



19,000,000 AMERICANS CAN'T VOTE!

By **BRENDAN BYRNE**

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as told to Theodore Irwin

IN TUESDAY'S Presidential election both candidates agree the results will be close. Every vote will be important. Yet the next President may be chosen not by those who cast their ballots but by the citizens who cannot vote.

A nationwide study by the American Heritage Foundation indicates that an estimated 19 million Americans of voting age will be disfranchised this year, generally through no fault of their own. Thus, out of more than 100 million eligible citizens, almost one out of six will be shamefully deprived of the voting privilege.

The 19 million missing at the polls this week will be penalized by outmoded regulations and unreasonable legal barriers which either rob them completely of a ballot or manage to discourage them so that voting seems too much of an effort!

The largest group of Americans affected are the 8 million who it is predicted will move with their families across state, county, or precinct lines during the year. Our population has grown more and more mobile, shifting from farm to city, from city to suburb, often from one state to another. Factories and mills move with their employees. Workers today travel wherever their specialized training happens to be needed.

Ignoring this trend, 35 states still require a full year's residence for anyone who wants to declare his choice for President. Three states (Alabama, South Carolina, and Mississippi) demand two years' residence. In some states, such as New York, if you move up the street to another house in the same precinct and district, you lose your vote unless you can prove you have lived at your new address for at least 30 days.

Then there are the 2,600,000 people—businessmen, traveling salesmen, actors, railroad men, bus and truck drivers, among others—who have to be

*On election day this week,
one out of every six eligible
citizens will be disqualified
through no fault of
his own; the reasons add
up to a national disgrace*

away from their home districts on election day. Under their state laws, they have no feasible way of casting their ballots.

Another 5 million are qualified citizens who are kept home or in hospitals by illness, are physically disabled, or are elderly persons living in nursing homes. Too many states like New Mexico make no provision for enabling them to vote by mail.

In the District of Columbia, 600,000 citizens can't vote because they have no legal residence elsewhere and are not entitled to absentee ballots. Although they pay taxes and can be drafted for military service, these forgotten people have no representation.

Sundry obstacles block the path to the voting booth for many other Americans. Twenty-one states have no laws permitting employees time off from work to vote. Annual registration in some states places an undue hardship on certain potential voters, particularly in rural areas; only 10 states have full, permanent personal registration.

Many of the half-million U.S. citizens living abroad find it hard to obtain an absentee ballot. Five states still do not provide for absentee mail balloting by civilians.

In the face of all the gaps in our balloting procedures, 36 states have made some kind of change since our last Presidential election. But we still have far to go before every citizen of voting age can cast a ballot if he wishes.

To strengthen our representative form of government, the American Heritage Foundation supports these recommendations by leading political scientists and election specialists:

1. Reduce state residence requirements to six months and the county minimum to 30 days.
2. Make available absentee registration and voting by mail to all voting-age citizens who will be away from the state or county on election day.
3. Extend absentee voting privileges to the sick and hospitalized.
4. Give the franchise to those who live in the District of Columbia.
5. Provide central registration facilities throughout the year, closing them about six weeks before election day.
6. Adequate, trained personnel must staff all polling places.
7. We should have a state-wide uniform system of permanent personal tax-free registration.
8. Facilities should be provided for mobile registration in public places, a practice effectively followed in Philadelphia.
9. Literacy tests should be simple and objective, evaluated according to an answer key provided by educators.

States that make it easier for their citizens to vote get more of them to the polls. Inevitably, people who want to vote but are disqualified lose interest in their government because they feel they have nothing to do with how it's run. Our democracy ends up being the loser!

Let's get out this vote, too!

COVER:

The pig-tailed miss in Paulus Leeser's photograph obviously doesn't appreciate the very serious efforts of her oompah-pahing brother, who is bent upon learning to play the French horn or bust trying.

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