

## *Voter ID bills clears Va. Senate*

By Laura Vozzella

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The [Virginia Senate](#) voted to [tighten voting restrictions](#) Monday in a party-line vote that Republicans called essential to democracy and that Democrats portrayed as a return to Jim Crow.

Senate Majority Leader Thomas K. Norment, Jr. ( R-James City), rear, and Sen. Stephen H. Martin ( R-Chesterfield), watch during debate in the Senate on Martin's voter identification bill Monday. (Bob Brown - AP) The Senate voted 21-20, with Lt. Gov. Bill Bolling (R) breaking a tie vote on the contentious issue. The bill, proposed by Sen. Stephen H. Martin (R-Chesterfield), requires that voters provide some sort of identification at the polls; otherwise, their votes will not be counted.

Democrats have complained bitterly that the measure, and [similar voter ID bills around the country](#), will suppress the votes of minorities, the elderly, college students and the poor, contending that they are less likely to have identification. Arguing that there is [no evidence of widespread voter fraud](#), Senate Minority Leader Richard L. Saslaw (D-Fairfax) said the purpose was to make it “more difficult for some people to vote.”

“Even Ray Charles could see through this,” he said.

Republicans countered that Virginia’s voter ID requirements were absurdly loose — “just short of the pinkie swear and a note from mom,” as Sen. Thomas A. Garrett (R-Louisa) put it during Monday’s heated floor debate. They said the bill would shore up the integrity of elections.

For decades, Virginia has had a law requiring that voters to provide identification at the polls. But about 10 years ago, Virginia changed the law to allow people who arrive at the polls without ID to vote as long as they sign a sworn statement that they are who they claim.

Under Martin’s bill, the voter would still be allowed to vote after signing the affidavit, but only by provisional ballot. The ballot would not be counted unless the voter later

provides identification. Voters would have six days to provide officials with ID. Faxed or emailed copies of the identification would be accepted.

A similar bill passed the House last week.

Even as it imposes stricter standards for presenting identification, the Senate bill also expands the types of identification that would be accepted at the polls.

Current law calls for a voter registration card, Social Security card, driver's license or government-issued identification or photo ID from a private workplace. The Senate bill adds utility bills, paychecks, bank statements, government checks and — with an amendment Martin offered on the floor Monday — a current college ID from a four-year Virginia institution. (The House bill does not add to list of acceptable forms of identification.)

In that sense, the Senate bill seems to fall in the middle of the road among the flurry of voter ID bills being proposed around the country in recent years, said Jim Harper, director of information policy studies the CATO Institute. Many of the bills filed elsewhere demand government-issued photo ID.

Harper, who opposes a national ID, does not object to some form of identification at the polls.

“States should be free to experiment and find the right balance,” he said.

“In my own life, when I started voting as a younger man, the polling place was staffed by two people: my mom; my soccer coach, Mr. Nieman; and a third woman, I don't know who she was. And that made impersonation fraud very difficult,” said Harper, who grew up in Northern California.

Today, he lives in the District, where no one at his neighborhood polling place knows him.

“There are places in rural Virginia where it's more like your mom, your soccer coach and another neighbor lady. And these [voter ID] things are going to be a pure waste of energy. And there's probably places in Virginia where there's somebody trying to put something over on them. ”

The Senate bill initially passed 21-19, with Sen. Charles J. Colgan (D-Prince William) voting with Republicans for the tighter voting rules. But moments after that vote, Martin asked the Senate to reconsider the matter.

The second time around, Colgan voted against the bill, prompting Bolling to jump in with his tie-breaking vote. It was not clear why Colgan changed his vote. He could not be reached for comment afterward.

