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YDC State Convention  
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ABSENTEE PRIMARY BALLOTS

CHANGE OF PRIMARY DATE

Thank you for this opportunity to join in the activities of your YDC Convention. It has been my observation that the Young Democrats of North Carolina are rapidly becoming one of the most dynamic political forces in this State today.

The Young Democrats, perhaps more than any other political body in North Carolina, have attempted to bring the voting franchise to every segment of the population -- the blacks, the poor, and the young. I applaud your endeavors to bring all North Carolinians into the decision-making process.

As a private citizen I have been deeply concerned with the serious inconvenience and possible disenfranchisement of the rights of certain classes of voters in this State during primary elections. I have already expressed my views privately and by letter to the Duke University Delegation to the North Carolina Student Legislature; however, I would like to take this opportunity to share with all of you my feelings on two very important voter problems.

North Carolina General Statute 163-245 restricts the use of absentee ballots in primary elections to persons serving in all branches of the armed forces, disabled war veterans in United States government hospitals, members of the Peace Corps, and wives of such individuals. These laws were enacted at a time when the use of absentee ballots was abused to such an extent that elections in some localities were literally stolen with absentee ballots.

Many is the time that corrupt politicians have voted the names of forgotten individuals in local cemeteries; or when living individuals voted in person in one precinct as well as by absentee ballot in another.

Today, however, with our more efficient election machinery and with the close scrutiny given to every election by the news media, I feel that the present restrictions on the use of the absentee ballot may have outlived their usefulness.

The great size of our state often makes it necessary for students, traveling salesmen, construction workers, and similar groups of individuals to travel several hundred miles or to undergo undue hardship in order to vote in our very important elections. I feel that this is an unfair burden to place on any of our citizens, especially our newly enfranchised voters.

All unreasonable barriers restricting the exercise of any individual's right to vote should be removed. Therefore, I believe that the current restrictions on the use of absentee ballots in primary elections should be re-examined and rewritten in such a way that any citizen now seriously inconvenienced or actually prohibited from voting in primary elections may now be able to freely exercise his franchise.

Another problem which is of great concern to me is the placing of primary elections on Tuesday, or any other weekday for that matter. A great many individuals could be seriously inconvenienced by the present law. It is very difficult for factory workers, the poor with no transportation, and students with their busy weekday class schedules, to secure rides to the poll or to get time off from their jobs or classes in order to vote.

Voting time is often restricted to the early morning rush or the late afternoon rush when long lines discourage many busy people. Factory workers, schoolteachers, office workers, and traveling salesmen would find it much easier to get to the polling place on a non-work day. Students desiring to return to their home communities would certainly find it much easier to return home on a week-end rather than during a week day.

Saturday is traditionally the day when the majority of our citizens are not engaged in their work or educational pursuits and have the freedom necessary to get to the polls and vote at a time most convenient to them.

I feel that both of these changes are necessary. All voters should have a fair opportunity on primary election day to cast their ballots for the candidate of their choice and the party of their choice. Such changes would not unduly complicate our election machinery and would provide a reasonable choice for groups of citizens now seriously hampered from exercising their right to vote during primary election time.

The 26th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States said far more to me than that the 18-year old citizen should be allowed to vote. It said to me that a great portion of our population was being unfairly denied their right to participate in the decision-making process.

It has become all too apparent that along with the young voter -- the black, the poor, and many other members of our society have also been denied their right of participation in the democratic process.

The 26th Amendment should tell us all that wherever undue restrictions have been placed on the voting franchise, fair minded people should work to remove these obstacles to democracy.

Again, this is the reason why I applaud the efforts of this great organization for its work in placing the political process back in the hands of the people where it belongs.

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