

September 20, 2006

**SCHAKOWSKY, HOUSE DEMOCRATS, CONDEMN VOTER ID LAW**

NEW BILL COULD DISENFRANCHISE MILLIONS OF AMERICAN VOTERS

**WASHINGTON, DC** -- Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to H.R. 4844, the so-called Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006. Beginning in 2008, this bill imposes a requirement that eligible voters must present a government-issued photo identification and beginning in 2010, eligible voters must present a government-issued photo identification that would prove they are a citizen.

Proponents of this bill claim that requiring a photo identification and proof of citizenship to vote will combat voter fraud. But, too often, anecdotal stories are put forth as evidence to prove the claim they are using to make the case for this bill. However, there is no concrete evidence to back up the need for this proposal. According to Demos and People for the American Way, to date there have been no major studies to document actual election fraud in the United States. Furthermore, according to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, nationally since October 2002, only "86 individuals have been convicted of federal crimes relating to election fraud, while 196,139,871 ballots have been cast in federal general elections." There needs to be more safeguards to protect the integrity of the electoral process, but this can only be done by addressing actual problems that are currently undermining voting rights, almost all of which have the effect of disenfranchising eligible voters. The bill doesn't address voter intimidation and discrimination at the polls and it doesn't take into account the costs to states to implement the requirements of H.R. 4844, making it an unfunded mandate.

This bill is not just guilty of being a solution in search of problem. It actually will *create* a problem.

The real impact of this bill will undoubtedly be an increase in voter disenfranchisement, because the burden and cost involved in obtaining the identification required would likely discourage many Americans from voting, an essential Constitutional right. Also, even though H.R. 4844 has a provision that requires states to give free photo identification to those who cannot afford them, it does not take into account the time and cost that eligible voters would incur to get the supporting documents needed to obtain this required identification. Essentially this forces people to pay for their Constitutionally guaranteed right to vote.

Mr. Speaker, the burden that this legislation creates falls squarely on the shoulders of seniors, and the disabled. The AARP is strongly opposed to this bill because of the disproportionate impact it has on seniors. Many seniors no longer drive and therefore do not have a driver's license, many were born at home by midwives and do not have a birth certificate, and have limited mobility, making it extremely difficult for them to obtain a government-issued identification to meet this bill's requirements. Even those who wish to vote by provisional ballot are required to present the required identification for their vote to be counted.

Elections should be open to all eligible voters and as Members of Congress we should be enacting legislation that encourages *more* Americans to vote, not erecting new barriers to voting. Laws such as the groundbreaking Voting Rights Act of 1965 were enacted to create a more inclusive democracy by making voting easier. H.R. 4844 will seriously undermine that goal and will be a disservice to the memories of those courageous civil rights heroes who fought for its implementation.

I urge all of my colleagues to oppose H.R. 4844.