us. While most adult Americans have a driver’s license, it is not necessarily true for large groups of Americans. Students, other young people and the working poor living in metropolitan areas often rely on mass transit, rather than own a car. Senior citizens living in nursing homes or with their families often give up driving. The blind and others with physical disabilities

don’t drive. All of them will be affected by these new restrictions.

Proponents claim that these changes are necessary to protect against voter fraud, but as a detailed study published by the

many of the same states where the wealthy have attacked collective bargaining rights, privatized public services and cut programs that serve the working middle class to the bone. They have every reason to fear

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— Former President Bill Clinton

Brennan Center for Justice notes: “By any measure, voter fraud is extraordinarily rare.” Former Pres. Bill Clinton got to the heart of the matter in early July when he summed up the efforts made to restrict the right to vote: “There has never been in my lifetime – since we got rid of the poll tax and all the Jim Crow burdens on voting – the determined effort to limit the franchise that we see today.”

What these laws are really about is consolidating the power-grab of the billionaires and Wall Street corporate barons. It is no coincidence that these restrictions on voting rights occur in

that the Main Street Movement created in the wake of their regressive policies would hold them accountable for their actions on Election Day.

That is why they are attacking the right of seniors, minorities and workers to cast an unfettered vote. That is why their actions are not only wrong, but a direct assault on our nation’s commitment to democracy. Voters have every right to be angry about these cynical efforts. We need to hold accountable the politicians who took these radical steps the next time we vote, before they eliminate our voice at the ballot box completely.



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