



Susan Bysiewicz
SECRETARY OF THE STATE
CONNECTICUT

For Immediate Release:
February 28, 2008

For more information:
Adam Joseph: (860) 509-6118
Cell: (860) 817-4165

- NEWS RELEASE -

SEC. BYSIEWICZ, LEGISLATORS, AND TEENS CALL TO EXPAND VOTING RIGHTS FOR 17 YEAR-OLDS

BYSIEWICZ, SLOSSBERG, SPALLONE, ESPOSITO AND DAVIS STAND WITH NOTRE
DAME HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND PUSH FOR STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Hartford: Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz, State Sen. Gayle Slossberg State Rep. James Spallone, State Rep. Pauld Davis, and State Rep. Lou Esposito were joined by more than 400 Notre Dame High School students to support a proposed constitutional amendment that would give thousands of 17 year-olds the right to vote in primaries as long as they are 18 years old by Election Day.

“Connecticut should be among the national leaders when it comes to voting rights,” said Bysiewicz. “Giving 17 year-olds the right to vote will increase turnout, make political candidates more accountable, and address a shocking inequity in our laws that allows a 17 year-old to enlist in the military but not vote.”

House Joint Resolution No. 21 states, “That article fourteenth of the amendments to the Constitution of the State be amended authorize any citizen who has not yet attained the age of eighteen years of age but who will have attained the age of eighteen years on or before the day of a regular election, who is otherwise qualified to be an elector and who has applied for admission as an elector in such manner as may be prescribed by law, may vote in any primary election, in such manner as may be prescribed by law, held for such regular election.”

The United States Constitution does not deny 17 year-olds the right to vote. The 26th Amendment to the United States Constitution only states that the right of citizens who are eighteen years of age or older to vote shall not be denied by the United States or by any State on

account of age. Taking into account that the Constitution does not bar states from lowering the voting age, some states have done exactly that. In the past several years nine other states in the nation have passed measures that allow 17 year-olds to vote in primaries so long as they turn 18 by the general election. The states are: Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia.

“In 1971, as young men were being sent to Vietnam, the 26th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was ratified, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18,” said Sec. Bysiewicz. “Lawmakers thought it was unfair that someone could serve our nation in combat but not have the right to vote. Today there are 17 year-old men and women who have enlisted in the armed services and are fighting a war in our name but they cannot vote. That is wrong and this measure would address that inequity.”

Lowering the voting age to 17, with said restrictions, would also increase voter participation among young people and help create life long voters. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Maryland, if you vote once you are 4-5 times more likely to vote again than if you never voted.

There are two ways an amendment can be made to the Connecticut Constitution. One option is that three quarters of the House and Senate approve the amendment and then it goes onto the ballot in the next general election that falls on an even numbered year. The other option is for a simple majority in both the House and Senate to approve the measure in two separate legislative sessions. If that happened, it would then go onto the ballot in the next general election that falls on an even numbered year.

Last year a similar resolution won wide support in the General Assembly but fell 9 votes short of having the support of three quarters of the House. The resolution was not raised in the Senate.

“We consistently encourage our young people to register, to vote and to become actively involved in the Democratic process,” said Senator Slossberg, who co-chairs the General Assembly’s Government Administration & Elections Committee. “We should do all that we can to enable young voters. Other states, too, have recognized the inequity in a restrictive voting age. It’s time for Connecticut to afford greater opportunities for 17 year-old men and women, who often carry the weight of adult responsibilities but are unable to cast their votes and make their voices heard.”

State Rep. Spallone, 36th District – representing the towns of Chester, Deep River, Essex and Haddam - said, “On Friday we will begin the process of amending our state constitution to allow 17 year olds to vote in primaries if they will be 18 on or before the general election. I am confident that we will gain the support needed in each legislative chamber to place the amendment on the ballot this fall. In a time of war, global environmental challenges and economic uncertainty, the stakes for young voters could not be higher. This amendment will help strengthen their voice in public policy matters, and, we hope, encourage a life-long voting habit.”

"This makes sense as long as the 17 year-olds are 18 years old by primary election days," said Rep. Paul Davis (D-117th District). "I am encouraged by the interest of young people in government and the political process. The time for this measure is now and I support it."

“By lowering the age to 17 we would ensure that the majority of high school seniors would be able to vote,” said Sec. Bysiewicz. “This, coupled with the civics requirement in high school that

I fought for, is a great one-two punch that will encourage thousands of young people to participate in the electoral process.”

Notre Dame of West Haven has been at the forefront of this cause. The Millard Fillmore Club, under the direction of Mr. Richard Antonetti, has championed this cause for the last several years. Students from Notre Dame spoke before legislative committees in the spring of 2007 in hopes of getting the law changed.

A hearing on House Joint Resolution No. 21 is scheduled for Friday February 29th at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford

-END-