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Editorial: A smart alternative to photo ID effort

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In the continuing and unnecessary debate over voter photo ID, GOP leaders acknowledge that electronic poll books would be a good supplement to the existing voting system, but they argue that such a tool must be used in tandem with their plan to change the state constitution to require photo IDs.

That makes little sense. Photo ID cards wouldn't be necessary if the state used laptop computers to provide already available identification information for use at polling places.

Such a system is preferable to the voting suppression effort that the GOP has orchestrated in the form of a constitutional amendment that appears headed to the November ballot. Republicans have moved a proposal that would have citizens vote on a state constitutional amendment that would require all voters to bring a government-issued ID to the polls.

Recommended by Secretary of State Mark Ritchie and other DFLers, the <u>electronic poll books</u> would bring drivers' licenses and ID photos that are already on file with the state into databases for use at each voting precinct.

That kind of system would make most voters easy to identify and could be set up to accept college IDs and take on-the-spot-photos when needed.

It would be a reasonable, economical system that citizens and politicians from both sides of the aisle could support.



Luke Sharrett, New York Times

A BETTER PLAN

"Our proposal can be in the polling place, this November, almost for free."

-State Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, referring to electronic poll books

. . .

"You shouldn't have a change in election law that is just the province of one party. Obviously, they're likely to change it in a way that would benefit them."

-Gov. Mark Dayton

Bipartisan agreement is especially important on voting rules. In the past, Minnesota governors from both parties have rejected photo ID plans because there wasn't adequate buy-in from both parties.

They shared the view of Gov. Mark Dayton: When it comes to the right to vote, laws should be crafted in a cooperative, bipartisan way that does not give an edge to one party or the other.

It's worth noting that several recent court decisions have blocked implementation of photo ID laws in other states. On Monday, <u>a Wisconsin circuit judge ruled</u> that the state's new ID law unconstitutionally burdens the rights of otherwise eligible voters.

"The government may not disqualify an elector who possesses these qualifications on the grounds that the voter does not satisfy additional statutorily created qualifications," Dane County Judge Richard Niess wrote.

The U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Division <u>recently blocked Texas</u> from enforcing a photo ID law because it would disproportionately suppress turnout among Hispanics. Similar challenges surely will occur should this misguided proposal pass here. As one DFL lawmaker predicted, the imprecise language of the amendment could trigger an "endless array of lawsuits."

The state reports that more than 540,000 voters used election day registration in 2008 -- about 18 percent of all voters. An

estimated 40 percent of all state voters have had to use same-day registration or ask someone to vouch for them at the polls at some time.

While one version of the proposed amendment would eliminate vouching, it could also restrict or do away with election day registration. Minnesotans have had same-day voting for 40 years, which is one reason why the state has such high voter turnout.

Groups of students, seniors, immigrants, low-income, minority and disabled citizens have expressed concern with the proposed amendment – for good reason. They rightly worry that the ID requirement would be burdensome and could possibly keep some voters away from the polls.

That problem could be avoided if the GOP would drop the ID amendment and work with the DFL on an electronic poll-book compromise.

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