

STUDENTS' RIGHTS ARE BEING HEARD!

One year ago, when the California Supreme Court handed down the first legal decision releasing students from the "residential apron strings" of their parents, most students in this country were just beginning to hear about "residency requirements." At that time -- one month after the enactment of the 26th Amendment -- only six other states permitted students to decide for themselves where they wanted to register and vote. The threat of student voting power was talked about by Cambridge and Bloomington and Chapel Hill townspeople with a vehemence equal to discussion of the "busing issue" by Wallace voters.

In the months that followed, students began to understand what "voting rights" were all about. They learned about "special qualifications" and "discriminatory questioning" first hand. Faced by hostile election administrators, students were submitted to cross examination and forced to answer such questions as: "Where do you go to church?", "Where do you plan to live five years from now?", "Where do you plan to be buried?". They were intimidated by election officials who required local registration of automobiles, local insurance rates, and state tax receipts. Election officials falsely inferred that by registering on campus, a student's auto insurance rates would increase and he could no longer be claimed as a tax deduction by his parents.

In courtrooms, students pleaded for the right to choose their voting residence. They argued that traveling, perhaps a thousand miles to vote or filing an absentee ballot meant they were singled out for special treatment. Such "burdens" might dissuade young persons from exercising their franchise and were inconsistent with the purpose of the 26th Amendment.

In nearly every state, students won the right to choose their voting residence and decide for themselves where they wish to vote. Today, only eight states bar students from registering on campus. The question now is whether college students are fully aware of this newly won right and whether they will exercise it.

Neal Zimmerman, a 26-year-old law student and organizer of the National Movement for the Student Vote's fall campus registration program, believes a student should give thoughtful consideration to the question of voting residency before he registers.

"First, a student must consider where he will be on election day," advises Zimmerman. "If he is away from the place where he registered, he will save a series of roadblocks, technicalities and deadlines called absentee voting. Attempting to vote absentee often involves a tremendous risk of being disenfranchised."

After considering mechanical problems involved, a student should think about where he wants to vote. "A student should vote where his interests lie," says Zimmerman. "A voter should vote where he is most knowledgeable about the issues so he can cast an intelligent ballot. Usually, forcing a student to vote at his parents' address is to impose an uninformed voter on the parents' town."

Students should recognize that they are as affected by the outcome of local elections as the people who live

there all year round. Most students live in their college town at least nine months a year, often as many as 12 months. They are subject to the local and state ordinances.

"The street runs both ways," explains Zimmermann. "College students are a boon to the local economy through the money they spend. The communities receive the benefit of property taxes which college students pay as part of the rent in off-campus houses. Students also pay sales, gas, income and other taxes in the college communities."

Many students don't realize that the U.S. Bureau of Census counts students as residents of their college towns for census purposes. This means that the college town receives the benefit of the student's residency; the student is counted to the town's advantage in its reapportionment formula for Congress and state legislatures and in its per capita formulas for state and federal aid.

Zimmermann feels strongly about the input students can offer to the political structure of his college town. "In towns where students have registered, they have proven themselves to be responsible voters." A recent decision of the New Jersey Supreme Court states: "The energy and idealism of the young is probably needed even more at the local level than at the national level."

Where a student registers and votes should depend on where the student wants to vote. The questions of interest in local government, knowledge of the issues and effects of local elections on his own life, as well as ease of voting must be considered.

"Most probably, these questions will lead a college student to vote at his college residence," says Zimmermann. "Every student has a duty to himself and his community to thoughtfully consider not simply whether he should vote or how he will vote, but also where he will choose to vote."

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For the average person who votes in the town where he is registered, casting a ballot is as easy as walking down the street, submitting a name to an election official, entering the voting booth and flicking the appropriate lever. But for the person who is registered in his home town and living somewhere else, voting means applying for and receiving an absentee ballot.

Voting absentee is a complicated, almost dizzying procedure. It is also risky. The confusion of deadlines, application forms, special signatures and rigid directions may even result in a discarded ballot.

Sometimes absentee voting is a necessity. Certainly, if a student prefers voting from his home address -- perhaps, his sympathies lie with a certain candidate running in his home town or he simply feels closer ties with the politics at home -- he will choose to register there. For freshmen and transfer students, the choice may not exist. Students might arrive on campus too late to meet the thirty day residency requirement.

For the student who must vote absentee, there are many procedures that must be followed. They all revolve around one important factor: Time.

In many cases, it will take as many as three letter exchanges between a student and his local clerk to finally secure a ballot. It could take as long as three or four weeks simply to receive an application so the absentee voter must be extremely aware of deadlines.

In initially requesting an absentee ballot from the town, county or city clerk, the voter should include his name, home address, the address where the ballot should be sent and the reason for necessitating an absentee ballot.

Deadlines, in either case, are crucial. The dates vary considerably from state to state so a check with the local clerk of the League of Women voters is a necessity.

Following directions to the letter may also make the difference between having a vote counted or discarded. Non compliance with directions is a valid reason for a discounted ballot. Again, procedures differ from state to state. In some cases it will be necessary to have the signature of a notary public before the bal-


lot can be considered valid. Notaries are found in most banks, the court house or the county clerk's office.

In sending in a ballot, there is always a deadline to meet. It's best to send the ballot out immediately, for frequently the ballot must be received by a specified date, and even, hour. Votes have been lost because a ballot was received an hour after the de-

termined deadline.

The red tape involved in voting absentee can be discouraging. Not only must the voter remember to vote, he must also remember deadlines, directions and special requirements. Most important, he must not forget to apply for his ballot.

Have you applied for yours? Apply to your elections board before November 1.



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