

Chris Larson: Wisconsin needs automatic voter registration

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Democracy is not a spectator sport. In order to have a well-functioning and healthy democratic system, it requires that as many of our neighbors as possible vote, and more importantly, that they have easy access to voting. That is why it is especially disconcerting that we are again seeing conservative backed groups and conservative politicians fighting as hard as they can to purge voters from our rolls. It is not lost on anyone that 35,529 Milwaukee residents are among those targeted in the purge. Milwaukee, of course, is home to the highest number of voters in the state. The intent of the years-long scheme is clear: from discriminatory voter identification laws to limiting access to early voting to unfiltered voter purges, the modern regressive Republicans want fewer people to vote because they think it's better for their chances to win.

When politicians change the rules to avoid the people, then it is time to change the system. One smart and simple way to do that in Wisconsin is by implementing automatic voter registration. Senator Dave Hansen has offered, and I have cosponsored, Senate Bill 293 which would ensure that all eligible voters are automatically registered in Wisconsin. Beyond that, it would require the Elections Commission to maintain that registration for as long as the voter is eligible. We should be tearing down obstacles to voting, not erecting new ones.

Wisconsin is already behind on this — 18 states, red and blue, and the District of Columbia already have automatic voter registration. We should all embrace encouraging participation in our democracy. It is striking that here in Wisconsin, ultra-conservative politicians and the groups that support them feel the need to suppress the vote. It kinda makes you wonder, what are they so afraid of?

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Maybe it's because Republican positions on everything from universal background checks to the legalization of marijuana have become increasingly unpopular with your average Wisconsin voters. Recent polls from Marquette Law School show that 80% of Wisconsinites support universal background checks, and 59% say marijuana should be legal. It'd be a whole lot easier if they just adjusted their positions on these issues to match those of mainstream Wisconsinites. Instead, Wisconsin's conservative groups and politicians are seeking to silence the masses. Their lawsuit and the potential disenfranchisement of 230,000 of our neighbors is a stark threat to our greatest franchise. We must protect it with automatic voter registration by passing Senate Bill 293 to ensure that no eligible voter, regardless of their beliefs, can be tossed from the rolls by scared ideologues.

Call your state elected officials today and tell them that you want automatic voter registration in Wisconsin. If you fear you may be purged from the voter rolls because of the conservative lawsuit, visit Myvote.wi.gov and check your registration today.

- Larson, D-Milwaukee, represents the 7th Senate District.