

Newly registered voters endangered species

In his Nov. 13 column, Timothy Benson claims Florida's election reform laws will help prevent fraud.

Unfortunately, the anti-voter law that the Florida Legislature passed this year simply does not address his stated concerns. It will, however, certainly make voting harder for Floridians and has already resulted in the League of Women Voters of Florida imposing a moratorium on our voter registration efforts after 72 years of problem-free voter registration.

Florida actually has a good system in place to thwart potential problems. A statewide computerized voter database is used by every county's supervisor of elections to weed out any problems and help prevent fraud.

Three years ago, the Legislature passed a series of laws that have already



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created a system that requires a return of forms in 10 days. Now, with no justification, the Legislature has shortened that to an unrealistic 48 hours, forcing those volunteers who continue to register voters to likely spend as much time trucking the forms back and forth to the supervisor as they do registering voters.

The League has not had a single reported problem with our voter registration for 72 years. Regardless, the Legislature has now drastically shortened the time period and radically expanded the bureaucracy and paperwork involved.

Few Floridians will want to volunteer to help register voters under these new onerous and draconian rules.

Voters deserve to know how "fraud" is the reason for cutting early voting in half. And for eliminating the Sunday before election day, the single most popular day for early voting. And how "fraud" now requires, after 40 years of allowing Floridians to change their address at the polls, the casting of a provisional ballot for cross-county moves. Benson has some explaining to do to connect this new law to the potential for "fraud."

The constant specter of voter fraud is used as a red herring to justify increasingly unreasonable restrictions on the right to vote, and in Florida it simply doesn't line up. Dredging up the same old stale arguments to defend more impositions on groups who

help their fellow citizens to vote is a direct threat to our democracy.

Our League volunteers have fought for voting rights since we began more than 90 years ago. We've been registering eligible voters for more than seven decades right here in Florida and have never had a single complaint or violation. This new cumbersome law is such a threat to our volunteers that we have suspended all voter registration in the state while we fight this in court.

We are no strangers to battling to protect America's right to vote — and we'll continue doing so, with a special focus on registering those who have historically been underrepresented in our democracy, including women and minority voters.

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