

United States Election Assistance Commission

**Roundtable Agenda: Voter Registration During the COVID-19
Pandemic**

Held at

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Via Zoom Meeting

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

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The following is the verbatim transcript of the United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC) Roundtable Discussion that was held on Friday, September 18, 2020. The meeting convened at 1:00 p.m. and adjourned at 2:08 p.m.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

All right. Well, I think let's get this kicked off. I think we've got everybody with us. And so welcome to this Election Assistance Commission Roundtable. My name is Ben Hovland. I am the Chairman of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. I'd like to welcome all of our speakers today and welcome everyone who is watching this virtually. This EAC Roundtable is going to focus on voter registration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is the EAC's fourth discussion on COVID -- on the COVID-19 pandemic response, and these ongoing conversations are certainly critical as November 3rd quickly approaches. Information and recordings on the previous discussions are available at EAC.gov.

Since our first COVID-19 hearing in April, we've continued to see how the pandemic has impacted elections. The amazing public servants that are our State and local election administrators have been doing a remarkable job adapting processes, procedures, and resources in response to COVID-19.

Today's discussion will focus on voter registration. And frankly, I think we've timed it pretty well. September is National Voter Registration Month, and next Tuesday, September 22nd, the

EAC will be joining thousands of partners around the country in celebration of National Voter Registration Day and encouraging Americans to register to vote and/or to make sure their registration is up-to-date.

During today's discussion, we'll hear from Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson and Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose, the new Co-Chairs of the National Association of Secretaries of State Elections Committee. We're also joined by Brian Miller, the Executive Director of Nonprofit VOTE, which manages National Voter Registration Day.

Even though Election Day is 46 days away, the first voter registration deadlines are only a couple of weeks away. Voter registration is always an important topic, but the impact this year can't be overstated. We've seen from research from the Center for Election Innovation and Research and others that there was a significant dip in voter registration in the spring due to the pandemic.

We know that every plan to vote starts with voter registration, except in North Dakota, and we know the impact of having a current up-to-date registration. That ensures voters get their mail or absentee ballot they requested delivered to them if that's how they're choosing to vote this year. Or if they need or want to vote in person, it ensures they don't have to fill out a

change-of-address form or a provisional ballot in the polling place. That reduces lines and makes Election Day better for everyone, better for voters, poll workers, and election officials.

Today, we hope to dive deeper into how the pandemic has changed voter registration efforts and how election officials have addressed these challenges. Thank you again to our speakers and everyone viewing this discussion online.

And now I'd like to turn it over to EAC Vice Chairman Don Palmer for some opening remarks.

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

Thank you, Chairman Hovland.

Americans have faced many challenges this year, and I'm confident that we will persevere and be able to participate in our democracy. It has been a unique year. More things are being done virtually and includes registration, online registration, and online requests for absentee ballots, for example. I'm glad we're having a hearing today and hearing about what the Secretaries from Michigan and Ohio are doing, including what other stakeholders in this arena are doing.

There is still time to register to vote and participate this year. We're all going to mark down September 22nd as the day that we do this together as we prepare for November. There's been a lot of discussion about inaccurate voter rolls. Now's the opportunity

coming up to go online and confirm your registration and make sure that your address is accurate and up-to-date. So those voter registration deadlines in States are approaching. Let's all make sure we ensure we're registered to vote for National Voter Registration Day, and I look forward to this hearing. Thanks.

Thank you, Chairman Hovland.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

You're mute. You're mute.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Thank you. Thanks, Vice Chairman Palmer. Commissioner Hicks, any opening --

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

Yes, thank you. Voter registration has historically presented challenges for voters and election officials. Voter registration requirements vary from State to State. Some have shifted to a hybrid model of registration. Some offer same-day voter registration options. And some States still present more challenges for voter registration than others. For example, some States do not offer online voter registration as an option, making it more difficult for voters to register to vote during this pandemic. These challenges offer -- these challenges oftentimes cause voter confusion, making the ordinary task of voter education and

outreach more difficult for election administrators during these difficult times.

With the presidential election less than 50 days away, several States are now facing these challenges compounded by voter registration deadlines. Election officials are now in a race against time to adequately inform voters regarding voter registration, nuances to ensure that they are ready for the election but also have to do so with deadlines looming. I look forward to hearing from our guests today at today's Roundtable. Thank you, Chairman.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Thank you, Commissioner Hicks. Commissioner McCormick?

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The coronavirus pandemic certainly has provided challenges to our method of voting this year, and voter registration is no different. The impact that the reduction of in-person and traditional voter registration services has does not only affect voters; election administrators have had to make operational adjustments to account for changes in receiving registrations to maintain safety in their offices and to their personnel.

Some States have seen voters utilizing more online and remote voter registration options rather than opting to register to vote in person. Fear surrounding the coronavirus has negatively impacted in-person voter registration drives. Neither large-scale registration events nor a person holding a clipboard on a street corner have been able to reach unregistered voters in the same way as past elections.

We appreciate all that election officials are doing to make the elections, including registration, safe and secure, and we urge all eligible voters to register if they haven't already. And if you've recently moved or become displaced because of the fires or hurricanes, please let your election official know where you are so you can still vote. Conversations like today's are important as election officials continue to register voters and administer one of the most important elections of our lifetimes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Thank you, Commissioner McCormick.

And now I'd like to introduce our panelists who have joined us today. We are pleased to have the Honorable Jocelyn Benson, the Secretary of State of Michigan; the Honorable Frank LaRose, the Secretary of State of Ohio; and Brian Miller, the Executive Director of Nonprofit VOTE, which, as I mentioned earlier, amongst many great things, manages National Voter Registration Day.

I'm going to kick things off with some questions. I wanted to turn to Secretary Benson first. Secretary Benson, you are, if I'm right, one of two Secretaries that both runs elections but also runs the DMV. We know that DMVs are the largest source of registrations in our country and just wondered if you could talk about that, talk about what you've heard on the DMV side from your colleagues around the country, around the impact on voter registration. You are muted. Sorry.

SECRETARY BENSON:

Thanks. And thank you to all the Commissioners for hosting this important discussion today.

Of course election preparedness and voter registration go hand-in-hand, and the impact of the pandemic has impacted all aspects of our elections process, including voter registration. And as the person who oversees not just Michigan's elections but also all motor vehicle operations and essentially the DMV, I'm very popular, as you can imagine. I'm just kidding.

It's -- but at the same time we were able to see both sides of the coin as we work to grapple with the need to maintain this safe and health -- the safety and health requirements of our systems and also -- and -- which led us to have to close our DMVs for 10 weeks in the height of the pandemic. And then secondly to also

ensure that the trains continue to run as we've had several elections this year. In fact, this November, it will be our fourth.

The bottom line for us is two things. Let's say three. Number one, registration dropped during the 10 weeks that our offices were closed, so, you know, that was a significant data point, a significant fact that impacted our State.

But secondly, we are an automatic voter registration State, and so that means anytime anyone interacts with our office to update or get a driver's license or State ID, they're automatically registered to vote if they're eligible -- if they're an eligible voter unless they opt out. So that provision has helped us in many ways clean up and improve the accuracy of our voter rolls, but it's one of the ways we've been able to bounce back quickly as well and ensure that we're continually registering everyone. And then -- and again, managing the DMV side and the elections side enables us to more efficiently handle both of those things.

And that leads me to the third piece, which is that we are also a day -- we are also a State in which people can register to vote up to and on Election Day. And in partnership with our clerk's offices who handle those, you know, last-minute registrations that are permitted in our State, that is -- that are -- those have been outside of our offices. It creates a little bit of a differential point in that registering in our branch offices two weeks prior to Election

Day is not sufficient for voting in an upcoming election. You have to register in your clerk's office to do that, so that's also created some differentials.

But clearly, having our office involved in all -- as many of those points as possible, particularly the DMV, has helped us smoothly navigate that bumpiness as well and all -- and, quite frankly, do all of these things and make all of these adjustments more quickly and more efficiently than we otherwise would if we had to grapple with and juggle the politics of multiple agency heads, and you all know how that can sometimes slow things down in a bureaucracy.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

That's great. Thank you.

Secretary LaRose, I couldn't help -- or I did happen to notice on Twitter last night that you had thrown out something about the Browns-Bengals game, I guess, that was on TV, and then mentioned that people should go register to vote. Obviously, that's a creative way to try to get people engaged. You know, Secretary LaRose, I don't know if you could talk about some of what you've been doing in Ohio to try to get voters registered and engaged.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Yeah, you're right, we were proud to see our Browns bring home a win last night in the battle of Ohio. This was just another

fun way to highlight voter registration and the importance of it, and we're really excited about the 22nd of September coming up as well because that's just going to be a continuation of the efforts that we've had underway on voter registration.

But as Jocelyn says, you know, we've -- it can be challenging to do voter registration in this environment. That in-person experience of voter registration is much harder to do.

Walking up to somebody on a college campus with a clipboard is just not -- you know, it's not in the cards in an environment like this. So what we're trying to do is be creative about it. And I think that we've done just that. We've created a number of partnerships.

One of the things that my office has done is we -- every graduating high school senior in Ohio gets a voter registration form as part of our Grads Vote program where we send these out to the high schools around the State and we ask them to put that packet right there with the high school diploma, and so that's one way to catch people right when they're turning 18.

We've partnered with the Ohio Craft Brewing Association, and I've had a lot of fun with this one. For our Every Vote Counts Initiative -- and I've got a beer bottle here not because I'm drinking on the job but because this is our new initiative with the Ohio craft Brewing Association where over 50 craft brewers around the State have been using this creative packaging. They've been putting

their great products in packages like this for the whole month of September. And on the back it says register to vote by October 5th, which is, of course, Ohio's deadline, and it gives the website, VoteOhio.gov, or of course you can use our online voter registration system that we have in the Buckeye State.

We've also partnered with barbershops and with beauty salons, and we call this Styling for Democracy. In fact, I was at Al's barbershop here in Columbus. It's called A Cut above the Rest. And this barbershop on the near east side of Columbus has done over 2,000 voter registrations just out of his barbershop, and we're so proud of the work that he's doing. He's also doing poll worker recruitment for us, so we've got a program that we're doing with barbershops all around the State. We're trying to be creative. Of course, we're partnering with a number of athletic teams on National Voter Registration Day for some things around the State, but we'll get a chance to talk about that in a while.

I'd love to see Ohio moved to a more automated system of voter registration. I've proposed that in our State legislature. But we're definitely doing what we can with what we've got right now. And, by the way, I think Ohio has a high rate of voter registration, but we want to keep pushing it higher.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

That's great. Thank you, Secretary LaRose. You know, Secretary Benson, I know you've been doing some great stuff in Michigan, too, and if memory serves, when we had our kickoff summit, I believe you and Secretary LaRose had a bet, so I don't know if you've got, you know -- obviously, that's a hard show to top down there, but I suspect you've got a few things happening in Michigan that you'd like to mention as well.

SECRETARY BENSON:

Yeah. Certainly, I think Secretary LaRose's point is -- you know, underscores the way in which election administrators have been able to successfully adjust and adapt this year is through innovative partnerships, whether it's through ensuring voter registration remains on track or that in every other way we're prepared for November. Those partnerships with barbershops, with private companies, with employers, with sport teams have been critical at helping us meet every need from alleviating poll worker shortages to ensuring voters know how to vote by mail if they want to and then enabling people to register to vote.

And so we've both partnered with the More Than A Vote effort led by LeBron James that's been amplifying the importance of registering to vote and ensuring voters of all backgrounds know exactly where to get trusted information both to register and about how to cast their ballot this year. And our partnerships in Michigan

with college sports teams, with professional sports teams, with, you know, employers, with universities and community organizations, that's been key to ensure that we are -- we've been able to meet our goal of continuing to make sure voter registration is not a barrier for any eligible voter.

I will mention on the bet we very -- Secretary LaRose and I very famously leveraged a bet, gosh, about a year ago or over a year ago now that whoever had the highest turnout, voter turnout in this November's election, the loser would have to sing the opposing team's fight song during the Michigan-Ohio State football game this fall. So maybe we are -- that's going to happen. I'm not sure. I mean, I know Frank thought he was off the hook. I think he's probably still going to have to sing the Michigan fight song at the Ohio-Michigan football game -- Ohio State-Michigan football game this year, so we'll see. But certainly, you know, I'm really proud and encouraged that we're -- that Michigan, as well as Ohio and many other States, are seeing an overwhelming number of people wanting to register and participate in this year's election because that's a good thing for democracy.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Of course when we have high rates of voter registration both in Ohio and in Michigan, it benefits Ohioans and Michiganders, but we had to make the wager about voter registration because what

happens on the football field has gotten predictable over the last couple years.

SECRETARY BENSON:

We'll see. Any given Sunday -- or Saturday.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Thank you both for what you're doing. If there isn't a public forum, I'm sure we can find a way to host for whoever has to sing.

But you both mentioned the importance of getting community involvement, getting other partners involved, and so, Brian Miller, I'd like to ask you really quickly to tell us a little bit more about National Voter Registration Day. And again, it's right around the corner, next Tuesday, but -- so for anyone sort of watching this that doesn't have a plan yet on how to be involved, if you could talk about how they can engage and really, you know, hopefully make this a record-setting day.

MR. MILLER:

Thank you, Ben. As you mentioned, you know, we're basically the -- this is a very collaborative holiday. Obviously, it involves election officials, it involves, you know, corporate partners, nonprofits, and many others. We simply do the administrative backend, which means we manage the website, all the social assets. We recruit the partners and we send out thousands of

posters, stickers, and this year masks to our partners around the country that are doing voter engagement work.

Obviously, the holiday started in 2012, and I'm glad to say we were one of the founding partners of the holiday along with a few other groups and NASS that first year. It has grown over the years. As of 2017 is when we took over management of the holiday. And really, it has been exciting. The last few years the amount of growth this holiday has seen and the expansion across the network has seen has been pretty dramatic. And we can now say we've registered over -- or close to three million voters since the holiday began. Half of that was in the last two years. And that just tells you the level of the speed at which the holiday has been growing.

Our goal this year -- and I think, you know, as you all mentioned, you know, we've got -- you know, the things that COVID are -- COVID is impacting, obviously, with the DMVs, which we already talked about, the halting of field programs, and the expansion of mail-in ballot, which, as has been noted, is all the more reason people need to be registered at their current address well in advance of the election, right?

And so, with these challenges we're really excited to see that our partners are rising to the occasion, and we are set -- we are already at a record year for partners. Hopefully, that will translate

into a record year for voter registrations come Tuesday. But when it comes to the major national partners, we now have over 100 national partners, premier partners. That's double what we've had in prior years. And that includes a lot of first-time corporate partners that are getting involved for the first time this year like Walmart, like Target, like AFLAC, like Allstate. Some of these like AFLAC and Allstate are doing employee-facing work, engagement campaigns. Bricks-and-mortar places like Walmart, they're going to be running announcements over their PAs in all the stores across the country on Tuesday.

We also have all the -- a number -- just about every digital platform you can think of, and you all have seen they've done work before and they're doing it again this year and upping the game, so Facebook, Twitter, Google, you know, go down the line. Those platforms are going to be lighting up on Tuesday as we get towards National Voter Registration Day.

We've got a slew of media companies from Viacom to Country Music Television, MTV, and so on that are going to be promoting the holiday on screen on live television so you can see the tickers running across the bottom of the screens. And of course, a lot of the big nonprofits and associations, you know, everyone from the League of Women Voters and groups that do voter engagement that's in their DNA, to a lot of groups that are

doing it special like the Electric Cooperatives Association or the -- or MOA with the Military Officers Association are doing engagement work, and of course, State and local election officials all across the country that are partnering in some cases with these community groups or doing it out there.

So, again, we have more partners this year than ever before and so really glad folks are rising to the occasion. We can say the same thing on community partners. We were concerned that number wouldn't go down -- wouldn't go -- would be suppressed a lot by COVID, but we've actually just broken our record for community partners with over 4,500 partners signing on, and that's local libraries, high schools, nonprofits like food pantries and health centers and local election offices. So we are gearing up for what we believe and hope will be the biggest National Voter Registration Day ever.

And I think going to the question I think that you asked as what's different this year -- and I can get into that now if this is an appropriate time or I could circle back to that, Ben?

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Well, let me be conscious of my colleagues' time. I want to make sure everybody gets -- and I'm sure we'll get to that, but it certainly sounds great. And know the EAC is excited to support National Voter Registration Day and be a premier partner.

And so I'll let -- Vice Chairman Palmer, if you've got -- if you want to jump in with some questions, that'd be great.

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

Sure. Thank you, Chairman Hovland.

I wanted to give the Secretaries an opportunity to talk a little bit about what -- they talked already a little bit of what they're going to do for National Voter Registration Day, but what about NASS and your colleagues if you -- if you know of some of their plans on how they are going to highlight the day of registration and are sort of educating the public?

As an aside to that, it's sort of a follow-up that I'll ask right now is, you know, there's never really been a lot -- a big budget for voter education. First of all, do you have a budget for voter education or voter registration outreach or do you -- or what you think the future of that is? Because I think it's -- expectations are sort of high on this, but sometimes the money is not there for us to do this type of outreach. What are your thoughts on those two questions, sort of what's going on with NASS and the rest of the country and -- on the voter education issue?

SECRETARY LAROSE:

I'll start off I guess. Obviously, I can't speak for my colleagues, but I know that voter registration is a priority for every Secretary of State, every chief elections officer in the State. And,

you know, here in Ohio we have a small budget, generally, in years like this that we use for voter education kind of initiatives. We do a lot with a little. We work on sort of the earned media principle of trying to get out there and use social media, use events to try to do it. For example, as I said, we're partnering with the Cleveland Cavaliers and other professional sports franchises all over Ohio. We're going to be -- I'll personally be up at their facility in Cleveland on National Voter Registration Day as a way to try to get some attention to this.

We're working with the Ohio newspaper Association. I believe a large number of newspapers around the State are going to be printing the voter registration form right there in the pages of their newspaper so all you got to do is rip it out and mail it in if you don't want to use the VoteOhio.gov that -- you know, the convenient website for doing it. All the zoos in Ohio are going to be promoting national voter registration with us on social media.

So really it's kind of about finding those force multipliers as we would call it in the military, the idea that others are going to help us sing off the same song sheet and get some real attention for this. And I know that Secretaries all over the country are doing just that through their social media pages and all of you with the national platform, thanks for sharing things that you see Secretaries of State post because, again, we're that trusted source of

information in a time where there's too much dubious information circulating out there. Your Secretaries of State and your local elections officials are the trusted source of information, and it's good for us to be able to use our social media platforms to get the word out about voter registration and every other aspect of elections administration as well.

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

Secretary Benson?

SECRETARY BENSON:

That's exactly right. And, as we've seen, you know, it's been -- and I think our comments today reflect this. Voter registration is not a partisan issue. It's critical to all of us as Secretaries of State, Democrats and Republicans, to ensure that everyone has the resources they need, every eligible citizen knows how to get registered to vote and their choices this year for voting. And so that voter education has been key, the partnerships to facilitate that voter education has been key. And, quite frankly, organizations like the EAC and NASS that have brought us together to share best practices have also been critical this year as well because we're doing all of this very quickly.

I mean, in this time where the pandemic and the realities of our democracy right now have evolved on a nearly daily basis particularly over the past six months, the more quickly we can learn

best practices and implement new strategies. And [inaudible] having a partnership with Kroger's now, we reach out to Kroger and grocery stores here in Michigan to replicate that partnership. That's also really become a force multiplier for us, our cross-partisanship collaboration. And it's helped also create in some ways some equity from State to State. And obviously every State is different, but as we share best practices and replicate each other's successful efforts to register voters this year, it's helped create some consistency as well across the country, and that's been important.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Jocelyn made a good point when she said that voter registration is not a partisan thing, and it's important for all Ohioans, all Americans to get registered to vote. But there is an important responsibility, and I don't want to skip over this, that both of the major political parties have, too, to get out there and do their voter registration drives. Candidates should be doing voter registration drives as they can, I mean, as they're out there doing their voter contact, whether they are venturing out and doing door-to-door, which I know some candidates are doing in a limited way or whether they're doing it through mail or whatever else. Candidates and parties should continue pushing for voter registration as well.

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

Thank you very much. I'm going to hand it back to the Chair and give my colleagues an opportunity to ask some questions as well. Thanks, Chairman Hovland.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

Since he's on mute, I'll just go in.

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

Go ahead.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

So I want to thank you both. I want to thank you both because I know that I've been to both your States this year and seen the amazing work that both of you are doing. And I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk a little bit more about some of the things of voters getting information from you on how to register to vote. Over my shoulder here you'll see the poster from NASS, which is the trusted sources poster that I believe both of you signed for me back in February. Where can voters get information on how to register in your States?

SECRETARY BENSON:

We have one portal, [Michigan.gov/vote](https://michigan.gov/vote). That's where you can check your registration status, update your address if you've moved recently, or register to vote online directly. Importantly, again, Michigan is a State where you can register to vote up to and on Election Day, and you can access those online tools up until

October 19th, which is two weeks prior to the election. At that point from October 20th onward voters in Michigan have to go and register in person at their clerk -- local clerk's office, and they can of course find out where to go by entering their address at Michigan.gov/vote.

Importantly also in Michigan you can vote early, meaning that it is possible for people to register to vote at their clerk's office, request their ballot right then and there, fill it out, return it, and be done with the whole participation-in-democracy package. So we're working to, again, make things more easy -- easily -- and easier in that way, but we have created that one portal, Michigan.gov/vote for citizens to get all the information they need.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

In Ohio, we're encouraging online voter registration as well. In fact, actually, that was a bill that I sponsored years ago in the legislature, and some of you actually helped to support that with your testimony and letters of support and everything else. So VoteOhio.gov is the place to go for that. And I'm thankful that a lot of partners around the State have all been promoting that VoteOhio.gov as the single place to go, so whether you're the Ohio Republican Party or the Ohio Democratic party or whether you're any number of community groups that are helping us -- I was with a group of veterans -- statewide veterans associations yesterday that

are helping us with voter registration and poll worker recruitment, VoteOhio.gov is the single place where we send everybody. It's that trusted dot-gov website that people know that they can count on.

Of course, you know, for those that want to use the old paper form, we're trying to get those out as well through a whole lot of different ways. I mean, a lot of libraries aren't open right now, but when you find -- if there is a library that's open and they've got forms, our State DMV offices all have those forms. Thankfully, unlike Jocelyn, I don't have to run those. We've got our Ohio Department of Public Safety that does that work. But they're also available at job and family services offices, so places where people get food assistance and other kind of things. In fact, food banks for that matter all over Ohio are passing out voter registration forms and doing voter registration drives.

I'm going to be at a food bank in Akron next week doing one of those. They've got a drive-through food distribution where we're going to be doing voter regs there and also absentee ballot requests because in Ohio we do have a deadline that's established in our State constitution of October 5th. You have to be registered to vote 30 days before the election, and so we're pushing all the way to October 5th to get as many voters registered as we can. And then of course we switch gears. In the next day early voting

begins because in Ohio we've got a full month of early and absentee voting as well that begins on October 6th.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

Great, thank you.

Brian, it's great to see you again. There are a number of organizations that are doing national -- or doing voter registration days. For instance, in watching sports last night I saw a National Black Voter Day being sponsored by the Urban League and the NBA and the Players Association. What sort of -- what other groups -- you mentioned Walmart and AFLAC and some others, but are there any other organizations that are -- that should be -- that you know of doing more of this voter registration and looking to partner with you but just haven't had the opportunity to or are new to this year?

MR. MILLER:

We have a lot of organizations that are new to us this year. And, you know, mostly on the corporate side I think because we've always had a strong nonprofit sector engagement with the holiday. We've also always had a strong engagement -- and groups like, you know, the National Urban League and NAACP are also very much a part of the National Voter Registration Day push, right? But obviously, you know, there's a -- they want to get that message out specifically about the impact of Black voters, and we certainly

support that, just like we're supporting Vote Early Day, which is happening on October 24th. And there's other efforts that people are trying to organize these, you know, day of actions in some cases inspired by the success of National Voter Registration Day.

But we have had a lot of partners. It's just the biggest increase of partners we've seen this year is on the corporate side with a lot of new corporate partners, but we have added a number of -- like the American Library Association is now actively promoting it all across the country. They've been very, very engaged. I think we have the National Congress of American Indians for the first time, and they are doing voter engagement work out on reservations, so there's a lot of new groups involved as well, so it's really exciting.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Hey, if I can add, there were two other cool ideas that we've seen in Ohio that I just thought of. I just opened my water bill at home the other day, and the city water department is mailing out a voter registration form with everybody's water bill. That's a simple thing that cities, townships, counties all over the country could be doing as they're sending out water and electrical or sewer bills or whatever it may be, including that voter registration form in there and instructions about how to send it back.

And there's also a group that's been going around and they've been putting these little installations in in public places where they've got like an inflatable T Rex. I think that's just there to get your attention. And then next to it they've got a waterproof box like you would see outside of a home for sale or whatever else and a big sign that says voter registration forms and absentee ballot requests here.

And so I think, you know, groups like that are great, and I love the creativity that people are bringing to the fight here to make sure we get everybody registered and in Ohio that we get them absentee ballot requests, too.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

Great. So in order for us all to be able to have time to ask questions, Commissioner McCormick, do you have any questions that you want to ask?

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

Yes, thank you. And thank you to our participants today. We really appreciate you being here.

Voters with disabilities may be disproportionately impacted by the availability of in-person registration services at this time, so, Secretary Benson and Secretary LaRose, what are some of the successful initiatives that you've seen that have helped voters with disabilities this year?

SECRETARY BENSON:

We've worked to upgrade our systems here in Michigan. Again, the name of the game is partnerships. Partnerships are key. Talking directly to members of the community are key. And we've worked to develop innovative ways to ensure everyone has access to registration and their ability to vote by mail, developing new portals that we've launched just in the past week to facilitate that. So in our view, you know, the more that you can engage partnerships at the community level and individuals and communities with additional needs, the better you can track what those -- and meet those needs, and that's work we've worked to do since I took office.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Yeah, to build on that, we have done the same kind of partnerships with State agencies, as well as the nonprofits that serve Ohioans with disabilities. Just a couple weeks ago, our office was actively participating with the National Disabled Voter Registration Awareness Week. We did a variety of web events surrounding that to get that out to the community. Of course, we maintain an ADA-accessible website. We have a full-time member of our team named Nate Fernandez who's a great guy, rock star that every day is making sure that our website is available,

particularly to those with visual impairments and so that it's an accessible website that they can use.

This is something that we pride ourselves on here in Ohio as far as making sure that voting is accessible to every Ohioan. That means not only the physical accessibility of the sites, which we focus on quite a bit also, but voter registration through our website and through partnering with agencies and nonprofits all over Ohio.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

Thank you. Mr. Miller, do you have groups -- partnerships with disability groups?

MR. MILLER:

Yeah, the National Disability Rights Network is actually on our steering committee, and so we've really worked with them to make sure a lot of our web content and the material that we're pushing out is, you know, ADA -- is accessible. We've also done -- partnered with them on webinars where we've had the subtitles and a lot of this other stuff done.

I think the main thing is we want to make sure that the groups -- again, just like the Secretaries pointed out, that the stuff that's happening on the ground is where it's most important, that the accessibility issues are addressed, and it's really glad -- it's good to hear that the ADA -- that the websites are ADA-accessible and that they're -- you know, obviously, people can access them

with readers and the kinds of things that they need in that community, but yes.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

Great. What are some of the most successful or fun initiatives that you've seen some of the partners do, Mr. Miller?

MR. MILLER:

I think there's a lot of -- you know, because a lot of this is happening online, I know there are some groups that are doing -- like they're trying to make -- and we're all Zoomed out at this point, right, you know, at some point, but I think people are trying to make some of this stuff fun so there are Zoom dance parties going on. There's -- sometimes people are leveraging celebrity voices on a Zoom where people can ask questions and make it like engaging and fun activities that they can do online. Most of that is to energize the folks doing the voter engagement work, but a lot of it is, you know, actually directly facing the communities that are happening. That's some of the online stuff that's happening.

There's -- one of the -- and then I think in the in-person stuff I think some of the things that Secretary LaRose just mentioned as far as the inflatables, I mean, people are getting creative. We do work with a lot of folks at food pantries that are doing exactly what was mentioned earlier, you know, walking the lines at the food pantries. And I think the main thing with the voting in person stuff is

that it's -- you know, it has to be creative and fun to get people's attention. You know, we -- obviously, we send out all the posters and stickers to everyone. They can be highly visual. We also sent out 25,000 masks this year to folks. A number of our partners have masks with, you know, the word "vote" written across it or something like that that they're using to both be COVID safe and send a message that we are -- but we can still continue our work around democracy building, around registering people to vote but doing it in a COVID-safe way. And so I think there's -- people have been pretty creative about how to do that.

And I think jumping back to one of the other -- to the online thing, I think this isn't a fun creative thing but it is a creative thing that people are doing to make the online voter registration accessible since so much of what we're doing this year is online. For all the States that have online voter registration, it's easy. You know, as long as you have a driver's license, you can get on the website and you can do the voter registration. People are phone banking and putting out those registration links. For the States that don't have online voter registration, it gets a bit trickier because you can use that online web form, but when you get to the last page, it says, great, now print this PDF out, sign it, and mail it to your local election's office, right? And it's the Federal form. That works for a lot of Americans, but a lot of people don't have printers at home.

They don't have working printers, they're out of ink, they don't have stamps. Numerous barriers stop them from doing that.

So one of the things we've been able to have all the -- we have -- our -- the voter registration tool on the National Voter Registration Day site, we turned on a print-to-mail feature which means when the person gets to that end page and they are going to have an option. If you have a print -- if you have a printer, you can print this form out and mail it your local election's office. If not, there's a second button which says please send me a pre-populated form that I just need to sign and return to my elections office. And so we're able to build that, and it's costing us a little money, but it's part of the -- what we think is an important investment in making sure that this online voter registration system doesn't exclude people because they don't have a working printer, you know, or stamps or whatever.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

So what do you think -- you know, we've talked a lot about online voter registration. What do you think the future of voter registration looks like after COVID? Do we see the continued upswing in online voter registration and some of these other methods? Obviously, the DMV has traditionally been the greatest source of voter registrations, but what do you see in the future?

Secretary LaRose and Secretary Benson, Secretary LaRose, why don't you go first?

SECRETARY BENSON:

I'm happy to chime in because, you know, in Michigan, we -- I mean, I would say the future for us is automated voter registration. We can reduce the barrier of voter registration as much as possible to the extent it creates a barrier by implementing policies which I think are just going to continue to spread both in voter -- in popularity with voters and with election administrators alike.

Automated voter registration in Michigan is something that was a voter-driven reform amended in our State constitution through a vote of millions of citizens in 2018. We've implemented it. We were importantly able to implement it in just under six months, about five months because we were able to learn lessons from other States, avoid some of their missteps, and also because, you know, managing the DMV made things run more smoothly as well.

What we've seen since implementing automated voter registration in our State is that it creates -- it significantly increases the convenience of the process, the accuracy of our voter rolls as well because every time someone interacts with our office, we are updating or increasing the accuracy, let's say, of their particular voter file within the qualified voter file statewide, so I think it has helped us improve our data. It has helped us increase the

accuracy of our voter rolls, and it has helped make it more easy for eligible voters to register to vote. I see this as a reform that the more people see how good it is, how cost-effective it is, how efficient it is for all parties involved, it's going to continue to spread throughout the country.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

And in Ohio we want to see the same thing. I've been supporting a piece of legislation for a while to create an automated system here in the State. It's got bipartisan support because most people understand what it does. They realize that it not only makes the rolls more accurate, of course, it's a convenience for voters to get more people registered as well.

That automated process in my mind creates the scenario where really anytime you interact with State Government creates an opportunity to update your information, to update your address. I think we all know one of the most common things that happens in voter registration is out-of-date addresses. People move and never update their address and maybe even habitually go back to the same gymnasium where they've been voting year after year and they're voting in somebody else's precinct and don't even know it. That's the kind of thing that we want to try to fix with creating a more automated system here in Ohio.

It also -- the current system that we have -- because, you know, again, it relies on people filling out a paper form either at the DMV or going on our website and doing it, it just doesn't meet people's expectations. I'll give you an example. I had a friend of mine that was disturbed when they showed up at the polling location and the address in the pollbook was not their address. He called me up and he said I've told you people in State Government that I moved. I filled out my taxes last year and notified the Ohio Department of Taxation. I told the DMV that I've moved. I told State Government in five different ways that I have moved. I filled out a national change-of-address form. Why don't you people all talk to each other?

Of course we know it doesn't work like that in the sort of stovepipes that exist in State Government, but it should. We should be able to break down those barriers so that when you even get a fishing license from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, that should be an opportunity to update your voter registration address, and there's no reason why we can't deliver that kind of convenience that Ohioans expect, and that's why I've been supporting what I think is the future of a system like this is to create a more automated, more turnkey system that helps people keep their stuff up-to-date and get registered.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

Well, thank you for that info. Mr. Chair, I'll turn it back to you for a second round if we have time.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Thanks, Commissioner McCormick. Actually, I did want to just follow up on that, you know, for the Secretaries. Obviously, we know the -- you know, the 50 States run elections 50 different ways, but, you know, knowing a little bit about Michigan and Ohio and other States, you know, it makes me think about -- Secretary LaRose, you were just talking about how -- you know, the importance of updating that information. And my memory is, you know, one of the standout sections of our EAVS survey, Ohio has a lot of provisionals because you use it essentially as a change-of-address form. But obviously, you know, if you could talk about the importance of people doing that ahead of time and how that makes the polling place, the day smoother for the voters, for the poll workers, for your election officials at your boards of election.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Yeah, thank you, Commissioner. And this is one of the reasons why we constantly push go and check your registration, visit our website, check to make sure your registration is up-to-date. I think we've all been out there whether it's on a college campus or at a rally or whatever else, doing voter registration, and when you ask somebody are you registered to vote and their answer is I think

so, then I always say make sure you fill a form because, you know what, if you think you're registered but don't know you're registered, we need to make sure your information is up-to-date, because that's always the folks that I worried about when I hear somebody say I think I'm registered to vote. So if you think you're registered to vote but don't know for a fact that your information is up-to-date, go to VoteOhio.gov or go to your State's voter registration website and check your registration and make sure that it's right.

As you mentioned, Commissioner, too, what will happen is if you show up at a voting location in Ohio and your information is out-of-date, you may end up casting a provisional ballot, which, thankfully can then get your information caught up and after the election -- after Election Day is over, but before the final certification of the official canvass is completed, that provisional ballot can be resolved, and in most cases your vote will count. Ohio counts a very high number of the provisional ballots we have and that does serve as a form to update your address, but you're going to slow down the line. You're going to slow down the process.

And one of the reasons why we want people to make sure their information is up-to-date is so they have that smooth experience, show up at a polling location, wear your mask, maintain six feet of distance, cast your ballot, get an "I voted" sticker, and be

on your way. And if you have your information up-to-date, then that's how the experience will go for you here in Ohio.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Thank you for that. And, Secretary, you made the good point that, of course, that does vary State to State.

And, Secretary Benson, I know you mentioned earlier that Michigan has updated a lot of its laws recently and you've now got same-day registration as a new program. But I know from talking to Secretary Simon in Minnesota, who's had that for a long time again, that they really -- you know, they got online registration -- or they pushed online registration, they pushed these address updates really because they were seeing about 70 percent, I believe, of their Election Day same-day registrations were address updates, and so I don't know if you can talk about how Michigan has been working with that or how that -- you expect that to work.

SECRETARY BENSON:

Yeah, I mean, I'll say we've now had several elections, mostly local elections, with the right for citizens to register to vote up to and on Election Day in place. What we've seen actually because we have multiple ways ahead of time in which people can register, update their address, register online, all of that, the people who are registering on Election Day are actually just doing just that. And it has been -- you know, we've sort of seen two data points that

have been particularly interesting and gratifying, one pretty consistently in every election, even local school board elections, the vast majority of people registering to vote on Election Day are young people, 18- and 19-year-olds. In fact, in the very first election in May of 2019 where this was in place, we had 400 -- just over 400 people register and vote on Election Day throughout the State. Over 300 of them were 18 or 19 years old. So that to me -- and that's stayed consistent ever since then.

And then that overlays with another data point we've seen which is for the most part this is -- you know, we'll see maybe a dozen or so even in a significant election like a presidential primary, a dozen or so people come in on Election Day to register to vote at their clerk's office, which is where it has to happen, except in college towns where we have seen -- and particularly in our presidential primary in March there were six locations in our State where we saw a large number of people registering and voting on the same day, and those were new registrants, all of them, but college students in Ann Arbor and East Lansing and other college communities throughout Michigan where we saw that concentration the greatest and -- which tells us what we've got to do is do more ahead of time to register those young people so that they don't feel or they don't have to wait until the last minute.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

That's great. Well, thank you for that. I'll turn back over to Vice Chair Palmer. I think he's got another question.

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

Sure. My question for the Secretaries is, obviously, overseas voters and military voters, they're in a unique position. What have you seen with your Federal postcard applications and their online registration systems with those voters? Have you seen that work effectively over the last couple of years, and how do you see that working this year?

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Well, I'm excited to say that today is actually the day that UOCAVA ballots begin going out in Ohio, and I think in every State it's required to start no later than tomorrow, if I recall correctly, 45 days before the election. And so around Ohio we're sending out a lot of overseas and military ballots, as we speak, to those that have requested them. I can tell you that the demand has been high this year. We've got a UOCAVA coordinator here in our office that focuses entirely on that overseas community in particular, building relationships within the military community. He himself is a wounded warrior and fellow veteran like I am, and so he's built relationships with those National Guard and reserve units here in Ohio, as well as with the active-duty counterparts.

And so I think the way that we do it in Ohio works well. Of course, there's always room for improvement. I think a lot of times, too, it relies on the family members of the folks that are back here in Ohio to serve as an advocate for their overseas loved one as well. I find that a lot of times it's the mom or dad that's helping their son or daughter who's overseas, reminding them to request their ballot, reminding them that -- for example, in Ohio, we can email you your ballot. Of course, you have to go find the MWR somewhere where you can print that ballot off or maybe the unit clerk in your unit will allow you to print the ballot off at the unit office, but you can print that off, and then of course you have to fill it out and manually mail it back. But a lot of overseas military personnel in particular don't realize that that is a service that exists for them, and so we're trying to spread the word on that everywhere -- every way that we can.

SECRETARY BENSON:

Yes. And same thing here in Michigan. As many of you know, I'm a military spouse and have spent a lot of time on military bases, and so, we've been now preparing to send out our ballots as well to our military and overseas voters. Those ballots are accurate ballots no matter what you may be hearing. They're accurate ballots, and we're proud to be getting them out to our military and overseas voters, either through the mail or electronically, and then

working to make sure they can get back on time, which is an ongoing effort as we work with our legislature to update our laws to allow potentially the electronic secure return of those ballots. It's something I've been advocating for, as someone who experienced firsthand how challenging it is when a servicemember is deployed and needs to vote in a major election or in any election.

Registration is the same piece. Of course, having online registration available increases the accessibility of that portal. And then it gets back to education, making sure that you build those partnerships, that you're talking regularly with military leadership in your State and at bases throughout the country and overseas that have large number of members of the military from our State there to make sure that they have access to trusted information on how to get our servicemembers and their families registered to vote and ensure their votes are received and counted on time.

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

That's very encouraging to hear. Tom, do you have some questions as well? I know you had a few.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

Yeah, I have a couple quick questions. One -- again, I want to thank you both for what you do. I think doing this in a bipartisan manner has done nothing but increase faith in our democracy and

that people can work together even though they are of different parties, similar to the way that we work on this Commission.

And I would ask that you archive some of these things that you're doing because here we are -- I think this is a historic moment in our country.

And for Secretary LaRose, when you were talking about craft breweries and barbershops, having those things -- and I think the Smithsonian is going to be calling you up before, you know, too long to get some of those items to put into their -- but, Secretary Benson, I believe that there's -- I had read something about the Detroit Pistons had a drop-box similar to -- their -- with their emblems and things like that as well. Is that true?

SECRETARY BENSON:

Yeah. So we're proud that Detroit is the first city in the country where all four sports teams have been investing in a really innovative way in our election system this year. The Pistons were the first out of the gate to allow -- and they're allowing ballots to be returned at their training facility through a branded drop-box. They're also hosting the receiving boards in Detroit at the end of the night, alongside the Lions in Ford Field. And what that means is at the end of the night every precinct and the ballots -- there's paper ballots and machines in every precinct will be delivered to these -- to the Pistons training facility and to Ford Field at the Lions facility.

And it's there that those ballots will be secured and prepared for any potential recounts or anything like that.

So they've stepped up and played a meaningful role in the actual operations of our elections at a time when we need more facilities to be available that allow social distancing for our election workers. And then at the same time we're leaning in in a significant way to educate voters not just about how to get registered to vote and all the ways to do that this year but in the ways in which the pandemic has created options for citizens to vote this year and helping us educate voters about those options.

So the Pistons were the first. The Lions quickly joined and followed suit with many of those same voter education pieces in place. We've got the Tigers and the Red Wings as well, and I hope my colleague in Ohio will soon have Cleveland and maybe even Columbus teams on board for the same type of great partnerships.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

That would be great because I didn't know that Cincinnati had a professional football team before Commissioner Masterson joined us.

So I want to pass it onto Commissioner McCormick for any --

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

Thank you, Commissioner Hicks.

I want to give Secretary Benson a chance to answer this question. What are some of the other things leading up to Election Day that you want your voters to know? I know you might have to depart early, so I want to give you a chance to say that. I have a few more questions that I've heard from voters that I'd like to ask, but I want to give you a chance --

SECRETARY BENSON:

Sure.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

-- to answer that.

SECRETARY BENSON:

Well, as we lead up to Election Day, what we want voters to know are their options to ensure their ballots are cast and counted and the options they have to vote this year. Right now, they can request that their ballot be mailed to them, and in doing so, they can do that online or on a form on our website. And then on top of that beginning September 24th next week they'll have the opportunity to go directly to their clerk's office and request a ballot in person right then and there. So there's multiple ways that people can get a ballot early this year, and then there's multiple ways to return it. You can return it in person at your clerk's office. You can return it via a local drop-box, and we've installed close to a thousand across the State. And next week, you'll be able to find

your local drop-box at Michigan.gov by answering your address. And they can also of course return those ballots through the mail.

And all of that to say is you've got early voting in person at your clerk's office and voting by mail or with a drop-box return option, and then you also still will have that ability to vote in person on Election Day at your local precinct. They will all be open and importantly available when you -- if a citizen were to go to that local precinct, they'll be met with election workers with masks and sneeze guards and gloves and sanitizer and social distancing guidelines in place to protect their health as well.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

Great. I've heard a few questions from voters and maybe we can sort of quick go through these. One of the questions I've heard is what happens if a voter moves to a new location after the voter registration deadline? What do they do?

SECRETARY BENSON:

Well, in Michigan, you can register to vote up to and on Election Day, and so if you -- first of all, if you want to update your registration, you can do so at any time. In the two weeks prior to Election Day, however, we do want you to go to your local clerk's office and do that in person to make sure you're able to vote in that particular election. But we also at Michigan.gov/vote have a portal for citizens to update their driver's license and their voter

registration address at the same time online. So I would encourage everyone to go to Michigan.gov/vote and find out the information that best suits them, and we'll work to make sure their address is up-to-date in our system.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Of course, in Ohio, with our constitutionally set voter registration deadline of October 5th, 30 days before the election, if you're planning on moving and you have that address, you should go ahead and update your address at voteOhio.gov so you can be prepared to vote at your new address. Or if you -- whatever address you're registered to vote at as of October 5th, once that deadline passes, then that'll be -- that'll be your voting address for the 2020 election cycle.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

So another question I've heard was, can 17-year-olds vote who will be 18 by Election Day? Can they vote early and can they -- or vote by mail?

SECRETARY LAROSE:

In Ohio, 17-year-olds can absolutely, you know, submit a ballot as long as they're going to be 18 by Election Day, and that's when the ballot will be actually counted, so that's what -- that's what matters is that as long as they'll be 18 by Election Day, then you are eligible to take advantage of any of Ohio's three great choices,

early voting, absentee voting, or in-person Election Day voting. And also, in Ohio, 17-year-olds that are going to be 18 by the general election can vote in the primary as well, and so we -- it's something that we work to publicize. Not ever -- often, not many people take advantage of that, but we work to make sure that 17-year-old Ohioans do know that.

And, by the way, in Ohio 17-year-olds can also be poll workers as part of our Youth at the Booth program. And, by the way, we're seeing great participation with that, having partnered with the Ohio Social Studies Teachers Association, and they're working to bring that message to high schools all over Ohio that 17-year-old high school seniors can sign up to be poll workers.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

That's great. Also, one more question I've heard from people who are interested in registering to vote. If they register to vote, will they be automatically signed up for jury duty? And this may vary by State, but this is a question that I've received from some voters.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

That's a -- one of those rumors out there that I work to debunk. At least not in Ohio that's not the case. Our courts can draw their jury pools from a variety of different sources, including DMV records and all sorts of other things. Of course, you shouldn't

be afraid to perform jury duty because, God forbid, if you ever ended up on the other side of that, you'd want to have a jury of your peers available, and it's an important responsibility of citizenship. But certainly, if you're avoiding voting as a way to avoid jury duty, then you're not doing it right, because you're not going to avoid jury duty just because you don't sign up to be a voter.

SECRETARY BENSON:

And in Michigan jury duty is based on the driver's license database, and, again, many people who are -- who have a driver's license are registered to vote. But registering to vote in and of itself does not get you added to the jury duty database.

COMMISSIONER MCCORMICK:

Yeah, I'm sure it's different in every State, but I just wanted to put that question out there because I have heard it from some of the voters -- or some potential voters anyway.

So, Mr. Chair, I'll turn it back to you for any -- anything else from other Commissioners.

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Great. I know, Commissioner Palmer, you have another question that you wanted to ask before we wrap up here?

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

Well, I do. I have a question for the Secretaries. I don't want to put you too much on the spot, but one of the phenomenon I've

seen since the implementation of online registration is that we're always -- there's always going to be a rush on the registration due date and a very big strain on the system. Have you taken any precautions to sort of strengthen that system, and particularly with a COVID virtual environment, I sort of anticipate that there might be a rush of registration. And so I'll -- what have you thought about and done in that area to prepare for the deadlines?

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Well, I'll start. Obviously, procrastination is an unfortunate part of human nature. We are encouraging Ohioans to put in their absentee ballot requests as soon as they can and to mail in their absentee ballots as soon as they get them. And we were asking people to sort of help us flatten the curve, not the viral curve -- that's important, too, by, you know, being smart about wearing a mask and everything else that we need to do, wash our hands. But the curve that we're trying to flatten is the absentee ballot request curve because, as you know, if every board of elections received their absentee ballots requests all at the last minute, it would certainly overwhelm them. And that's why we're happy that we've got close to 1.5 million Ohioans already here in the middle of September that have requested their absentee ballots.

But as it relates to registration, thankfully, our IT team is on top of this. We have cloud-based backups and servers that can

handle that capacity. They've assured me; I've double-checked on that. And our boards of elections remain open late on the night of our voter registration deadline, so October 5th we'll be directing our boards of elections to stay late that night so that people that are running a voter registration drive can get that -- get those materials down to their county board of elections on time. So we're making sure that even if people wait until the last minute, that the systems, both physical systems and our IT systems, are going to be ready for that, and I hope we see a rush, right? Hey, Ohio, try to -- you know, try to get so many people registering to vote that it crashes my system. I guarantee you, you can't do it.

SECRETARY BENSON:

Well -- okay. So we have been, you know, methodically planning to ensure our voters simply are informed of all of their choices to get registered to vote and to vote since really the beginning of this year, and certainly, we've been doubling down on those efforts with the pandemic. So that's why my office mailed every single registered voter in the State an absentee ballot request form early in this year, in June, and through that and additional communications we've now got close to 2.5 million citizens have requested and let us know that they want to vote by mail this fall. That's helped us plan and avoid any kind of last-minute surges or at least be prepared for them, meaning that we anticipate we'll still get

another probably half million, maybe more, citizens continuing to request to vote by mail in the lead up over these next six weeks, but we've, you know, I think spread out the system enough to be prepared to withstand that.

That said, we are in Michigan going to be dealing with record turnout and record numbers of citizens voting by mail. We're going to blast through both of those past records, and because of that, we do need to be prepared for surges on the system at any point, same with voter registration.

So, with that said, we've been, you know, increasing. We've recruited 2,000 -- 20,000 additional election workers throughout the State to help backfill vacancies and prepare our clerks for Election Day. We've purchased the new high-speed tabulators and the like with our CARES grant funding. And thank you all for helping us get access to that Federal funding as efficiently as possible this year.

That's been critical. And on top of all that, proactive and continual voter education, encouraging people to plan ahead, make a plan to vote, vote early, know your options, and continually communicate that with voters has been critical. So I believe we're in the best shape possible to minimize any potential last-minute surge on any of those things.

And of course it certainly helps that in Michigan you can register to vote, for example, up to and on Election Day. You can

vote early at your clerk's office up to and on the day before Election Day, Monday, November 2nd.

So all of those things we've been educating voters about to spread out the number of voters and the choices that they make this year, and I'm confident that we're on track to continue that success and that progress as we now, you know, hopefully head to cross the finish line in November successfully.

VICE CHAIR PALMER:

Great. That's good to hear. Chairman Hovland?

CHAIRMAN HOVLAND:

Thank you, Vice Chairman Palmer.

And I think that, you know, I really appreciate our panelists being here. You know, I think this was some great information. It's a reminder of the importance of hearing from your State and local election officials. Obviously, Ohio and Michigan are lucky to have you all both at the helm as the chief election officials in your State.

For folks who live in other States, I want to mention [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov) is a great place to go to get registered. It will get you to your State website for the 40 States that have online registration.

So again, thank you to our panelists. Thank you for everyone who was able to join us today. We hope that Americans use National Voter Registration Day next Tuesday and remind friends and family and their networks about the importance of

registering and updating their voter registration. I do have a suspicion we might see a new record for National Voter Registration Day, and I hope we do. No pressure, Brian. We'll all be out there spreading the word, so hopefully, undoubtedly, that will be a big success.

The EAC Commissioners and EAC staff are working to continue sharing information and resources with election officials, coordinating with State and Federal partners, and offering support to help election administrators as they administer safe, secure, accessible, and accurate elections. The coming months are going to -- or I guess really at this point the next 47 days and then maybe a few more for the canvass and certification process, it's going to be incredibly busy, and there's going to be a lot of noise around elections. And so, really, for anyone watching this, you know, again, just reiterating the importance of getting your information on election administration from trusted sources, from your State and local election officials. Again, today, you saw why that matters and what a great job they're doing.

Again, if you need to register or update your information, check out [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov). Make a plan to vote. And if you need to get to your State or local election official's website, I'm sure Google can help you. The National Association of Secretaries of State also

does a great job with their CanIVote.org website that can get you there.

So, again, thank you all for joining us, and this concludes the EAC's Roundtable on voter registration. Thank you.

SECRETARY LAROSE:

Thanks, everybody.

COMMISSIONER HICKS:

Thank you.

SECRETARY BENSON:

Thank you.

MR. MILLER:

Thank you, everyone.

[The Virtual Public Hearing of the United States Election Assistance Commission adjourned at 2:08 p.m.]

bw/cms