Spring June 3, 2011

Is Minnesota GOP voter i.d. proposal sabotage dressed as integrity?

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After being thwarted last month by Governor Dayton’s veto, Minnesota Republicans are trying again to bypass him with a ballot initiative changing the Minnesota Constitution to require photo identification in order to vote.

The proffered reason is to “secure the integrity of [the] vote that Governor Dayton has denied,” according to Senator Scott Newman, Republican from Hutchinson.

Similar measures around the country have been proposed by Republican leadership from neighboring Wisconsin down to South Carolina.

The palmetto state’s governor reasoned that “[i]f you have to show a picture i.d. to buy Sudafed, if you have to show a picture i.d. to get on an airplane, you should show a picture i.d. when you vote.”

Lost on Nikki Haley apparently is that we do not want barriers to the cornerstone of democracy, while preventing the cornerstones of methamphetamine and mass murder at 30,000 feet justifies requiring to know who has a cold and who wants jetlag. Not exactly ejusdem generis, Governor.

Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie opposes the measure because it would change “what’s now a right in our Constitution” (unlike buying drugs and flying on airplanes) “a right to vote—into a privilege.”

So why in the wake of a questionable initiative against marriage equality does the Minnesota GOP want to tack another fundamental right-contracting constitutional amendment proposal onto the ballot?

Ensuring the integrity of each vote is important to vindicate *Baker v. Carr*’s promise of “one person, one vote.”

Despite a paucity of demonstrable evidence of voter fraud issues in Minnesota, it seems a small burden to most to produce photographic identification at the voting booth.

That does not mean, however, that it is not a very real burden to some, *viz.*, those least likely to have a driver’s license: the youth, the impoverished and minorities, an ejusdem generis of Democratic voters.

Government-issued identifications could be issued.

But if citizens were to incur the fees it would be tantamount to a poll tax, evoking ugly Jim Crow-era obstacles. If the State were to foot the bill it would belie the GOP chorus of fiscal austerity to confront a bloated budget.

Voting is often taken for granted by many. Some of those that would be affected by a photo identification requirement have never had that luxury.
While actual voting by an individual is a matter of personal preference that can be undertaken indifferently, permitting the unfettered access to the right to vote for everyone eligible is a matter that cannot be trifled with lightly.

In weighing the calculus of the magnitude of the right at stake, the resulting burden to be shouldered by already disadvantaged and vulnerable groups against the scale of the problem sought to be addressed and the likelihood of success of the measure to be implemented, the efficacy of the initiative is suspect.

It may be true that the current system allows for voter fraud and concealment of the same. Republicans would be well served to further illustrate this in order to dispel the suspicion that their ballot measure is an attempt to disqualify dependable Democratic support dressed in integrity’s clothes.