

Voter Registration Reform: Vital To Voter Participation

By Harry Reid
Member of Congress

The United States provides its citizens with the most democratic rights of any country in the world. However, we create or permit some of the most difficult pre-conditions to the expression of those rights. Voting is a prime example.

Though some say voter registration showed a

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controlled Senate.

Department deputy spokesman Alan Romberg conceded that the recent statements by King Hussein of Jordan in which he blasted U.S. support for Israel and refused negotiations with Israel were the catalyst that insured success to opponents of that sale.

Secretary of State George Shultz told a news conference on March 20 that while Reagan was ready to "put on a major effort" to get the Stinger sale approved, "There was no question about the fact that King Hussein's statements constituted a very serious setback to chances of Congressional approval."

Shultz hinted during

his news conference that he would like Congress to abandon its efforts to force the U.S. to move its Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in return for Reagan's withdrawal of the Stinger sale.

But Romberg, at the State Department briefing on March 21, said he could not predict what the Congressional reaction would be to the President's withdrawal of the Stinger proposal. Efforts were continuing in Congress, however, to gather co-sponsors for the bills directing the Embassy move, something the Administration opposes.

Shultz told the news conference that he viewed the transfer of the Embassy as "damaging" to U.S. in-

terests. He said it was something that went "beyond political matters and goes into deep religious roots."

Shultz also, in a warning to Arab states, stressed that "You have to get out of this notion that every time things don't go just to everybody's satisfaction in the Middle East, it's the fault of the U.S. or its up to the U.S. to do something about it. We are active...and in the end any solution that works will work primarily because the parties to it are out there, are involved in it and are determined to make it work."

slight increase in the 1980 election, in actuality, registration has been declining for two decades. It is time to create reforms to protect and encourage voter registration. With cooperation between the federal government and state legislatures, voter registration could be improved significantly.

Easier registration requirements would aid the country in producing a greater voter turnout. We could encourage state adoption of mail registration. This would lower the personal cost and inconvenience of registering.

A second possibility is making voter registration available when a person gets a driver's license. Still another alternative is universal voter enrollment, through which the government itself would compile a list of eligible voters prior to each

election.

Private-sector initiatives have been instrumental in achieving substantial voter registration within particular community, ethnic or religious groups. These efforts should be encouraged because of the vital support they have given to the democratic process. The Las Vegas Jewish Community already has made a powerful impact on political decision-making in Nevada and the nation. It is important to use this enthusiasm to encourage even greater participation. That participation is rooted in voting.

With a 20-year decline in voter registration, we must pursue and encourage new alternatives. We must work with our state legislators and citizen groups to create voter registration incentives. For, only through each person's right and responsibility to vote can we preserve the remaining freedoms that our great nation provides.

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