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EDITORIAL

## Block the Vote

In a country that spends so much time extolling the glories of democracy, it's amazing how many elected officials go out of their way to discourage voting. States are adopting rules that make it hard, and financially perilous, for nonpartisan groups to register new voters. They have adopted new rules for maintaining voter rolls that are likely to throw off many eligible voters, and they are imposing unnecessarily tough ID requirements.

Florida recently reached a new low when it actually bullied the League of Women Voters into stopping its voter registration efforts in the state. The Legislature did this by adopting a law that seems intended to scare away anyone who wants to run a voter registration drive. Since registration drives are particularly important for bringing poor people, minority groups and less educated voters into the process, the law appears to be designed to keep such people from voting.

It imposes fines of \$250 for every voter registration form that a group files more than 10 days after it is collected, and \$5,000 for every form that is not submitted — even if it is because of events beyond anyone's control, like a hurricane. The Florida League of Women Voters, which is suing to block the new rules, has decided it cannot afford to keep registering new voters in the state as it has done for 67 years. If a volunteer lost just 16 forms in a flood, or handed in a stack of forms a day late, the group's entire annual budget could be put at risk.

In Washington, a new law prevents people from voting if the secretary of state fails to match the information on their registration form with government databases. There are many reasons that names, Social Security numbers and other data may not match, including typing mistakes. The state is supposed to contact people whose data does not match, but the process is too tilted against voters.

Congress is considering a terrible voter ID requirement as part of the immigration reform bill. Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky, introduced an amendment to require all voters to present a federally mandated photo ID. Even people who have been voting for years would need to get a new ID to vote in 2008. Millions of people without drivers' licenses, including many elderly people and city residents, might fail to do so, and be ineligible to vote. The amendment has been blocked so far, but voting-rights advocates worry that it could reappear.

These three techniques — discouraging registration drives, purging eligible voters and imposing unreasonable ID requirements — keep showing up. Colorado recently imposed criminal penalties on volunteers who slip up in registration drives. Georgia,

one of several states to adopt harsh new voter ID laws, had its law struck down by a federal court.

Protecting the integrity of voting is important, but many of these rules seem motivated by a partisan desire to suppress the vote, and particular kinds of voters, rather than to make sure that those who are entitled to vote — and only those who are entitled — do so. The right to vote is fundamental, and Congress and state legislatures should not pass laws that put an unnecessary burden on it. If they do, courts should strike them down.

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