

Voter preregistration now available for 16-17-year-olds

Written by Becca Brandt

When discussing a recently passed bill from the Colorado General Assembly, it is not one's first instinct to look to a high school government class. But in the case of House Bill 13-1135, Luke Thomas' sixth-hour government class was exactly the place to gather input on the topic.

House Bill 13-1135, which went into effect Wednesday, Aug. 7, concerns the age at which citizens of Colorado can register to vote. More specifically, every person who has reached 16 years of age can preregister to vote and update voter information as long as they meet all Colorado registration regulations.

Going into the government class, the students had no knowledge of the new law, but after a little prompting, they certainly gave their two cents on the subject.

There were disagreements among the students about whether this was a good idea or not. Kaety Overton thought it was a good idea, but it might put a lot of pressure on young people to determine their political affiliation at such a young age.

Ramiro Iniguez was completely against the idea, stating simply, "I'm not mature enough and neither are some of these other people."

In terms of determining political affiliation, Megan Vieselmeyer thinks at such a young age students are impressionable and may just decide to vote with the same party as their parents.

One of the sections in the bill will allow 16- and 17-year-olds to register at driver's license examination facilities starting Jan. 1, 2014. It was pointed out by Jentry Andersen that it would be convenient to just fill out the necessary preregistration application when filling out the information required to get a driver's license.

County Clerk Beth Zilla believes that allowing people to register at 16 and 17 years old will not be a problem at the courthouse.

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Before the law took effect, people who were 17 and would be 18 by the next election could register. Their documentation would remain in a pending file and then roll over to the registered voters list when they turned 18. The same will apply for those who preregister.

The students also had strong opinions about how funds should be allocated in regards to the act. A total of \$86,672 has been appropriated for the implementation of this act, with \$55,000 going to the division of motor vehicles for contract programming services and \$31,672 to the information technology for the purchase of computer center services.

Bianca Rodriguez considered the whole act to be a waste of money, saying “Either way, whether 16 or 18, a person is going to decide if they will or won’t register. It could have stayed at 18.”

Zach Roll also disagreed with the way money was going to be spent, believing some of the funds should go to getting the word out to those who can preregister.

There was a consensus among the class that it would be pointless to spend money on implementing the program if the government didn’t do a better job of letting people know preregistration is now an option.

Luke Stewart thinks the best way to get younger people involved is to put the information where they will see it: the school. “We are stuck in class, why not learn it here?” he asked.

Thomas thinks it would be good for students to learn about their civic duty, but teachers have to be careful about providing an unbiased environment. Last year, Thomas’s classes viewed and broke down the coverage of the presidential election. He thinks the government class provides a good environment for the students to have in-depth discussion about this sort of thing.

His students, however, think the education process should start younger, so that by the time students are 16 they will have an understanding of the whole process. Stewart said at the very

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least, the bill should be mentioned and students should be told how to sign up.

Andersen noted she would be willing to fill out the online application form if they took class time to complete the process.

Now that the bill has been passed, Thomas is interested in seeing the impact in young voter turnout in the next few years.

The overall opinion in the classroom was that it is important for people to vote, including the younger generations, and House Bill 13-1135 will be beneficial to voter turnout as long as the younger generations are educated on the subject.

House Bill 13-1135 was introduced to the House on Jan. 18. Following amendments, the bill went to second reading where it was passed with amendments and third reading where it passed on March 12 with a 37-28 vote.

The bill was introduced to the Senate on March 13, which was followed by amendments and the second and third readings (both of which passed with amendments).

After considering the Senate amendments, the House concurred and repassed the bill. On April 29, the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate both signed the bill. Governor John Hickenlooper signed the bill on May 10.

Citizens of the state were given a 90-day period following the adjournment of the General Assembly on May 8 to file a referendum petition in which they could send all or part of the bill to the general election in November 2014. Seeing no filed objections, the bill took effect Aug. 7.

Registration can be completed at the county clerk's office or online at www.sos.state.co.us/voter-classic/secuRegVoterIntro.do

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Registration regulations in Colorado state that a voter must be a citizen of the United States, a resident of Colorado 30 days prior to the election and not be confined as a prisoner or serving any part of a sentence (including parole) for a felony conviction.

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