

Secretary Gale submitted this article to Nebraska newspapers for their consideration.

Nebraska's voting process excels without Election Day registration

By John Gale

The Nebraska Legislature is considering two bills that would allow Election Day registration. EDR allows a person who did not register to vote prior to other deadlines to register and cast a ballot on Election Day.

University of Nebraska students are pushing to have EDR adopted in Nebraska. As the state's chief election officer, I applaud the students for their interest in voting and democracy.

However, I am against adopting EDR in Nebraska. I believe that Nebraska's current methods work equally well or better.

Registering to vote in Nebraska already is extremely easy. It's as easy as taking the registration form that is available online, filling it out and mailing it. Voter registration also can be conveniently done when one gets a driver's license.

Under current law, you have to be registered 10 days prior to an election to vote in that election. This allows time for our local election officials to get ready for the complex process of Election Day. We want the voters to have a pleasant experience when they go to the polls. It should be quick, efficient and error-free.

EDR would add considerable complexity to our Election Day process.

I believe that those using EDR would find it cumbersome. It also has the potential to disrupt the voting experience of those already registered.

In addition, we have a very high number of political subdivisions with elected offices, and the boundaries of these subdivisions are not uniform. This results in a very large number of different ballots, particularly in a primary election. For example, Douglas County will have more than 4,000 ballot faces in the primary election, more than any jurisdiction in the country.

One of the major functions of precinct poll workers is to distribute the correct ballots to voters. Mistakes in distributing ballots could make a crucial difference in close races.

It should be noted that Nebraska already has a form of EDR. Currently, a person can register to vote and cast an early ballot on the same day at a county election office during a period of several weeks. For the May 13 primary election, this period runs from April 7 until May 2. This presents a wide window and abundant convenience for citizens.

There are nine states that have adopted EDR. It is instructive to look at the registration practices in those states to understand why those states have adopted EDR and why they are dissimilar from Nebraska.

The original seven EDR states were exempted from the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. NVRA requires that voter registration be available at driver's license offices and sets strict standards on voter list maintenance.

Those states that aren't subject to NVRA use EDR to help keep their registration rolls current. Since Nebraska is subject to NVRA, we do regular voter list maintenance.

Some EDR states have a long period (up to 25 days) between their regular registration cutoff and the election. Nebraska has a short 10-day cutoff.

Some EDR states require a waiting period (up to 30 days) for new residents before they are allowed to register to vote. Nebraska has no waiting period.

Some EDR states automatically purge citizens from registration rolls if they haven't voted in recent years. Since Nebraska is subject to NVRA, we have to follow strict requirements before purging a registered voter.

The overriding goal of EDR is to provide ample opportunities for citizens to participate in the voting process. We already have a variety of avenues available in Nebraska that make both voter registration and voting extremely easy.

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