A Vietnam-Era Veteran and 50-Year Citizen of the United States

Herta Weber has spent more than 50 years in the United States. Originally from Germany, Ms. Weber came to the United States when she was 22. She was educated in the U.S., served in the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy, and since 1960, when she became a citizen, has voted. After serving overseas during the Vietnam War, attending school in Texas and Chapel Hill, N.C., and being stationed in several places across the U.S., Ms. Weber moved to Arizona in 2007. Arizona, Ms. Weber's chosen state of residence, rejected her voter registration application.

As a U.S. citizen with 24 years of military service, Ms. Weber feels especially strongly about the right to vote. Ms. Weber never had problems registering to vote after she became a U.S. citizen and lived in other states. In Arizona, although she filled out a voter registration form correctly, provided her naturalization certificate number as requested, and swore to her U.S. citizenship under oath when she signed the form, Arizona rejected her voter registration form for failure to provide proof of citizenship and forced her to re-apply and provide additional documentation.

“As a naturalized citizen, I should have the right to register to vote equal to all other citizens,” Ms. Weber said. “I also don't think my voter registration should have been rejected because I provided my certificate of naturalization number, since this is the only citizenship number that I know. As a veteran I cannot comprehend why a United States citizen should have her voter registration rejected and I cannot help but wonder how many thousands of U.S. citizens are experiencing this same disenfranchisement.”

A Newly Naturalized Citizen whose Application Was Rejected -- Twice

The first thing Jesus Gonzalez did after completing his naturalization ceremony at the federal courthouse in Yuma County in 2005 was register to vote. He did so because “We should all have an equal right to elect the people who make the decisions in our country. I want to have a voice in the United States.”

On the day he became a U.S. citizen, Mr. Gonzalez properly completed a voter registration form, provided the requested number of his certificate of naturalization, and swore to his U.S. citizenship under oath when he signed the form. Arizona then rejected his voter registration form for failure to document his U.S. citizenship. Mr. Gonzalez later attempted to register to vote a second time, using his driver’s license number online, but he was rejected again because his driver’s license was issued before 1996 and thus could not satisfy state law.

Mr. Gonzalez, who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1960’s, eventually paid $112.95 to get a U.S. passport as proof of citizenship, a cost he believes he should not have had to incur to be able to register to vote. He believes the rejection of his voter registration applications are the result of intentional discrimination.

“Early on,” said Mr. Gonzalez, “I worked as a farm worker under very difficult conditions while working in the fields. I was treated like a slave. I remember drinking water from a canal like an
animal…When my application for voter registration was denied, I was angry. After all of my hardship and struggles to finally become a U.S. citizen, I was still treated like a second-class citizen of this country. Once again, I felt like I was treated this way because I was Mexican.”

“As U.S. citizens, we should all have the same rights, despite our country of origin. I have paid taxes all my life, and have contributed to this country,” he said.

**A Kentucky Native Who Voted for President Roosevelt in 1932**

Shirley Preiss was born in Kentucky at home in 1910. She never had a birth certificate because Kentucky did not issue them at that time and did not have a passport because she never traveled outside the U.S. In 2005, as she developed health problems, she moved to Arizona to live with her son and daughter-in-law.

Ms. Preiss had a Social Security card, a Medicare card, and an expired driver’s license from a previous residency in another state, and she voted throughout her adult life since casting her first vote for president in 1932 for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Yet Arizona rejected her voter registration application because she could not meet the state’s standard for documenting her citizenship.

“Every breath I ever breathed has been in America,” Ms. Preiss said. “I live here, and I want to vote in this state…under the constitutional right of mine.”

*Ms. Preiss died on February 18, 2011.*