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ELECTION SPECIAL

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BRIEFINGS

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RECALLING 1998'S
PROPOSITION 10



Assault on the Democrat Monolith

**Can Bill Simon Restore
California's Two-Party System?**

New Rules for Fraud Same-Day-Voting

Shawn Steel



What would the Southwest Air clerk do if you showed your electrical bill for I.D. and then demanded a seat? Security would be called and you would be detained until you furnished proper I.D. You need a valid driver's license to cash a check at Safeway, but supporters of this November's Proposition 52 believe a preprinted bank deposit slip is sufficient to prevent fraud at the ballot box. That's right, this "reform" would allow Californians to register on election day and vote after showing "proof" of identity by using one of a laundry list of various items considered sufficient proof of residence. They also could register by going to their county registrar's office during the 28 days before an election. Same-day registration and voting with lax rules encourages fraud.

The initiative's proclaimed intent is to increase voter turnout. This seemingly innocuous measure appeals to our desire to maximize participation in our representative system of government. After all, it's easy to imagine something like an untimely relocation causing a person to fall through the cracks and be ineligible to vote.

But closer examination of the initiative makes it plain the measure would make it easier to *commit* voter fraud and harder to investigate it and that an already complicated voting system would become even more complex and unwieldy.

Consider, for example, what will be considered valid identification if this measure passes: utility bills, credit card bills, bank statements, preprinted checks or bank deposit slips, a vehicle registration, and "mail addressed to the voter at his or her current residence address." About the only thing missing is a note from your mother.

Initiative proponents contend it would actually reduce voter fraud because, currently, Californians must meet no ID requirement to register and vote. A far more likely result would be organized voter fraud by unscrupulous campaigns exploiting these permissive registration provisions. What, for instance, is a polling worker to do when a group of "voters" suddenly show up with utility bills and demand to vote? To avoid a lawsuit [civil rights violation?] the worker would certainly provide the ballots. After the votes are cast there is no

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way to "double" check for fraud. All ballots are mixed together — no more provisional ballots to review later. Riverside County Registrar Mischelle Townsend says it would be extremely difficult to prevent fraud under such provisions. Now, if there's any question about your eligibility, you can cast a "provisional" ballot, which is set aside and counted last, after its validity has been ascertained. The same-day-voting initiative would abolish provisional ballots, thereby eliminating the main avenue for investigating voter fraud even as it multiplies opportunities to commit such fraud.

If this initiative passes, you can count on vanloads of warm bodies armed with utility bills rolling up to polling locations in closely contested legislative and congressional districts: contests in which a little fraud can go a long way toward deciding the race's outcome. The initiative also requires county registrars to station a worker outside polling places. This would mean recruitment, training, and pay for thousands of additional workers, an expensive, time-consuming order for officials already hard-pressed to scratch up enough workers to discharge their current responsibilities. Small wonder the registrars of some of the state's largest counties think the same-day-voting initiative is a bad idea.

The measure's promise to increase voter turnout is also spurious. Supporters say California voter turnout in November 2000 hit its lowest level since 1964, when our voting laws were certainly less flexible. Since then, we have enacted very liberal absentee voting laws and the "motor voter" program and have shortened the registration blackout period to just 14 days before an election. You can even download voter registration forms from the Internet.

Voting has been made successively easier the last two decades, yet turnout continues to decline. By what magic would this flawed initiative reverse this trend? Clearly the cure to voter apathy lies elsewhere. The right to vote is precious, but same-day-voting would undermine it by encouraging fraud and placing burdensome new mandates on already overwhelmed, underfunded county election officials. The best way to increase turnout is to give voters candidates they can believe in and elected officials who respond to the will of the people — rather than to powerful special interests. CPR