Bill Cook seeks to put integrity back in our elections procedures

April 03, 2013

The following press release came from Sen. Bill Cook’s office:

Yesterday, Senators Cook, Rabin, and Sanderson proposed S666 Election Law Changes and S667 Equalize Voter Rights. The intent of these bills is to protect the integrity of North Carolina’s entire electoral process. We believe these reforms will be appreciated by citizens in this state who view voting as a sacred civic duty.

In these tough economic times, we need to be proactive in finding ways to save money. One day of early voting in North Carolina costs $98,000. Our counties bear this cost exclusively. Cutting back early voting from seventeen to ten days does this by saving roughly $686,000 per election. This money would be better used to hire teachers and first responders.

We are simply equalizing the playing field for all voters in our state.

Cook was also a primary sponsor of S668 which would prohibit legally declared mentally incompetent people from registering to vote.

The Voter Integrity Project issued the following statement about these bills:

We’ve gotten a bill into the Senate that Progressives are going to hate almost more than they hate Voter ID. If other states pick up this legislation, it will shift the landscape of college town voting all across the nation and may even put “college states” like Massachusetts back into play because so many students use the same-day registration rules to vote in that state. (Some say the students vote in their home states too, but we cannot confirm it yet.)

- The two bills (SB 666 & SB 667) were designed in response to a Buncombe County Commissioner’s race that was flipped after Warren Wilson College students were invited to vote again after it was learned that their dorm addresses were in a critical district, different from their actual mailing addresses (they had been using in all previous elections).

- The bill will “encourage” college students to vote by absentee ballot from their home of record and put consequences for their voting on campus.

- The bill has the effect that any student who votes from their temporary college address to start paying taxes in that community
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In case the students don't own anything, the bill also takes the fully emancipated young adults OFF of their parents' state income taxes (as a deduction)

It brings their voting rights back to being equal with all other "sojourners" in our society (like teachers, dual-residence vacationers and their military peers) who only get to use absentee ballots

There are links to all of the details I mentioned above--including the Warren Wilson issue--in the text below and on our website.

Let me know if y'all want to do anything on your show.

BTW, I've BCC'd some friends in hopes they will forward to radio shows in their parts of the state, so don't be surprised if this story pops elsewhere too.

Thanks,

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VIP-NC is a trans-partisan, volunteer organization that works for "free and fair elections" by bringing more transparency to the process in order to ensure that no voters are disenfranchised.

By removing a student from their parents tax deduction because they chose to vote at their college, you are, essentially charging charging a fee to vote. By the same token, our soldiers in Iraq should have to pay if they choose to vote from there. This is a tax increase. When did the republican party become in favor of tax increases?? Why not just sell tickets at the voting booth? Money raised could help reduce the deficit. The arrogance of these actions is unbelievable.

Lyle Leuck

If college students who vote in their college residence are taken off their parent's tax return as dependents, they have no assets and will require a full ride to any college who estimated the financial contribution of a parent. This will be a major upheaval to college financial aid offices.

ps We all know you are doing this to keep more liberal/educated/Democrats from voting. You don't fight fairly!

Amy Johnson

Editor's response: Note that the bill does not restrict college students from voting. What it does is address WHERE they vote. It's intent is for them to vote where they claim residence. They may do so either in person or via absentee ballot. This matters a great deal in local elections.

Larger | Smaller
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And yet, we will debate any poster who submits nonsense. If you’re not willing to defend your position, don’t post it here.

Voting
April 07, 2013 | 03:59 PM

In all my 24 years in the military I voted by absentee ballot in my home of residence listed on my enlistment papers, except when I bought property in the state where I was stationed. Then I had to vote there. If there are instances, where it can be verified, of transit status people voting twice obviously they need to be charged with voter fraud. It someone cites research hinting of this they need to continue their research to find the facts.

George H. Schryer
April 07, 2013 | 10:07 PM

In 1979 the Supreme Court case Symm v. United States they ruled that college students have CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT to register to vote where they go to school. This proposed law has nothing to do with voter “integrity” or saving money. It all has to do with the GOP thinking college students had a lot to do with Obama almost winning NC in the last election (only a 92000 difference between Obama & Romney).

The GOP, in the states they control, have been passing or trying to pass all sorts of legislation designed to limit or block those voters that largely go Democratic. From requiring new arbitrary forms of voter I.D., limiting early voting or same day registrations to this latest bullpucky stunt.

I am not a democrat or republican. And I don’t give a fig what party a politician belongs to as long as she or he is the best person for the job. But frankly what the extremists in the GOP have been allowed to pull off the last 3-4 years is stomach turning.

Disgusted

Editor’s response: so do you feel people who have a residence in Beaufort County (i.e., a river cottage) should be able to vote here even though they live, work and maintain a permanent domicile in Virginia? It is interesting that the Symm court held that residence must be determined the same for ALL residents and not differently for college students than others. But that is exactly what this bill seeks to do. Why should college students be treated differently than other citizens?

Voting address
April 08, 2013 | 07:37 AM

If they are using their college address to vote where they are going to school, seems they are claiming to be a resident of that city and state. They also need to be required to have a drivers license issued with that address and have their vehicle registered at that address.

Frances

Obvious Voter Disenfranchisement
April 08, 2013 | 02:33 PM

The Supreme Court has already rules that students may register and vote where their campus is located.

Your argument that this may lead to abuse is hamstrung by the fact that you cannot produce even a single case of this happening. Until any evidence at all can be provided to show that this type of abuse is actually happening, this is clearly a solution in search of a problem.

Ohh, and it has the happy side-effect of restricting votes that would likely have gone to Democrats. But...you guys totally wouldn’t do something like that...right?

Anon

Editor’s response: That is not how we read the Symm case. The issue there was a questionnaire used by the registrar that was required of students but not other voters. The COA specifically said: “But the issue before the District Court was whether the registrar could selectively use a questionnaire in making his determination of residence.” We would argue that it is the burden of those opposed to S667 to bring forth a case that prohibits the state from denying a tax exemption if a ‘child’ registers to vote at an address other than the parents. We cannot find any such precedent in this jurisdiction. In fact the COA in Symm specifically held that Texas law could determine the definition of residency for voting. But we read Symm to say that the method (of determining residency) must be applied equally to students and non-students. And that is what S667 seeks to do. In fact, its short title is: “Equalize Voter Rights.”

Financial Aid Complication...
July 25, 2013 | 07:45 AM

The tax break is the primary motivation for students to be listed as tax dependents. Dependent students’ aid requires inclusion of parental assets on the FAFSA. This amount comprises a substantial portion of the calculation for how much federal and state aid students receive. Once a student becomes independent, many of them look, on paper, as low-income individuals with few assets and part time employment.

This bill promotes a perverse incentive for students to become independent and file financial aid forms with no assets, effectively boosting their total award and causing tax payers to subsidize more students at a higher price.

Savvy parents who intended to pay for college all along will simply write checks to their kids or use savings to pay off student loans later (which have also been subsidized by taxes).

I’ve worked in higher education for my entire career. Filing as an independent student is a rational economic strategy, especially as college costs go up.

Also, don’t forget about the out-of-state students who are beyond North Carolina’s control. If 20% of the students hail from elsewhere (don’t forget about graduate students), the tax penalty will not apply although the property taxes would, making it more expensive, and less attractive to go there in the first place. This is ALSO a poor strategy since non-resident tuition helps subsidize educational costs for NC residents.

No matter how you slice it, this is not good public policy.

Brad

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