

# Voter amendment should be voted down

Over our 30-year history of working in rural Minnesota, the Land Stewardship Project has often focused on basic issue of democracy — that people directly affected need to have a say in the decisions related to their lives. It is through democratic action that we will create a food and farming system that is answerable to people, not corporations.

That's why LSP has joined "Our Vote, Our Future," a coalition of over 70 organizations working to oppose the voter restriction amendment to the state constitution that will be put before Minnesota voters Nov. 6. There are several important reasons why rural Minnesotans should vote "No" on this amendment, reasons that address basic issues of democracy as well as common sense.

Consider these facts:

- In 2010, an in-depth survey of county attorneys in Minnesota was conducted by the Citizens for Election Integrity and the Minnesotan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance. They found that a photo voter ID system's main role would be to prevent voter impersonation. However, the survey also found that, "The results are clear — there was not one single conviction for voter impersonation. In fact, while there were investiga-

tions, there were no felony convictions of double voting, non-citizens voting, under-age voting, or voting outside of the jurisdiction." If there ever was a case of a solution looking for a problem, this is it.

- If this amendment is adopted, 700,000 Minnesotans who were eligible to vote in 2010 would not be able to vote as they did in 2010, as reported by the St. Paul Pioneer Press. That includes voters who do not have a photo ID or who use Election Day registration. The amendment would make it harder for veterans — many of whom use Veterans Administration IDs that don't have a current address — and current military personnel who vote absentee, to vote. So if the amendment passes, and there is an amazing response and 80 percent of these Minnesotans take the steps (and pay the costs) to become eligible, 140,000 Minnesotans would still be disenfranchised.

- It's important to consider who these 700,000 eligible voters are who do not have a photo ID and who use Election Day registration. The segments of Minnesota's population for whom this situation is most common are elderly Minnesotans, young people, people of color, voters with disabilities, and the poorest Minnesotans. According to the Brennan

Center for Justice, national studies show that as many as 11 percent of eligible voters do not have government-issued photo identification. We have certainly heard from LSP members about people they know who would be affected — an older relative, a student who is moving frequently, a soldier overseas.

LSP's work is based primarily in farming and rural communities. Rural communities include many elderly Minnesotans who often don't have a photo ID since they don't drive or need one, yet they have lived there for their entire lives. It is also the case that in rural communities, your home might be many miles from anyplace that offers a "government issued photo ID" that would be mandated by this proposed amendment. Voter ID would make it more expensive and inconvenient for rural people to vote where they have always cast their ballot.

Voter ID would be costly if adopted, with most of the costs placed on local governments. Various local and state agencies estimate these costs at \$30 million to \$50 million for start-up, with an additional \$8 million to \$10 million in annual operating costs. Rural counties have estimated the costs of mandated photo ID at hundreds of thousands

of dollars per county; as high as \$250 per voter in Minnesota's Kittson County alone. This burden on Minnesota's townships and counties, and rural citizens, is unwarranted and unnecessary. The backers of the amendment missed this common sense concern in their haste to advance this policy.

As for the argument that photo IDs are now required for a lot of things, like boarding a plane, so why not for voting — the fact is this drastically changes our voting system and in the process makes it so tens of thousands of people can't exercise a right guaranteed by the Constitution. Boarding an airplane and casting a vote are different things. Voting is simply the bedrock of American democracy.

All of us are hurt when we exclude people from the vote. We are stronger and better as a state and a nation when people have a say over the decisions that affect their lives. That's why the U.S. Constitution and our state constitution have consistently been used to extend our rights, not diminish them.

The Legislature botched this one. Vote "No" on the Voter ID Amendment Nov. 6.

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