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Background Brief on ...

Voting in Oregon

Vote-by-Mail in Oregon

Vote-by-mail is an election method whereby voters receive and return their ballots through the mail. This process replaces traditional polling place elections. Oregon's experience with vote-by-mail began when the 1981 Legislative Assembly first authorized counties to conduct certain elections by mail. State laws passed since that time have broadened vote-by-mail, and in the 1998 general election, Oregon voters approved an initiative requiring vote-by-mail in all biennial primary and general elections, making Oregon the first state to go to a completely vote-by-mail system. During the 2000 general election, Oregon was the first state in U.S. history to determine its electoral votes for president entirely by mail.

The Vote-by-Mail Process

For state elections, counties must mail ballot packets to all active registered voters between the 18th and the 14th day before an election. The packet includes the ballot, a secrecy envelope, and a pre-addressed return envelope. The voter marks the ballot and places it in the secrecy envelope that, in turn, is placed into the return envelope. The voter must then sign the return envelope for the ballot to be counted. The voter can then either put a stamp on the envelope and mail it or take it to a drop site designated by the County Clerk's Office within the county.

Ballots must be received by the county, either through the mail or at a drop-off site within the county, by 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election. The date on the postmark does not count. Elections officials verify the signature on the return envelope from each voter by matching it against the voter registration card signature on file with each county. County elections offices may begin scanning ballots into a vote tally system up to seven days

before election day in accordance with a security plan approved by the Secretary of State. Election officials will not release preliminary results until after 8:00 p.m. on election day.

Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002

The Help America Vote Act was approved by Congress in October 2002 to make reforms to the nation's voting process. The HAVA requires all states to upgrade voting equipment, make voting more accessible, provide better voter education, and reduce fraud through the implementation of a central voter registration system developed and managed by each state's Chief Election Official. It includes provisions for replacement of punch card and lever voting systems, creation of centralized voter registration databases, new voter identification requirements, and access for people with disabilities and enhanced voter outreach.

With implementation of the HAVA, there will be no changes to Oregon's vote-by-mail system or to the basic structure of the elections process and, for the most part, voters will register and vote in the same way. The roles, responsibilities, and relationship of the state and the counties will also remain much the same. However, Oregon will implement and maintain a centralized voter registration list with direction and assistance from the counties.

Oregon Centralized Voter Registration

As a part of the implementation process of the HAVA, the Oregon Centralized Voter Registration project will create a single, centralized, interactive, and official database system with the names and addresses of Oregon's registered voters. Currently, Oregon's 36 counties collect and store voter registration information differently and there is no way to aggregate voter information at the state level. Information to be included in the statewide system is the name, address, identification number, political affiliation, and voting history.

Online Voter Registration System

On March 1, 2010, Oregon became the fourth

state in the nation to provide online voter registration. The online system should decrease the administrative costs, improve voters access, particularly the housebound, elderly and out-of-state members of the military.

Oregonians, who are at least 17 years of age, have a valid Oregon driver's license, permit or identification card, can go online to register to vote. For those who register online, the signatures on their driver's licenses, permits or ID cards will serve as the signatures for voter registration cards. Those signatures will be checked to validate mail ballots in elections.

Voters also can go to the online site to change political parties or addresses.

As with paper registrations, online registrations will require voters to declare themselves U.S. citizens. Lying on the registration form is a felony, punishable by five years in prison, a \$125,000 fine and deportation for undocumented immigrants.

Staff and Agency Contacts

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Additional Resources:

[Help America Vote Act of 2002](#)

[Oregon Central Voter Registration](#)

[Vote-by-Mail Information](#)