

▶ **VOTE BY MAIL**
IS THE OREGON STYLE VOTE BY MAIL RIGHT FOR COLORADO?

▶ **First things First: What is Vote by Mail?**

▶ Vote by Mail is:

1. A “no-excuse” voting system in which the voter receives a ballot by mail, and returns the ballot by mail or personally delivers it to the recorder.
2. The system may or may not permit “permanent no-excuse” voting by mail.
3. The system may be optional, as it is now in Colorado, or “mandatory” as in the all vote by mail (VBM) model. Today we will be discussing the all vote-by mail model.

Benefits of All VBM Elections

- ▶ Vote by Mail (VBM) systems are popular with voters and election administrators nationwide.
- ▶ 30 states currently permit VBM, and 5 states, including Colorado, provide for permanent VBM status.
- ▶ In the 2008 presidential election, 64% of Colorado citizens cast their ballots by mail. In California, more than 62% voted by mail. Over 80% of Oregonians approve.
- ▶ VBM balloting has been shown to increase accuracy.

The Benefits: Continued

- ▶ The cost reduction is substantial. Oregon, for example, reports a 30 percent reduction in costs.
- ▶ Voters approve. Studies show 80 % approval rate in Oregon.
- ▶ Avoids long lines at polls and Election Day pressures
- ▶ Reported increase in turnout in Oregon and Washington.
- ▶ We can agree that is all good ... but is there a downside?

▶ **Unintended Consequences**

- ▶ Voter turnout *may* increase, but an all VBM election system does not broaden the electorate.
- ▶ Mobile voters and the homeless risk losing franchise.
- ▶ 2009 study shows all VBM has a disparate impact on minority voters, *and*
- ▶ VBM has a disparate impact on urban voters.
- ▶ VBM may provide a greater opportunity for voter coercion and election fraud
- ▶ All-VBM elections restrict access to polls for the more than 35% who currently choose not to vote by mail.

▶ **Voter Turnout and All VBM**

- ▶ Oregon reports 6% increase over 3 presidential elections, but scholars see inconsistent results in studies.
- ▶ Some academic studies find modest increase, but VBM systems do not broaden participation.
- ▶ A 2007 California study found a slight decrease in turnout in all VBM precincts.
- ▶ 2009 California study also found turnout decreased.
- ▶ Finally, if we assume all VBM will increase turnout, who will it bring into electorate? Will some voters have less access, not more?

▶ **Turnout in 2009 California Study**

This study involved 97,381 voters through four elections from 2006 to 2008 in California's unique, precinct by precinct optional VBM system. Here are the findings:

- ▶ “When a mandatory vote-by-mail system is implemented, the estimated odds of an individual voter voting decreases by 13.2%.”
- ▶ “Communicating with voters about mandatory vote-by-mail matters a great deal and can eventually overcome the negative effect of being forced to vote by mail. This occurs when at least 4 pieces of communication are sent out by elections officials. “

▶ **Who Gets a Ballot?**

- ▶ All registered, “eligible electors” are to be mailed a ballot, but what of eligible voters in “inactive” status?

▶ Under Colorado's current law, most inactive status voters would not receive a ballot or election notices.

▶ Voters in inactive status do not receive a ballot in Oregon, Washington, and California, in addition to Colorado.

▶ **RELIABILITY OF U.S. POSTAL SERVICE**

▶ U.S. Postal Service reliability rates in 2007:

▶ 90% delivered for First Class mail

▶ 95% delivered for overnight mail

▶ Urban, multi-residential building pose special problems as do college campuses.

▶ For example, over 6 percent of Multnomah County, OR ballots were undeliverable in 2004. In Benton County, over 7 percent were undeliverable.

▶ When considered with the inactive voter issue, this raises serious concerns. How do we address not getting ballots to voter and getting others to the wrong person?

▶ **Issues of Mobility**

▶ Will all eligible voters in fact get a mail-in ballot?

▶ One in eight voters nationally changed residences from Jan. to Nov. of that year, according to 2008 CPS.

▶ Minorities, young people, singles and divorced people move at significantly above-average rates.

▶ 21 % of people with incomes under 25,000 change residences within one year, compared to 12 % of people over \$100,000

▶ Renters are three times more likely to move.

▶ How will a voter who has changed residence get the mail in ballot? What fail safe provisions can be made?

▶ **EFFECT ON URBAN & MINORITY VOTERS**

▶ "Across voter stratifications, being forced to vote by mail has negative effects on the turnout of urban and minority (Hispanic and Asian) populations. For a mail ballot precinct and fixed election characteristics, the estimated odds of voting decreases:

50 % for urban voters;
30.3% for Asian voters;
27.3% for Hispanic voters “

How Does Vote By Mail Affect Voters?
Bergman, Yates, Ginnold 2009

▶ **The Issue of Election Fraud**

- ▶ Election fraud in general, and especially fraud in the form of double-voting or impersonating a voter, is uncommon.
- ▶ Absentee mail-in voting, however, has been the most fertile ground for fraud. It can take the form of:
 - ▶ (1) forging signatures or signing fictitious names; (2) coercing or influencing a vote; (3) vote buying; and (4) misappropriating absentee ballots.
- ▶ Safeguards, such as audits and signature matching, combined with limiting access to completed ballots can reduce the risks.

▶ **Best All Vote by Mail Practices**

- ▶ Notice, Notice, Notice.
 - ▶ Community outreach, Public Service Announcements
 - ▶ Work with civic groups to get the message out
 - ▶ Address communication challenges with diverse languages
- ▶ Effective communication & partnership with the USPS.
- ▶ Maintain or increase Early-in-Person voting centers.
- ▶ Registration portability legislation
 - ▶ Make it easier for voters who have moved to obtain and cast a mail-in ballot.

▶ **Best Practices: Continued**

- ▶ Make VBM ballots and envelopes visually distinguishable.
- ▶ Create effective fail-safe measures for eligible voters who, for whatever reason, fail to receive a ballot.

- ▶ Mail ballots to eligible voters who are inactive due to having been placed on the USPS NCOA list.
- ▶ Overall, introduce all VBM gradually.