STANDARDS BOARD PRESENTATION ON MOVE ACT PILOT PROGRAM
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In late 2009 the West Virginia Legislature authorized the Secretary of State to conduct a Uniformed Services and Overseas Voter Pilot Program to allow absent uniformed services members and overseas citizens to vote using available voting technology to receive and cast a ballot online. This pilot was originally only for the 2010 primary election. However, after the primary election progress report submitted to the legislature showed a high rate of participation, the legislature approved the continuation of the pilot for the general election in order to gain more data.

The pilot program was open to all 55 counties in West Virginia. The counties wishing to participate had to submit a request to the Secretary of State to be included in the pilot. Each county was responsible for choosing a vendor and negotiating the terms of the pilot with that vendor. Two voting system vendors, Everyone Counts and Scytl, were the project vendors chosen and both had to pass a comprehensive screening process. The Secretary of State's Office was the oversight body responsible for ensuring the pilot was conducted in accordance with the law.

Five counties participated in the pilot program for the primary election and had 77 UOCAVA voters participate. The results showed that the online absentee ballot return rate of 82% was twice the mail absentee ballot return rate of 40% for the primary election. This 40% rate for mail return is relatively consistent from 2008 – 2010 across all jurisdictions in West Virginia, with the non-pilot counties reporting a 41% mail return rate for this election. It is worth noting that based on absentee applicant data, the voters utilizing the online system were uniformed service members, military dependents, overseas residents, educators and students living abroad and represented different party affiliations and genders.

These results of a high return rate, lack of security issues and the diversity of the users were indicators that the pilot's intended purpose of providing UOCAVA voters a safe, simple and timely way to cast a ballot was successful. This also prompted the continuation of the pilot for the general election and encouraged three more counties to test the waters for themselves.

For the general election, the participant base grew to 165 voters with the addition of three more counties. Of these voters, 125 (76%) cast their ballots using the online voting pilot system. The 76% return rate for online voting far exceeds the average 58% return rate using standard mail as the ballot transmission method. These figures imply that voters having electronic access to their ballots have a higher than average likelihood of returning a ballot in time to be included in the final vote totals.

West Virginia also participated in the ballot delivery pilot project with the Department of Defense and Federal Voting Assistance Program, which was referred to as LiveBallot. This program had two distinct differences from the online pilot program.

First, the voter had to print the ballot in order to mark it which did not allow for an over-vote warning mechanism. This occurred because of the inability to obtain county ballot data from the ballot preparation vendor in time to activate the electronic ballot delivery function of FVAP's project vendor.

Second, after printing and marking the ballot the voter was required to return it by standard mail, fax or email. Standard mail reintroduces the travel time and postmark issues sought to be eliminated by the online voting project. The fax and email options required the voter to waive the right to a secret ballot.

However, we embraced these differences as an advantage instead of a disadvantage. This allowed simultaneous pilots providing new, but different methods and enabled us to provide our voters with more options. We included all 55 counties in the FVAP pilot because we recognize that those who may be wary of casting their vote online may be more open to using fax or email. And even if they did not want to transmit their voted ballot by fax or email they could still receive the blank ballot electronically and then mail it back. Receiving the ballot electronically gave the voter quicker access and therefore gave them a longer timetable for returning the ballot by mail.

We had daily contact with the FVAP vendor and when the deadline for submitting all of the data came and went we did not stop. We continued to gather and submit data for the ballot matrix (mapping precincts with ballot styles). When we realized that some counties had not even received their ballot proofs and the deadline was nearing we were hoping that at least 47 or 48 counties would be able to participate. The vendor still encouraged us to submit as much data as we could. If all counties were not ready on the GO LIVE day they could be added later. Two days before absentee ballots were to be transmitted to UOCAVA voters we received data from the last county, processed it and submitted it to the vendor. The vendor did not promise us that all counties would ready for the pilot, they promised to do their best. 45 days before the election UOCAVA absentee ballots were mailed, the online voter pilot program was up and running and all 55 counties in West Virginia went live in the FVAP ballot delivery pilot program.

 This was an amazing effort by multiple individuals sharing the same goal of making voting easier for the sons and daughters of West Virginia who were away from home. We had 35 UOCAVA voters who provided an email address in order to have their ballot delivered electronically using the FVAP pilot. Of those 35 voters, 68% used the LiveBallot system to cast their vote and return it electronically. It is believed that if we had more time to educate the voters about this system the results would have been even greater.

A benefit of both pilot projects was the integration of a ballot-tracking mechanism into the online portal used by the voter for ballot access. As required by the MOVE Act, this service allowed the voter to see when their ballot was mailed or transmitted to them and when it was received by the local election official. It also indicated if the voter's ballot was rejected for any reason.

Security issues are a big concern when talking about combining voting and technology. West Virginia did not experience security issues with either pilot program. When organizing the online voting pilot program a key element was to protect the security, integrity and confidentiality of personal data and ballots as well as providing safeguards to the data that indicates how an individual voted.

Clearly the results show that if the technology is offered it will be used. We learned many things by utilizing both pilot programs and want to form a study committee comprised of individuals from all interested parties to explore the best options for moving West Virginia forward.

We received positive feedback from the voters in support of these options and I would like to share these two with you about online voting.

From an overseas voter:

"I will be working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for at least the next two years. This program has enabled me to still cast my vote from 8500 miles away. I have nothing but praise for this system."

From a military voter:

"Thank you for allowing Monroe County as a Pilot Program in Voting Online. I am presently in Iraq on assignment with Operation Iraqi Freedom and this online voting process gave me a chance to Vote here while in a Combat Zone. Many of our soldiers last election did not have their vote counted due to being overseas in a combat zone. That was wrong for their vote Not to count. This way that you have developed is excellent. Thank You."

For me, these statements really make me think, they make me want to work harder, they inspire me to find solutions, and they confirm that the work to improve the voting experience for UOCAVA voters during the 2010 election cycle by the Secretary of State's office, local election officials, FVAP, and vendors was well worth the effort.