

LES AUCOIN
1ST DISTRICT, OREGON



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

June 11, 1981

Dear Colleague:

In 1960, for the first time in American history, television networks were on the air reporting presidential election returns from the East at a time when the polls were still open in the West.

This new influence on voting posed new problems, which were addressed in bills introduced in the 87th, 88th, 90th, 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 94th, 95th and 96th Congresses. None passed. The problem remains.

Why have none passed? Because too few Members have experienced the feeling of hollowness that comes from the absolute knowledge that your vote wouldn't matter? Millions of West Coast voters have shared that experience. Because too few Members have seen mayors, commissioners, sheriffs and state legislators doomed by early projections from 3,000 miles away? We in the West are on intimate terms with that feeling.

It need not happen again. H.R. 3595 is a simple, practical solution. It respects and preserves all First Amendment rights. It respects the rights and interests of all states. It mandates only that all polls close by 11 p.m. EST, and that no presidential results be released for publication until then.

I am joined in commending this bill to your attention by:

Mr. Weaver	Mr. Don Edwards	Mrs. Fenwick	Mr. Goodlin
Mr. Wyden	Mr. Coelho	Mr. Downey	Mr. Mineta
Mr. Akaka	Mr. Beilenson	Mr. Vento	
	Mr. Burgener	Mr. Seiberling	

We seek your support, before 1984 is upon us. By then it's too late, again. If you would like to co-sponsor, please call Bob Crane or Trish Bauman at 5-0855.

With best regards,

Sincerely

LES AUCOIN
Member of Congress

LA/pjb

The following is taken from the Congressional Record, May 14, 1981.

LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO
AMEND VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Mr. AuCOIN. Mr. Speaker, a vote is a precious thing to give, and to lose. Today I am introducing a bill that amends the Voting Rights Act to assure Americans who live in the West that their votes in Presidential elections really count.

The amendment provides a pragmatic, practical, and nonintrusive solution to the problem caused by early release of Presidential elections.

As determined by public opinion polls following the November election, thousands of registered voters in the West did not cast ballots because they were discouraged by early projections and by an early concession hours before the polls officially closed.

Under the approach we are offering, States would be free to decide when to open the polls. Our amendment would mandate that all polls close no later than 11 p.m. eastern standard time, and it would prohibit release by election officials of Presidential election results until all polls are closed.

In Oregon and other Western States, this approach has been enthusiastically received by publishers, legislators, election officials, and groups such as the League of Women Voters, because of the problems it avoids. I commend it to my colleagues and urge their support.

Let me summarize briefly the advantages of this approach:

It does not move election day to a Sunday, where it would conflict with religious and recreational activities;

It does not declare a voting holiday, thus averting the enormous costs of shutting down commerce for a day;

It does not involve a complex, unwieldy plan for a split-day voting or impose a uniform opening time that would open polls in the West as early as 5 o'clock in the morning.

It does not pose a confrontation with the first amendment over the broadcasting of election results.

A useful measure of the significance of the problem is shown by a Field Institute survey conducted recently for the California Secretary of State. The poll found that more than 400,000 registered voters in California--Democrats, Republicans, and others--did not vote because of the early election news reports and an early concession speech.

It can be readily deduced from the numbers that State, local, and congressional races easily could have been affected by the early disclosure of election results while the polls were still open. In my own State of Oregon and throughout the West, the problem was the same.

First amendment protections must be a prominent consideration in any legislative solution. For that reason, the "Canada solution," which outlaws publication or broadcast of voting results before the polls close, is not adaptable to the United States. There would be a clear confrontation with the Constitution. The amendment proposed today poses no threat to free speech or press.

For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for this amendment.