

VOLUNTARILY POWERLESS?

Americans who say that "we are too powerless to change things" are often people who haven't really tried.

There are a number of legislative "changes" which have taken place just because of people's efforts.

Take the example of aliens and their ability to attend public college in this state. About six years ago, the San Francisco JCRC became involved in an effort to permit resident Soviet Jews -- and other such refugees -- who had not yet become citizens, to attend public college without paying non-resident fees. Interim legislation was passed along those lines.

Last week, Governor Deukmejian signed a more permanent law, AB 2015, which permits alien refugees who have established their one-year residency in California, to attend college on the same basis as American citizens. San Francisco Assemblyman Art Agnos was the author of the bill, and the San Francisco Lawyers' Committee for Urban Affairs was heavily involved. It simply would not have happened without citizens' action.

As one Congressman put it: "I need help in casting votes. The 'ballot box' is not far away. It is painted blue and it reads 'U.S. Mail.'" There are a number of current national legislative issues on which you may want to try to make a difference:

Equal Access: Should prayer groups be allowed to use elementary or high school facilities during school hours? This Jewish community has opposed prayer groups on school campuses during school hours. There have been too many attempted incursions of Christian evangelical groups on elementary and high school campuses

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"Voluntarily Powerless?"
Page 2

in the Bay Area. And if the prayer sessions are held in school hours, the school administration necessarily becomes involved. Currently the courts tend to prohibit such school prayer meetings.

Now in Congress is the "Hatch-Thurmond-Grassley" bill, proposing a Constitutional amendment to permit "equal access" to such religious groups on elementary and high school campuses. Also, Hatfield's S 815 would provide such "equal access" on a high school level. Do your Congresspeople know how you feel on this matter?

School Prayer: The same "Hatch-Thurmond-Grassley" bill proposes a Constitutional amendment which would permit "individual or group silent prayer or meditation in public schools." And Senate Joint Resolution 73, by Strom Thurmond, proposes a Constitutional amendment which would permit "individual or group spoken prayer in the public schools." Do your Congresspeople know how you feel on this matter?

ERA and Insurance: The Equal Rights Amendment has been reintroduced into both the Senate (SJ Resolution 10) and the House (HJ Resolution 1) with 57 Senators and 240 House members co-sponsoring the legislation. It is the same measure which died three states short of ratification. Also, women's groups are especially interested in S 372 in the Senate and HR 100 in the House, which would prohibit any insurer from discriminating in terms, conditions or rates, on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or religion. Do your Congresspeople know how you feel on these matters?

Do your Congresspeople know how you feel about anything?