

**Activist group's registration drive adds 1,000  
lower-income voters in Auburn**

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Journal Reporter

AUBURN -- There are 1,000 more lower-income registered voters in the Auburn/Kent area this year than last, thanks to a get-out-the vote drive by a statewide activist group.

Aiko Schaefer, director of the Seattle-based Statewide Poverty Action Network, said that since March, volunteers have knocked on the doors of 20,000 households in 31 precincts in the 47th and 31st legislative districts.

Of the people they contacted, she said, about half of them had never registered to vote before.

Another 5,000 people said they had registered, but never voted.

Just had to be asked

``What we found out is that people are generally interested if they are asked to register to vote,'' Schaefer said.

About 1,000 people registered on the spot with volunteers. She said others might have registered on their own but there is no way of counting them.

The goal, she said, is to register 1,900 voters in the two districts.

The effort will continue through Oct. 2, the last day to register by mail for the Nov. 2 general election.

``We are now going back through neighborhoods to catch those we missed,'' she said.

Hopes to apply elsewhere

Schaefer said the intensive door-to-door-campaign is a pilot study that the Poverty Action Network hopes to learn from and then apply it elsewhere in the state.

The underlying reason for the effort, she said, is that time and again representatives in Washington, D.C., and Olympia have not made the concerns of lower-income people a priority. Those people need to take action to elect people who will listen to them, she said.

A U.S. Census Bureau analysis of the 2000 election showed that the voting rate among families with incomes of \$50,000 or more was 72 percent, compared with 38 percent for people with incomes under \$10,000.

The two legislative districts were not chosen randomly. They contain a high number of people with low incomes. Nearly 20 percent of the population in both districts use state social services through the Department of Social and health Services.

The volunteers also surveyed residents and found that the people they were talking to are working more hours for less pay and their major concerns are health care, housing and day care.

``We found people feel they are ignored by elected officials,`` Schaefer said.

Out to educate voters

Registering voters is only part of the project, Schaefer said. They also want to educate voters.

To that end, the Poverty Action Network is sponsoring a candidate's forum Sept. 26 at St. Matthews Episcopal Church in northeast Auburn. Schaefer said they hope to have candidates for the Legislature from the 47th District and candidates for the 8th Congressional District. There are no races in the 31st District.

Schaefer said they also plan to distribute a voter guide on a variety of local and statewide races.

Candidates were asked to fill out questionnaires that focused on issues important to low-income people: income, health care and tuition for adults to go back to school.

Those will be mailed out to all residents, she said.

As the Nov. 2 election gets closer, volunteers will again knock on doors to remind people to vote.