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VOTER ID: UNFAIR AND A WASTE OF TAX DOLLARS

MADISON: Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau) Monday told reporters that Republicans might bring a voter ID bill up for a vote while their Democratic colleagues are out of state. The Senate may not vote on a bill that has a fiscal impact unless there are at least 20 senators present, and without the Democrats they are one senator short. They say they can strip the voter ID bill of its spending elements, but make no mistake – what they are proposing is a new government program which will cost millions of dollars annually and which seeks to address a problem that does not exist.

Despite the lack of data showing a problem, Republican leaders want to require every citizen to show a specific kind of photo ID before having the opportunity to exercise their constitutional right to vote. *Politifact.com* has confirmed hands-down that if this bill is passed it will be the most restrictive voter ID law in the nation.ⁱ

“This bill is about voter suppression. Research shows that in Wisconsin, the people who do not currently have the kind of ID required – and for whom it will be most difficult to obtain the ID – are more likely to be the elderly, the disabled, low-income individuals and students,”ⁱⁱ said Andrea Kaminski of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Fund.

“Photo ID legislation is a prime example of wasteful use of taxpayers’ money. Our state has effective identification procedures already in place for voter registration and has yet to prosecute a case of voter impersonation. This reveals what the push for voter ID really is -- politics as usual at a time when essential state government services are being cut,” Kaminski said.

The authors of the bill have downplayed the cost to implement the voter ID program if it becomes law. The Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimated that implementation of the 2005 voter ID bill would cost \$2.3 million annually for the DMV alone, in addition to an indeterminate cost for the state and local governments for training of election officials, voter education and processing of provisional ballots.

A recently released bipartisan study found that implementing the voter photo ID law in Indiana has exceeded \$10 million over four years, and that is simply the cost of providing the free photo identification.ⁱⁱⁱ This figure does not include the cost to educate voters (an additional \$2.2 million) and re-train poll workers and elections officials. Nor does it reflect the cost of defending the law in court.

The Wisconsin Department of Justice last week said that it does not anticipate any costs related to the voter ID law, if it is passed. But it should be noted that the DOJ is headed by Attorney General JB Van Hollen, who strongly supports the bill. If the voter ID bill is passed, the cost of defending the new law will fall upon the DOJ.

Legal challenges are not unlikely. UW-Madison political scientists David Canon and Donald Moynihan have identified serious legal vulnerabilities with the voter ID bill currently before the state Legislature. Less restrictive photo ID laws in Georgia and Indiana were challenged in court and resulted in major legal costs for those states, in addition to amendments to bring the laws in line with federal election law and the U.S. Constitution.

“Our state government should be in the business of making it easier for citizens to vote -- not adding costly restrictions and hassles that will negatively impact all voters. How can lawmakers justify wasting tax dollars on a new government program designed to address unsubstantiated rumors in the hope of achieving results that cannot be measured? Voter ID is a sham, and the League of Voters calls on the Legislature to reject it,” concluded Kaminski.

SOURCES:

ⁱ <http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/statements/2011/feb/15/milele-coggs/milwaukee-ald-milele-coggs-says-bill-would-give-wi/>

ⁱⁱ UW-Milwaukee study: <http://www4.uwm.edu/eti/2007/VoterID.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Iowa State Association of County Auditors, 02/02/11:
<http://www.lwvwi.org/Portals/0/IssuesAdvocacy/PDF/ISACA%20Voter%20ID%20Report%20020211%20final2%5B1%5D.pdf>