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ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

Although the word "reform" can cover a multitude of sins, the "reform" that has the potential for causing the most illegalities is President Carter's proposal for Election Day registration.

Under the Carter proposal, we would no longer have to register in advance of elections. Anyone would be able to vote by the simple process of signing an affidavit that he is a qualified voter and producing some sort of document to assert the location of his residence, such as a driver's license or an affidavit from another voter.

Under the Carter plan, the states would be required to eliminate their present pre-registration requirements for Federal elections. The higher administrative costs caused by this new system would be paid for by a Federal grant of 20 cents times the number of voters in the last Presidential election.

But there is much, much more. An additional Federal grant would be given to encourage states to adopt Election Day registration for state and local elections, too. Still another grant would be given to states that develop "outreach" plans to stimulate maximum voter participation by such gimmicks as registration by mail, mobile units, and bilingual programs.

These bonus grants would be based on the same 20-cent formula as the basic subsidy, with a maximum total subsidy to any state of 80 cents per voter. The cost of these subsidies is estimated to be $48 million for each Federal election.

The reason President Carter gave for the elimination of pre-registration for voting is that he is "deeply concerned that our country ranks behind at least 20 other democracies in its level of voter participation." Only 54 percent of our voting-age population voted in 1976. In Western European countries, about 80 percent vote.

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So what! In Communist countries, 99 percent of the people vote. Does that make their election processes superior to ours? Voting in the Soviet Union is a government-enforced obligation. Voting in the United States is not and should not be an obligation. It is a right that may be freely exercised or not, as the individual wishes.

The reason more Americans do not vote is not because it is too difficult or inconvenient for them to register. A 1975 Census Bureau report on voter participation showed that only 3.8 percent gave "unable to register" as the reason for not voting, as compared with 15.3 percent who said "not interested."

No figures are available on how many share the attitude of the aggressive nonvoters who sported bumper strips prior to the 1976 election that said: "Don't vote -- it only encourages them."

It is likely that those who choose not to vote are consciously or unconsciously expressing their view that it doesn't make any difference which candidate wins. Making it easier to vote will not relieve this concern.

On the other hand, the Carter "reform" proposal wi 11 make it very easy for dishonest voters to vote two or three times at different polling places. As a practical matter, officials in the polling places would be compelled to hand a ballot to any unknown and unidentified person who showed up with a piece of paper in his or her hand. There would be no way whatsoever to identify the person or to verify the piece of paper.

Congressman Charles E. Wiggins aptly said that adoption of the President's proposal would be "rejecting 180 years of history." It would invite fraudulent voting by aliens. It would deprive the political system of voter registration lists that are so valuable to candidates of all parties.

It is difficult to see how any plan could be imagined that would cause more election frauds. The Carter proposal would be the death knell for honest elections.

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