

Dēmos a network for ideas & action

July 24, 2008

Dear Senators:

I write to express Dēmos' support for S. 3308, a bill introduced on July 22, 2008, by Senators Dianne Feinstein and John Kerry and co-sponsored by Senators Hillary Clinton, Patrick Leahy, Charles Schumer, Patty Murray, Ron Wyden, Harry Reid and Barack Obama. The legislation would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to permit facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to be designated as voter registration agencies, in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act. With such designation, VA offices and facilities would be required to offer voter registration to individuals served there, as currently practiced at public assistance agencies and at offices that provide services to people with disabilities. It also requires the VA to accommodate voter registration assistance by nonpartisan organizations and elections officials.

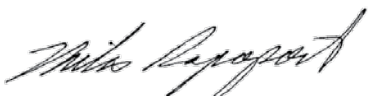
Dēmos' work shows that the designation of public institutions as voter registration agencies can powerfully expand the franchise, when properly implemented. Over the past several years, we and our partners in the NVRA Implementation Project have worked with state authorities to reestablish and expand voter registration opportunities at public assistance agencies, as required by the NVRA. Registration applications received at those agencies has soared. Tens of thousands of individuals have been newly added to voter rolls in North Carolina, Iowa and elsewhere. We would expect the expansion of voter registration opportunities at VA offices and facilities to affect a similar increase in registration among veterans.

For reasons that are difficult to understand, the Department of Veterans Affairs has in recent months acted to restrict voter registration opportunities for veterans. Secretary Peake declined California Secretary of State Debra Bowen's request that the VA be designated as a voter registration agency in her state. The Veteran Health Administration has promulgated a new directive that unreasonably hinders nonpartisan voter registration efforts at VA facilities by groups like the League of Women Voters.

These recent actions do a disservice to the veterans of our armed services, who have been called upon to risk life and limb in the service of our nation. Surely, every effort should be made to assist them in the exercise of the most fundamental right and responsibility of citizenship. The Department of Veterans Affairs should readily accede to designation as a voter registration agency, as authorized under federal law, and welcome nonpartisan initiatives to register veterans at its facilities. S. 3308 would accomplish both.

Dēmos extends its strong support for this legislation.

Sincerely,



Miles S. Rapoport

President

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