THE FACTS: Protecting Our Right to Choose Leaders

Background:

- NEA believes the right to vote, and to have one’s vote counted, is the most basic tenet of a democratic society. This right is now under attack by a deliberate and systematic attempt to prevent millions of voters from exercising their constitutional right to engage in the democratic process.
- These block-the-vote efforts could impede as many as 5 million eligible voters from casting ballots.
- Anti-voter initiatives seek to eliminate same day registration, shrink early voting windows, require a photo identification, and change student voting requirements.
- Fourteen states have enacted anti-voter measures. These exact an unfair price on the elderly, student, minority, and low-income populations. Some examples of recently passed legislation designed to disenfranchise voters:
  - Photo ID laws affecting 3.2 million eligible voters have passed in Wisconsin, Texas, Tennessee, Kansas and South Carolina.
  - Florida made it more difficult for a citizen to change his or her voting address, shortened the state's early voting period, and essentially shut down third party voter registration efforts.
  - The Ohio legislature is considering proposals that would dramatically shorten popular early voting periods and make provisional ballot use and vote rejection much more likely. Ohio voters will decide the fate of the new law in November 2012.

Impact of Anti-Voter Measures:

- Voter ID Requirements
  - 21 million Americans – 11% of eligible voters – do not have government issued IDs. (The right to vote under attack, 2011). This number includes 18% of all eligible voters over 65 and 25% of all African-Americans. (Citizens Without Proof: A Survey of Americans’ Possession of Documentary Proof of Citizenship and Photo Identification, 2006)
  - A 2011 Advancement Project report shows that 15% of those earning less than $35,000 per year are without ID. (Source: What’s wrong with this picture?, 2011)
  - Substantiated cases of voter fraud make up only 0.00005% of nationwide ballots cast. (Voter suppression: The real voter fraud, Milwaukee Courier 2012)

- Shortening Early/Absentee Voting Periods
  - A number of states have passed or considered measures that impede the actual casting of ballots by registered voters by placing new restrictions on the early and absentee voting processes.
Overall, 34% of voters in the 2008 general election cast ballots before Election Day, up from 22.2% four years earlier, according to data from the Associated Press and Edison Research.

These changes will inflict particularly harsh burdens on minority communities, who rely heavily on early voting periods to cast their ballots.

- **Voter Registration Drive Restrictions**
  - From 2000 to 2008, registration groups registered tens of millions of new voters, including close to nine million in 2008 alone. (US Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008*)
  - States have nevertheless proposed and implemented burdensome restrictions on third-party registration organizations – driving many from conducting any efforts in 2012.

- Implementing these unnecessary changes in the voting laws – such as public awareness campaigns, provisional ballots, and election official training – is costly and strains tightening state budgets.
  - Indiana’s voter photo ID law cost the state $10 million over four years.
  - Missouri recently estimated the cost of implementing a photo ID requirement at $20 million just in the first three years.
  - Underlying documentation, such as a birth certificate or naturalization papers, is often necessary to obtain a state issued photo ID. Many people don’t have ready access to their birth certificate, for example, and getting copies usually costs money.

**What NEA is doing to protect voting rights:**

- NEA has created a team to work on voter protection in 2012. In addition to getting our leaders involved on the national front, we will also be reaching out to our members across the country and asking them to engage on voter protection issues.

- We will be working with our partners and coalitions on the ground across the country to plug our activists into voter education, voter registration, and voter protection programs in their local communities.

- Go to education votes (www.educationvotes.org/voterprotection) to find more information, resources, and ways you can help make sure that all voters have a voice in 2012.