

Sunshine Voters

BY JOHN H. FUND

The people who cast the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything.

—attributed to Joseph Stalin

In the wake of the Florida election mess, many proposals have been made to clean up our sloppy election systems and make it easier for people to vote. Some of those changes—increasing voter education and retiring antiquated machines—make sense. But another idea—to allow people who aren't registered to vote to cast ballots on Election Day—could create chaos eclipsing Florida's infamous chads. Nonetheless, the idea is being pushed by two young Democratic millionaire sugar daddies. They have ponied up big bucks to put same-day voter registration

initiatives on the ballot this November in California and Colorado.

Same-day registration, which allows people to walk into a polling place on Election Day and vote on the spot, has long been used in the small states of Idaho, Wyoming, New Hampshire and Maine. But in those states many people know their neighbors, and the risk of fraud is minimal. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, the two larger states where it's now used, problems have developed. Anecdotal reports often surface in Minnesota of college students floating from precinct to precinct casting ballots. In Wisconsin, in a truly rich example of liberal hypocrisy, a New York socialite working for Al Gore pleaded guilty to fraud in the 2000 presidential race when she admitted to bribing the homeless with cigarettes, after they'd been given rides to polling places in order to vote. At least 3,500 Wisconsin voters who were sent confirmation cards for their Election Day registration had them

returned by the post office as undeliverable. Al Gore wound up winning the state by only 5,700 votes, out of 2.5 million cast.

But those pushing to expand same-day registration to other states dismiss such problems as trivial. They argue that pre-election registration deadlines—15 days in California, 30 days in Colorado—contribute to declining voter participation, because unregistered voters who don't become interested in an election until the last minute are frozen out.

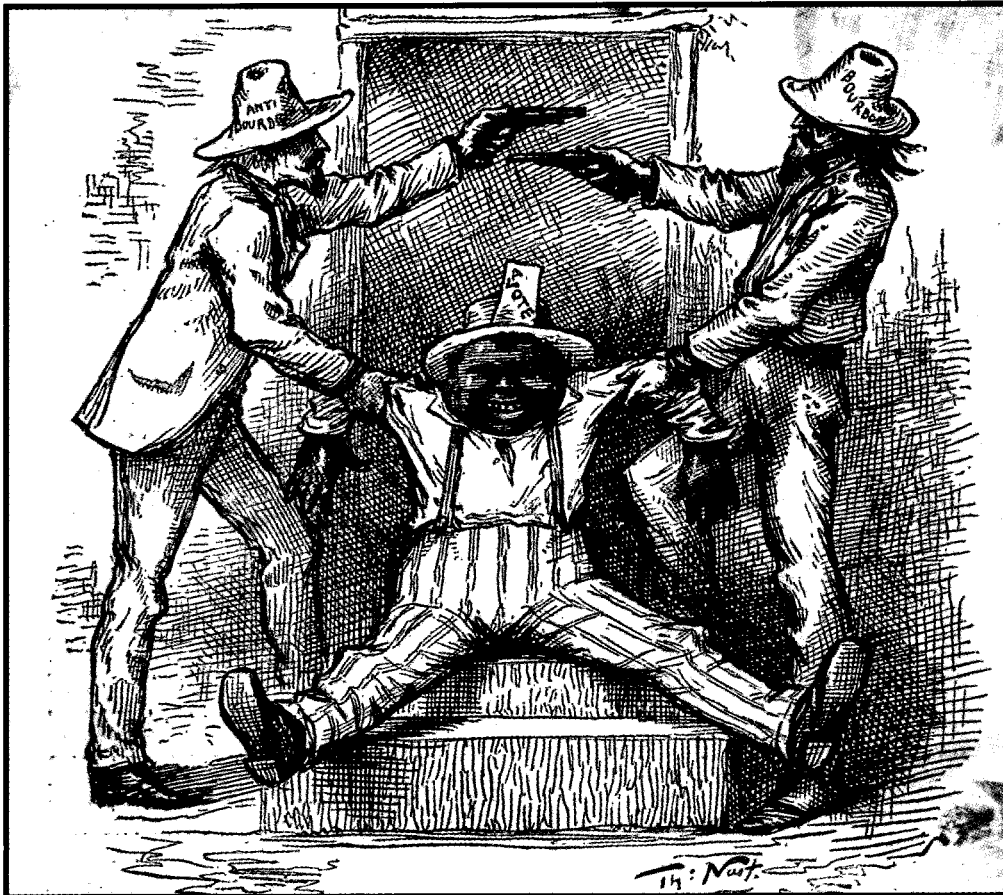
Rob McKay, a philanthropist whose father built the Taco Bell restaurant empire, has placed an initiative on California's November ballot to require same-day registration. He plans on spending up to \$8 million on the campaign. He insists his motivations are nonpartisan, although he acknowledges he is a registered Democrat and won't disagree with those who say his measure will help Democratic get-out-the-vote efforts.

It's a safe bet that same-day voter registration would make California's loosey-goosey polling places all the more chaotic. Lisalee Anne Wells, who has worked polling places in Long Beach, says that with "polling places now going unattended, others with staff but no paperwork and the typical staffer a distracted part-timer, the notion that voter registration should be added to Election Day is laughable."

County officials in California agree. Steve Weir, the voter registrar of Contra Costa County, says the initiative "adds complications, and the one thing California elections officials agree on unanimously is that elections have gotten too complicated, and so we're going to make mistakes." In his county he estimates that he would have to spend \$75,000 to recruit an additional worker for each of its 800 polling places in order to register voters on Election Day.

In Colorado, a same-day voter registration initiative is being pushed by 27-year-old Jared Polis, a dot-

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com millionaire who in 2000 spent over \$1 million of his own money to get elected to the state board of education, a nonpaying position. Now he is spending even more to tout the idea that Colorado is somehow putting insuperable barriers to voting by requiring registration in advance.

Even the normally liberal *Denver Post* is cool to Mr. Polis' idea. It recently editorialized that "the idea of registering on Election Day would gladden the hearts of New York City's old Tammany Hall tigers, who routinely shifted battalions of voters from precinct to precinct in pursuit of their 'vote early, vote often' philosophy."

Indeed, the untold story of Florida's 2000 election controversy was the number of suspect ballots that could have affected the outcome. The *Miami Herald* reviewed a third of Florida's counties and found that more than 1,200 votes were cast illegally by felons. In addition, in Duval County alone, 499 votes were cast by unregistered voters. Cora Thigpen, aged 90, admitted to voting for Al Gore and being proud of it: "If I had voted a half-dozen times, I would have voted every time for Al Gore." Let's not make it easier for voters like Ms. Thigpen to show their devotion.

The history of voter registration is rife with stories of fraud and outrageous disenfranchisement. As the liberal writers Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward have pointed out, political machines like Tammany Hall and Richard Daley's Chicago swelled voter rolls with the names of the dead. Poll taxes, literacy tests and other obstacles were used until the 1960s to discourage voting among immigrants in the North and blacks in the South.

Given this history of abuse, it makes sense to tread carefully when millionaires put forward pet political causes such as same-day registration. It is a recipe for bedlam at the polls, greater voter cynicism about the integrity of elections and the throwing of more contested races into the courts. The last thing we want is another Florida. But that's exactly what same-day registration would make more likely. ♪



EUPHORIA LACKING

BY BRIAN S. WESBURY

Last month in San Diego, I heard a senior executive from LPL Financial Services, Inc., the number-one independent broker-dealer in the United States, tell more than 2,000 of his company's representatives that they were using barely a quarter of the technology the company had available. He urged them to use more.

LPL's technology is impressive. It allows real-time access to client accounts, streamlines the order process, rids the company of excess paper and dramatically boosts account-representative productivity. Some of it is brand new; some will not go online for a few months, but all of it will be considered essential in a relatively short time.

The same story can be told for most sectors of the economy. The full potential of the Internet and real-time computer databases has yet to be tapped, but will be shortly. Despite the collapse of technology sector stocks and assurances from the cynics that the late 1990s was a bubble, the promise of the New Era is being fulfilled.

That promise was, and is, increasing productivity—what collectively allows us to accomplish more each working day. Greater efficiency and more productive processes are the lifeblood of our economy. Without rising productivity, there can be no long-term progress, no increase in living standards and no steadily rising stock market.

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Language, money, the printing press, internal combustion engines, computer chips and software—all lifted wealth by making people more productive. For the most part, that progress has been relatively consistent. Unfortunately, for those who had to live through certain periods in history, there has been some backsliding. The Dark Ages, for example, saw an actual decline in living standards. Fortunately, the Renaissance followed.

In recent years, a renaissance of sorts has occurred in America. After the malaise of the 1970s, productivity growth has improved dramatically, with durable goods manufacturing productivity up 5.0 percent per year in the 1990s. Living standards followed.

And during the recent recession, astonishing those who belittled the idea of an economic "New Era," productivity has remained very strong. In the nine months to December 2001, productivity continued rising, more rapidly than in any recession since 1949. In the first quarter of 2002, non-farm productivity grew at an 8.4 percent annualized rate, its strongest performance since the second quarter of 1983, when the economy was exiting the worst recession since the Great Depression.

And yet this year at least, all that productivity growth has not helped the stock market one iota. Productivity is supposed to boost corporate profits, and according to Commerce Department figures, profits were indeed up sharply between September and March. At the same time, interest rates have fallen, inflation is in check and the economy is showing