

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that on the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the Republican Leadership in the House of Representatives is bringing to the floor a proposal that says if you are African American, if you are Hispanic American, if you are Asian American, the Republican Party does not trust you to vote. The measure before us builds barriers and creates a coercive environment with the election and voting process.

In its worse manifestation, H.R. 1428, the "Voter Suppression Act," could return us to the "good old boys" days of Jim Crow laws. It is a proposal that has the effect of intimidating minority voters and creating a double standard that makes it more difficult for American citizens, who do not meet these new Republican superimposed criteria, to vote. For the Party of Lincoln, the Party of "states' rights" to interject this unprecedented level of big brother, big government is a shame.

Minnesota has led the nation in voting participation for the past few decades by providing election day registration and extended absentee ballot procedures. To date, there have been no examples of widespread scandal or voter fraud. At a time that we should be doing more to empower new voters and facilitate the voting process, this measure moves backwards to a process which is a proven failure.

Mr. Speaker, none of us condone illegal voting. But this is an issue that has been and should continue to be addressed at the state and local level. If the Republican members are truly concerned about how minority voters vote, maybe they should end their policies designed to divide our nation and penalize minorities instead of trying to frustrate the legitimate exercise of their franchise, the right to vote. I urge a "No" vote on H.R. 1428.

Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to H.R. 1428 which seeks to limit eligibility for voter registration by the creation of a new federal voter eligibility system to confirm the citizenship of registered voters.

This apparently politically-motivated bill would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to establish a system through which the Commissioner of Social Security and the Attorney General must respond to local voting officials who question, for one reason or another, the citizenship of voter registration applicants.

My colleagues, I ask you is this bill necessary? What evidence is there of widespread voter registration fraud by noncitizens?

Instead of combating voter registration fraud H.R. 1428 would likely foster discrimination instead, because it would allow state and local officials to drop American citizens from the voter rolls solely on the basis of their "ethnic sounding" last name or because of the fact that they live in a predominantly minority neighborhood.

Additionally, it is an unworkable bill since neither the Social Security Administration nor the INS can confirm the vast majority of citizens born in the U.S.

I urge my colleagues to oppose this potentially discriminatory and mischievous bill. At a time when voter turnout is already at record lows, this bill would make sure even fewer citizens vote.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to the Voter Eligibility Verification Act (H.R. 1428). My opposition to this bill is not because I oppose taking steps to protect the integrity of

the voting process, but because the means employed in this bill represent yet another step toward the transmutation of the Social Security number into a national identification number by which the federal government can more easily monitor private information regarding American citizens.

The Social Security number was created solely for use in administering the Social Security system. Today, thanks to Congress, parents must get a Social Security number for their newborn babies. In addition, because of Congress, abuse of the Social Security system also occurs at the state level such in many states, one cannot get a driver's license, apply for a job, or even receive a birth certificate for one's child, without presenting their Social Security number to a government official.

Now Congress is preparing to authorize the use of the Social Security number to verify citizenship for purposes of voting. Opponents of this bill are right to point out that, whatever protections are written in this bill, allowing states to force citizens to present a Social Security number before they can vote will require the augmentation of a national data base—similar to those created in the Welfare Reform and the Immigration Bills of 1996.

Mr. Speaker, clearly we are heading for the day when American citizens cannot work, go to school, have a child, or even exercise their right to vote without presenting what, in effect, is quickly becoming a national I.D. card.

National I.D. cards are trademarks of totalitarian governments, not constitutional republics. I'm sure all of us have seen a movie depicting life in a fascist or communist country where an official of the central state demands to see a citizen's papers. Well the Founders of the Republic would be horrified if they knew that the Republic they created had turned into an overbearing leviathan where citizens had to present their "papers" containing a valid government identification number before getting a job or voting.

In order to protect the privacy rights of America's citizens, I plan to soon introduce the Privacy Protection Act, which will forbid the use of the Social Security number for any purpose other than for the administration of the Social Security system. I would urge my colleagues to support this bill when introduced and vote against the Voter Eligibility Act. It is time for Congress to protect the Constitutional rights of all Americans and stop using the Social Security number as a de facto national identification card.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, all Americans are concerned with maintaining and improving the integrity of our nation's elections. We know that, in some recent cases, illegal immigrants and others not legally qualified to vote have registered and cast ballots. A number of bills have been introduced in this Congress to deal with this problem.

Regrettably, H.R. 1428, while attempting to restore electoral integrity, actually threatens to return us to a darker era in our nation's history, when people's voting rights were frequently challenged or harassed and their right to cast ballots was denied.

H.R. 1428 would allow local officials to check the eligibility of registered voters by submitted names from the voting rolls to the Immigration and Naturalization Service or the Social Security Administration. But how will the names be chosen? Will the Smiths, the Johnsons, and the Andersons be scrutinized,

or will the efforts of local officials be more focused on the Singhs, the Martinezes, and the Nguyens? Unfortunately, the historical record would indicate the latter.

In addition, the bill presumes that the INS and the SSA will have their records available and updated for use by local officials, which we know is not likely to be the case. And should local election officials not be able to confirm citizenship, they can drop voters from the rolls without having proven that they are not qualified to vote.

Mr. Speaker, rightly or wrongly, Hispanic-Americans and other immigrants to our country feel a growing bias against them. U.S. citizens living in my district who were born in Latin America have expressed their growing frustration and fear with harassing INS raids which treat all immigrants as suspects; they are being denied the presumption of innocence. A Salvadoran-American woman living in my district, who has been a resident and a citizen for more than 20 years, never leaves her house without her U.S. passport, for fear that she may be harassed or detained by immigration or other law enforcement authorities.

H.R. 1428 threatens to intensify the growing feeling of alienation among immigrant U.S. citizens, without assuring that it can easily, reasonably, or fairly accomplish its objective of ballot integrity. For these reasons, I must oppose H.R. 1428.

Mr. POSHARD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong opposition to H.R. 1428, the Voter Eligibility Protection Act. This legislation would permit state and local voting officials to verify the citizenship of registered voters through the Social Security Administration or the Immigration and Naturalization Service. I would urge my colleagues to vote against this misguided attempt to undermine one of our most precious, fundamental and hard-fought rights, the right to vote.

It is clear to me that this bill would intimidate voters by subjecting them to a burdensome process of citizenship verification. Most upsetting is that it would disproportionately impact Americans of color, who will be suspect for no other reason than the way they look. At a time when we should be continuing our efforts to open the electoral process to more Americans, particularly more minorities, to ensure that all groups are adequately represented, I am astonished that my colleagues would even consider a measure that will undoubtedly have the opposite effect. H.R. 1428 threatens to keep millions of voters from exercising their rights, and that is the very last thing this Congress should be doing.

In addition to the shamefully discriminatory impact that will result from this legislation, there is the simple fact that the measure will not work. Both INS and SSA have themselves admitted that they lack the capacity to accurately verify the citizenship status of voters. H.R. 1428 would violate the privacy rights of voters, undermine the Voting Rights Act and the National Voter Registration Act, discourage eligible Americans from voting, and foster discrimination when we should be working to eradicate it and instead celebrate the diversity that is such a critical component of this great nation. All this, and the legislation would not even accomplish its purported goals.

I will oppose this measure, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with grave concern regarding legislative