VOTER SUPPRESSION OR ELECTION INTEGRITY?

By Lauri Strauss

As potential new bills on voting rights make their way through the Georgia General Assembly, many claim the bills are forms of voter suppression, while others say they are intended to ensure voter integrity. It is an important issue that is dividing people around the state and across the country.

Voter suppression is a dark part of America’s history. Although the 15th Amendment gave African American men the right to vote in 1870, many states still found ways to block them from voting. To address this issue, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ensured people had equal rights to vote at the state and local levels. However, in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ended what many believed was an important part of the Act that served as a safeguard against states with a history of voter suppression. Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act required states to get approval before changing their voting rules. When Section 5 was removed, it became easier for states to implement new voting rules.

During the 2020 election season, states encouraged people to vote absentee and to vote early. Many Americans felt the measures were an important way to ensure people could vote easily and safely during the pandemic, while others felt these regulations made easier for people to vote fraudulently while making things harder for election workers.

The country remains divided on whether fraud was a problem in the 2020 election. The Heritage Foundation provides a database of election fraud cases in every state over the past several years that may help people determine if they think fraud was a problem in 2020. In the meantime, several states are taking measures to tighten laws around voting. Many call the laws voter suppression, while others consider them safeguards to decrease the likelihood of voting fraud in the future.

The Georgia General Assembly is one of the states considering new legislation around voting. In addition to helping reduce the potential for voter fraud, state legislators who favor the new bills believe they will help ease the workload for local election staff. Potential regulations include eligibility to request absentee ballots, presenting ID when voting absentee, restricting early voting sites and reducing early voting hours. Georgia is not the only state implementing new laws. Other states also are considering their own bills.
For Your Information

On the federal level, Congress is considering legislation to help restore parts of the Voting Rights Act that ended with the Supreme Court’s 2013 decision. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act was introduced during the last Congress and is expected to be a focus during the current one. In the meantime, states continue to debate their local election rules and how to best ensure fair and honest elections. Only time will tell which bills will pass through the Georgia legislature and be signed into law by Governor Kemp, and how they may impact the future of voting in Georgia.

Sources used for this article and more information:
ABC News: Timeline – Voter suppression in the U.S. from the Civil War to Today

ACLU: Voting Rights Act

Brennan Center: Election 2016: Restrictive Voting Laws by the Numbers

Georgia Recorder: No-excuse voting ban creates GOP schism as Georgia Senate presses on

Human Rights Campaign: Voting Rights Advancement Act

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