

GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON STRENGTHENING UTAH'S DEMOCRACY

RECOMMENDATION FOR IMPROVING THE VOTER REGISTRATION PROCESS

SPONSORED BY ACTING CHAIR KIRK JOWERS

Whereas, the Commission agrees with the National Commission on Federal Election Reform in 2001, which concluded: "The registration laws in force throughout the United States are among the world's most demanding ... [and are] one reason why voter turnout in the United States is near the bottom of the developed world";

Whereas, voter registration processes and requirements can impose a significant hurdle to voting;

Whereas, the Commission believes that Utah's voter registration regime should enhance voter access and encourage all residents to vote;

ONLINE REGISTRATION AND REGISTRATION UPDATES

Whereas, available technological advancements can make voter registration simpler and more efficient;

Whereas, counties across America increasingly allow citizens to register at least partially online;

Whereas, Salt Lake County allows residents to submit registration information through an online registration form for input and verification, which must then be downloaded, printed, and delivered with an original signature to the county clerk before the registration is deemed complete;

Whereas, the online-offline "hybrid" process used by Salt Lake County cuts down on clerical time needed for data entry, reduces clerical errors, and protects against voter fraud;

Whereas, even if Utah implements an automatic registration system, procedures such as "partial online registration" are still necessary to ensure that individuals who do not register or update information by completing a state form can later still register and/or update registration information;

The Commission hereby resolves to recommend that all Utah residents should have the opportunity to submit registration information through an online form, which will then be downloaded, printed, and delivered with an original signature or delivered electronically via portable document format to a county clerk.

ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

Whereas, Utah residents are currently required to register to vote at least 30 days before an election with the county clerk if registering by mail, or at least 15 days before an election with the county clerk if registering in person;

Whereas, election-related media attention and candidates' outreach efforts peak after Utah's 30- and 15-day registration deadlines, meaning that public interest reaches its highest intensity when citizens who are unregistered can no longer choose to vote;

Whereas, several states' registration deadlines are less than 15 days before Election Day, and nine states currently allow same-day registration, giving residents the option to register at their designated polling location prior to voting;

Whereas, states whose voter registration deadlines fall shortly before Election Day boast our nation's highest turnout and registration rates;

Whereas, in Idaho and Wyoming, two Election Day Registration states with populations and partisan divisions similar to Utah, 61.4 percent and 64.3 percent of eligible citizens turned out to vote for the 2008 general election, compared with just 53.1 percent of eligible citizens in Utah;

Whereas, the five states with the highest voter turnout rates for the 2008 general election were all Election Day Registration states;

Whereas, scholarship shows that Election Day Registration can increase a state's voter turnout by 9 to 14 percent;

Whereas, Election Day Registration's ability to make voting rolls more accurate, when coupled with Utah's current poll-place identification requirements, would make fraudulent registration at the polls under an assumed identity unlikely under an Election Day Registration system in Utah;

Whereas, based on experiences in other states, Election Day Registration will not result in significant additional costs for Utah's election administrators;

Whereas, any additional administrative complexity caused by Election Day Registration can be overcome by mimicking procedures established in states that have maintained Election Day Registration arrangements for over 30 years;

Whereas, even if Utah adopts partial online registration, further measures are needed to ensure that eligible voters whose names do not appear on the voter rolls on Election Day or whose information is not up-to-date can correct the rolls and vote on the same day;

The Commission hereby resolves to recommend that the Utah Code be amended to repeal Utah's 30- and 15-day registration requirements and allow Utah residents to register on Election Day immediately before casting a regular ballot at their new designated polling place. Any voter who registers on Election Day would be required to show proof of residency and complete a normal registration card, which requires the voter to affirm his or her residency and eligibility to vote.

**APPROVED 16-0 (3 ABSENT)
NOVEMBER 5, 2009**

VOTING TO APPROVE

Acting Chair Kirk Jowers, Representative Rebecca Chavez-Houck, Randy Dryer, Representative Craig Frank, Dave Hansen, Bruce Hough, Meghan Holbrook, Senator Scott Jenkins, Dan Jones, Tom Love, Frank Pignatelli, Dick Richards, Dee Rowland, Ken Verdoia, LaVarr Webb, Doug Wright