

GEORGIE ANNE GEYER

# Rush of non-citizen voters

**I**BROWNSVILLE, Texas did not have to wait long to find myself up against the most serious new problem in the seemingly endless mazes of illegal immigration. For the potential for non-citizen voting was all over the front pages of the Brownsville Herald the day I arrived — and so was the incredible way in which the federal government is actually, willy-nilly, encouraging it.

First of all, non-citizens are forbidden in almost all states from voting in federal elections, but the fact is that they are indeed voting all over the country, and not only in local elections. The new factor is last January's idealistic "motor voter" law, officially known as the National Voter Registration Act. What happens is that the law, supposedly to encourage citizens to vote by allowing them to register when they get a driver's license or even apply for food stamps, has only made voting so oversimplified that it has virtually removed any controls at all.

As Herald staff writer Anthony Gray, a fair-minded young reporter, said in his articles: "A federal mandate requiring state agencies to offer voter registration to applicants for social services and driver's licenses may be dramatically increasing the number of illegal voters in counties along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Compounding matters, the new voter registration application does not require an applicant to state where he was born. Furthermore, state agency employees are prohibited from making a determination on a person's citizenship status for voter registration purposes, even if they see documents that state that a person may not be a U.S. citizen."

When Mr. Gray stopped by to see me at the mellow old Fort Brown Hotel, he stressed that same fact, made worse by the non-demands of the motor-voter bill. "You have a voter registration card, you can vote," he went on. "But formally, there is no place listed for your place of birth. As long as you have

a mailing address, you get your vote. In theory, you could make up a fictitious person and vote fictitiously."

In fact, all a "voter" has to do is go into state agencies — such as the Department of Public Safety or the Department of Human Services — and ask for an application for a voter registration card. "You don't need to show anything to prove who you are — or that you are an American citizen," Mr. Gray said. "You are simply entered into the rolls." (In fact, through a series of idealistic laws and regulations, all favoring illegal immi-

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grants at the expense of the coherence of the state, schools in Texas cannot ask which children are there illegally, nor can hospitals ask patients.)

Whenever I have mentioned the fact that both legal residents and illegal aliens are actually voting all across the country — sometimes in local elections, which can be legal, but also often in federal elections, which is not — Americans look at me as though I am smoking something. Yet, this is because some areas have actually voted to allow non-citizens to vote in local elections (Takoma Park, Md., is one). Others, such as Los Angeles, have pushed non-citizen voting in school board elections. In New York City, the idea was put forward for illegal aliens with children in the city's schools to register to vote as unique "parent voters."

As early as 1983, when "Target 7," an investigative television show in Chicago, undertook a comprehensive investigation on voting and

illegal aliens, it discovered that the Chicago Board of Education was making voter's cards available to just about anyone — despite the fact that it is a felony for a non-citizen to vote in federal elections in Illinois.

U.S. Attorney Dan Webb was quoted on the show as saying, "What bothers me the most is that when you have this number of illegal registrations, what you're doing is laying the groundwork to have fraud on Election Day." (This proud Chicagoan must admit that this is not the first electoral fraud in my fair city, but at least in the old days, it was not the idealists who led the fraud!)

There is even an avant group, in the universities (where else?) which is fervently pushing non-citizen voting, starting on a local level. In a discussion on these topics, law professor Jaime Ruskin of American University argued that the word "citizen" means only "the inhabitant of a city or a town." "Thus," he said, "one can be a citizen of Takoma Park but not of the United States."

Meanwhile, Anthony Gray and many electoral officials in Brownsville and elsewhere along the teeming border are worried that the same thing could happen there as has already happened in Chicago. Elections administrators say the new federal voter registration mandate has increased the number of registered voters in the county from 105,000 to 116,000 since January — but that they have neither the mandate nor the enforcement capacity to determine who those people are, much less if they are citizens. Already there are claims of mail-in fraud.

Far more serious than the potential for immediate fraud is the infinitely larger question of how and why America is so disorganizing and disconnecting itself — and, thus, ultimately disenfranchising itself.

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*Georgie Anne Geyer is a nationally syndicated columnist.*