

STEP UP THE VOTE IN TEXAS

A Non-partisan plan for election reform

The League of Women Voters of Texas and five advocacy groups have come together to propose non-partisan principles to replace the very partisan principles that have been offered for election reform in Texas. We are convinced that the principles that we propose would not only improve valid voter participation but would also find and address election problems, whether the problems are fraud, misinterpretation of the law or voter intimidation.

Problems that need addressing:

1. Texas was 46th in voter turnout by voter eligible population in the 2008 general election. Only Hawaii, West Virginia, Utah and Arkansas had a lower voter turnout than Texas.
2. Texas has the highest number of recent violations under the Voting Rights Act.
3. Rejection rates for provisional ballots for Texas are among the highest in the country.
4. Advocacy groups report a significant number of instances of poll workers not following existing election law on provisional ballots and ID requirements but Texas doesn't have an adequate method of reporting and dealing with these issues.
5. Hispanic registration rates are significantly lower than white-non-Hispanic registration rates in Texas.
6. Despite the mistaken belief that many voters are not eligible to vote, there is virtually no evidence of voting by non-citizens or voter impersonation.

Principles for addressing these issues:

1. Register all eligible Texas voters and make sure their votes get counted accurately.
2. Protect the rights of all Texas voters from deceptive practices that intimidate voters or provide false information about voting.
3. Encourage all eligible Texans to participate in all Texas elections.
4. Provide avenues to identify, report, investigate and resolve election issues
5. Prosecute cases of voter and election fraud.
6. Substantive changes in voting policies, including any change in identification requirements, must be accompanied by a robust and multi-faceted public and poll worker education campaign.

Specific Needed Improvements:

1. Establish a non-partisan Texas Election Committee to analyze data provided by the Secretary of State and to identify election issues and concerns and recommend changes in election law and procedures.
2. Increasing voter registration by providing same day registration during early voting will reduce the need for provisional ballots for ID related issues.
3. Further automate registrations through the Department of Public Safety and other databases as mandated by the National Voter Registration Act.
4. Improve registration forms and voter database matching procedures so that eligible registrations are not rejected for hyper technical issues or data entry errors.
5. Increase voter education and poll worker training especially on the purpose and treatment of provisional ballots.
6. Define clear processes and procedures for equal treatment of provisional ballots.
7. Clearly post voter's rights at every polling location including phone number, address and internet location as routes for filing complaints.
8. Mandate that the Texas Secretary of State compile an Election Day report including complaint incidents, performance measures for NVRA compliance, and voter turnout analysis for the State Legislature and the Texas Election Committee mentioned above.
9. Revisit the issue of unnecessary or wrongful purging, and find ways to improve quality of the data without wrongful or excessive purging.

Texas Election Facts:

1. If Texas were to reach the average level of voter turn out in the US, we would add one million voters.
2. The average rejection rate for provisional ballots across the country is 20%. In Texas the rejection rate is about 75%.
3. According to the US Department of Justice, Texas, since 1982 has had the second highest number of Section 5 (pre-clearance) of the National Voting Rights Act, objections interposed by the DOJ. Only Mississippi has had more.
4. In testimony before the US Supreme Court this past week we learned that there is a 16-point registration difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white voters in Texas.

Call to Action:

The League of Women Voters of Texas and five advocacy groups ask you as citizens of Texas to call your Texas House Representative and ask them to support policies that improve voter participation and address valid election problems.

PRESS RELEASE MAY 4, 2009

Groups Supporting this Statement:

ACLU-TX

Advocacy, Inc.

Common Cause of Texas

League of Women Voters of Texas

Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)

NAACP Texas