

Calif. expands rights to noncitizens

By Jennifer Medina, New York Times

LOS ANGELES – California is challenging the historic status of American citizenship with measures to permit noncitizens to sit on juries and monitor polls for elections in which they cannot vote and to open the practice of law even to those here illegally. It is the leading edge of a national trend that includes granting drivers' licenses and in-state tuition to illegal immigrants in some states and that suggests legal residency could evolve into an appealing option should immigration legislation fail to produce a path to citizenship.

With 3.5 million noncitizens who are legal permanent residents in California, some view the changes as an acknowledgment of who is living here and the need to require some public service of them. But the new laws raise profound questions about which rights and responsibilities rightly belong to citizens over residents.

“What is more basic to our society than being able to judge your fellow citizens?” asked Jessica A. Levinson, a professor at Loyola Law School, referring to jury service. “We’re absolutely going to the bedrock of things here and stretching what we used to think of as limits.”

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