

On October 4, the University Senate, which is the shared governance body representing students, staff, and faculty at the University of Minnesota, voted overwhelmingly to oppose the Voter ID Amendment. The Senate noted that the amendment would “add additional barriers to voting that are not currently in place and would disproportionately affect certain populations of the state of Minnesota, including members of the University of Minnesota student body.” In particular, currently the Minnesota Constitution stipulates that citizens residing in a precinct for 30 days preceding an election shall be entitled to vote in that precinct, thereby permitting college students to vote either where they currently live or at a more permanent address.

Such attention to *facilitating* voting, as opposed to restricting it, is precisely what we should demand in a democratic society. Voting is not a privilege, it is a fundamental right at the very heart of democracy!

Universities in particular have a special responsibility to advocate against restrictions on voting. The Continental Congress declared in The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 “Knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” President Thomas Jefferson believed education of the citizenry to be so critical to participatory democracy that he proposed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to “come in aid of the public education [as] the influence over government must be shared among all people.” And, finally, the Morrill Act of 1862, created land-grant schools like the University of Minnesota specifically to promote democracy to a broad swath of citizenry.

It’s for that reason that faculty at the University of Minnesota strongly oppose any efforts to restrict the voting

rights of our students. It's for that reason that Provost Karen Hanson has twice sent messages to all University instructors, once in August, and once yesterday, calling upon them to note Election Day in their course syllabi and to encourage students to vote. Provost Hanson noted "Minnesota traditionally has one of the highest voter turnouts in the nation. Minnesotans are rightly proud of this high level of civic engagement, and we want to ensure that eligible voters within the University community are able to exercise their important right to vote." Exactly! Their *right* to vote!

We can't be sure just *how* many votes will be restricted if the Voter ID amendment passes, because the Legislature has failed to provide any details about its associated, enabling legislation, engaging instead in a "trust us" game on this critical issue. However, for so fundamental a right as voting, an extraordinary standard should be applied when considering denying individuals access to the polls; the burden of proof should be on those *challenging* an individual's right, not vice versa.

On the arch above Northrup behind us, we can read that "The University of Minnesota [is] Devoted to the Instruction of Youth and the Welfare of the State." Indeed, the Welfare of the State depends on the engagement of *every* educated, youthful, *next* generation. The ability of such generations to influence our democracy through their rightfully cast votes should not be diminished, now or ever. We all need to exercise our right to vote in two weeks and to vote a resounding NO to this anti-democratic amendment.