



**Nevada State Assembly
Elections, Procedures, Ethics, and Constitutional Amendments Committee
Public Hearing
April 10, 2007**

**Testimony of Miles Rapoport,
President
Demos: A Network of Ideas and Action**

Thank you Chairwoman Koivisto, Vice Chair Mortenson and members of the Elections, Procedures, Ethics, and Constitutional Amendments committee, for allowing us to submit written testimony in support of AB506 - Eliminating the deadline for registering to vote in an election.

My name is Miles Rapoport, and I am the President of Demos, a nonprofit research and advocacy organization established in 1999. Prior to assuming the helm at Demos, I served for ten years in the Connecticut State legislature. As a state legislator, I developed expertise on electoral reform, by serving and subsequently chairing the Committee on Elections. In 1994, I was elected as Secretary of the State of Connecticut and I served as Secretary of the State for four years.

As President of Demos, I have continued my work in the area of election reform. Demos works with policy makers, advocates and scholars around the nation to improve our democracy and achieve greater economic equity. Our work on voting issues, particularly

Election Day Registration, provisional balloting, and voting by citizens with felony convictions is nationally recognized.

First, allow me to commend the Chair and members of the Committee for considering Election Day Registration (EDR). By passing EDR legislation, Nevada would be taking a major step towards expanding access to the democratic process to all Nevadans. By adopting this important election reform, Nevada would become a boost to many other states currently considering EDR proposals. In fact, this legislative season there have been EDR bills introduced in at least 21 other states¹. In addition to Nevada, there are several states that are on the verge of adopting a version of “same day registration” this year.² The states are Washington, Oregon, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Connecticut and Iowa.

Both houses in Iowa have already passed EDR this year and the bill is on its way to Governor Chet Culver for his signature. Because the Governor is the former Secretary of State of Iowa and a long time EDR advocate, we expect the governor to sign the bill.

Also, at least one house has passed an EDR bill in Washington, Oregon, North Carolina, and Hawaii. In each of these states, EDR is working its way through the other house, and we expect additional action on the various EDR proposals before the legislators conclude their legislative session. In addition, the Connecticut joint Assembly/Senate Government

¹ This year EDR proposals were considered in the following states: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington

Administration and Elections committee reported the bill this week, and we expect both houses to pass the bill this year. Finally, Massachusetts has a very long session, and the first hearing for the bill is scheduled for May 10, 2007.

WHY FOCUS ON ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

While Election Day registration is an important reform, it is not a silver bullet for our democracy. Many things must be done to encourage people to join in the process and make them feel that it is rewarding and relevant. While we can't guarantee that people will vote, we have an obligation to make the process as welcoming and as accessible as possible. EDR is an important step toward expanding access.

EDR is not a new reform. It has a proven track record. Some states have successfully allowed Election Day registration for over thirty years -- before computers and before the establishment of statewide lists of voters. Maine, the first state to adopt EDR, started the practice in 1973; today there are seven states that allow EDR. The states are Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, New Hampshire and Maine. The participation rates in these states are generally 10-12 percent higher than states without EDR.³

² Some states are considering proposals to allow people to register and vote in the early voting period before Election Day but not on Election Day.

³ Voters Win with Election Day Registration, Election Day, January 31, 2007. See <http://www.demos.org/pub1280.cfm>

In the 2006 election, EDR enfranchised over 700,000 individuals who registered and voted on Election Day. These votes comprised almost 13 percent of the ballots reported in EDR states. Without Election Day Registration, hundreds of thousands of Americans might have been excluded from a momentous national election.⁴

WHY EDR BENEFITS YOUNG PEOPLE

Among the largest beneficiaries of EDR are young people. Young Americans, especially college students, move frequently and have a harder time keeping their voter registration current. The overall youth turnout rate had increased in 2004, but lagged behind in overall turnout rates. EDR ensures that young people can register and vote on Election Day, leading to a voter increase of up to **14 percentage** points.⁵

ADDITIONAL REASONS TO SUPPORT EDR

While participation is the strongest reason to adopt EDR, there is also an important corollary benefit that legislators should consider:

It improves the quality of campaigning and gets more people interested in the election.

In non-EDR states, candidates limit their focus to registered voters. This may appear to be an efficient way to run an election – but it is not the best way to involve people in the democratic process. It also limits a candidate’s ability to engage unregistered, natural supporters because they are compelled to focus their campaign on registered voters.

⁴ See note 3.

⁵ See Mary Fitzgerald, Easier Voting Methods Boost Youth Turnout, February 2003, available at <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP01Fitzgerald.pdf>

However, in EDR states, candidates have to talk to **everybody**, not just the people who are on their “lists”, because everyone is a potential voter. As a result, more people are contacted by the candidates and get interested in the election. This is particularly important for young people because studies show one of the factors that increases the likelihood of a young person voting is contact with a candidate or a campaign.⁶In this open environment, candidates are encouraged to address more of the issues and concerns of the people they represent, and they are less likely to ignore people or communities simply because they are not registered or have low registration rates.

WHAT ARE THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST EDR?

It’s certainly reasonable to ask this question. The main two concerns I’ve heard for years are fraud and problems administering EDR.

In the states that have EDR, there have been virtually no instances of illegal activities relating to fraudulent registration on Election Day. There have been periodic “fraud” studies in the EDR states; the most recent were completed after the 2004 election.

Following the 2004 election there were examinations of the EDR voters by the Attorneys General in New Hampshire and Wisconsin. Both found no fraud directly attributable to EDR. The registrars in states that have EDR are as concerned about the integrity of their elections as their colleagues across the country. Yet they have been able avoid any significant voter fraud, while at the same time incurring minimal costs and avoiding unmanageable burdens for election officials. To accomplish this they use proven, yet simple cost effective mechanisms to register people and prevent fraud, such as

⁶ See note 4

identification at the polls, specialized workers for the day, and voter and poll-worker education.

Additionally, states with same-day registration require registrants to take an oath attesting to the truthfulness of the information they provide upon registration. Willful violations typically carry significant penalties of fines and imprisonment.

Live access to the statewide database or laptops is not required at every polling place. Elections in EDR states are no more chaotic than elections in other states. Moreover, election officials actually feel better about the overall process because they can truly further the participations of most citizens since they rarely have to tell an eligible citizen that they cannot vote.

Conclusion

Election Day Registration is a wonderful reform, which increases participation, reduces problems at the polls, and has been successfully administered without fraud. Your state can become a model for the nation by joining the seven other states that already do this.

We will applaud if you do.

Contact Information:

Dēmos: A Network for Ideas & Action
220 Fifth Avenue, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212-633-1405 – voice
212-633-2015 – fax
www.dēmos-usa.org