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Voter ID Scam Is the Real Fraud

by Cynthia Tucker

If the U.S. Supreme Court upholds Indiana's harsh voter ID law, as its justices seem poised to do, hundreds of thousands of black Americans should march in protest. So should hundreds of thousands of Latino Americans. Native Americans, too. Political activists from across the ethnic spectrum should convene the biggest political demonstration since the historic March on Washington in 1963. Where is the Rev. Al Sharpton when a genuinely critical issue comes along? Where's the Rev. Jesse Jackson?

The GOP-led campaign to pass stringent voter ID laws is a greater injustice than the prosecutions of the Jena Six, more significant than the incarceration of Michael Vick, more damaging than the insulting rants of Don Imus. This is a frankly brazen effort to block the votes of thousands of people of color who might have the temerity to vote for Democrats. And it's un-American.

As happened in several states, including Georgia, the then-GOP-dominated Indiana legislature pushed through a rigid law in 2005 requiring state-sponsored photo IDs at the ballot box. While the Republican spin machine has worked mightily to portray this as an effort to curb voter fraud, it is no such thing. There has never - never - been a single case of "voter impersonation" at the ballot box, with a fake voter using an electric bill or phone bill to pretend to be a valid voter.

Earlier this month, radio journalist Warren Olney pressed Indiana Secretary of State Todd Rokita about the prosecution of voter impersonation cases in Indiana. "Oh, yeah. We suspect it happens all the time," Mr. Rokita said. "Suspect?" Mr. Olney countered.

"Well, are you saying you want to define whether or not there's fraud based on whether or not its prosecuted?" Mr. Rokita answered, adding, "It's a hard type of crime to catch. ... It's hard to catch one in the act."

OK, then. Got that? It's a little like the search for life on other planets. Extraterrestrials are out there, even if none has actually been spotted.

(If Republicans were interested in actual voter fraud, they would have tightened the rules for absentee ballots, since that's where most voter fraud occurs. But because Republican voters tend to favor absentee ballots, many GOP-dominated legislatures have made absentee balloting rules less stringent.)

But there is evidence aplenty of this: There are thousands of law-abiding registered voters across the land who have no government-sponsored ID - no passport, no driver's license - and who will be banned from the ballot box if the highest court upholds this highly partisan law. It is difficult for middle-class citizens to believe, I know. If you live inside the comfortable economic mainstream, where taking airplane trips and renting DVDs is a routine part of life,

you can't imagine voters without a state-sponsored photo ID.

But they're out there. Just ask Mary-Jo Criswell, 71. Her ballot was thrown out when she showed up at her Indiana polling place expecting to use the same forms of ID, including a bank card with a photo, that she had used in the past. She has epilepsy, she says, so she has never had a driver's license.

Citizens like Ms. Criswell are Americans, too, and they have every right to vote. It is elitism, pure and simple, to suggest requiring them to obtain a state-sponsored photo ID is a "minor inconvenience." But that's exactly what Justice Anthony M. Kennedy called it during oral arguments, noting that the law is expected to affect only a small percentage of voters.

That's true. The GOP is aiming at a small pool of voters - mostly poor, often elderly, usually black or brown - who lack driver's licenses. As it happens, they tend to support Democrats. With so many elections decided by a margin of a few hundred votes, Republicans figure they can stay in power by blocking just a few Democratic ballots.

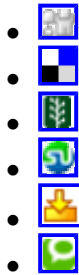
But the Republicans could be in for a jolt. The electorate seems much more excited about Democratic candidates this year. The Democratic presidential candidates have topped the Republicans in fundraising, and in early primary states, more Democratic ballots have been cast than Republican ones.

The way things are going, Republicans running for national office could lose by a lot of votes - not a few. So they'll need a new scam to win elections.

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