



January 7, 2013

## HUFF POST POLITICS

# The Path to Free, Fair and Accessible Elections for Every American

Posted: 12/13/2012 9:46 am

When President Obama gave his acceptance speech on election night, he pointed to some of the challenges that voters faced when casting their ballot earlier that day, saying "[we have to fix that.](#)" In addition to national-level reforms, however, the League of Women Voters is looking to concrete reform opportunities that may be possible as state legislatures begin convening in early 2013.

The League has identified four proactive priorities for our elections administration reform work next year:

- Secure Online Voter Registration
- Permanent and Portable Statewide Voter Registration
- Expanded Early Voting
- Improved Polling Place Management

**Secure Online Voter Registration :** As more and more Americans use the Internet for daily tasks like paying bills and banking, states must develop online voter registration programs to modernize registration and make it more efficient. [Online registration can reduce costs](#) for already strapped state and local budgets and can reduce the errors that come when officials have to re-enter information from handwritten forms. We're encouraged that over 15 states have begun to upgrade their voter registration systems to meet the needs of our modern mobile society. But we also want to ensure that these programs are designed to be available to all eligible citizens. Unfortunately, many states currently restrict online voter registration to those who already have a driver's license, which means that millions of eligible voters cannot register or update their registrations online. Not only does this limitation substantially reduce the effectiveness of online registration, it also raises concerns about the discriminatory effect. The League looks forward to working with state officials to develop secure online voter registration that best serves us all.

**Permanent and Portable Statewide Voter Registration:** Another way to streamline the voter registration process and reduce problems at the polls is to make an individual's registration permanent and portable within a state because nearly 50 percent of Americans [move within five years](#). This means that once a voter has taken the responsibility to properly register to vote, the registration stays active whenever they move within that state. Voters would still be able to update their addresses before Election Day, but with portable registration, they will also be able to update their addresses when they go to vote. This would help reduce confusion at polling places. Now, many voters do not realize they need to update their voter registrations when they move, and they show up and wait in line at their new polling place, but then have to be directed to another location or given a provisional ballot. Allowing address updates at the polling place reduces voter confusion while saving the time and costs associated with provisional ballots. What's more, it ensures that those who have a high propensity to move, including renters, young people and lower-income voters, aren't kept from voting. Citizens who have already followed the rules and taken the initiative to register to vote should be able to easily update their addresses and vote and not penalized for moving.

**Expanded Early Voting:** Early voting rules [vary widely from state to state](#), with some offering no early voting options at all! Early voting is important not only because it gives us all an additional opportunity to fit the important act of voting into our busy schedules -- it also reduces the crush of voters on Election Day and makes the whole process more efficient. We in the League believe that no voter should have to wait more than one hour to vote (not the three and four hours many voters [faced in 2012](#)), and we support early voting because it helps reduce the long lines at the polls. Every state should have in-person early voting, and it should be available at multiple locations outside of traditional business hours, not only in the evening but also on Saturday and Sunday.

**Improved Polling Place Management:** Our hard-working election officials and volunteers aren't getting the resources they need to make all our elections run smoothly. And sometimes the resources that are available -- voting machines, ballots, voter registration lists, polling places and poll workers -- are not allocated properly and fairly. This can result in poorly staffed and equipped polling places and unexpectedly long lines at particular precincts, often those that historically have had lower voter turnout. When there is a particularly exciting election, high new voter registration rates, or population shifts, problems develop. We need to increase the total resources that go toward making our election system work, but we also need to ensure that those resources are distributed fairly and equitably. States need standards that aren't just based on the old patterns but take into account all eligible voters. This would improve the experience for both voters and Election Day workers, as well as helping to reduce long lines and increase the efficient use of the resources we do have.

Through election administration reforms such as these, we seek to make our democracy as free, fair and accessible as possible, so that all eligible voters are able to participate in our great democracy. Our mission -- Making Democracy Work -- aims toward a fair and efficient election system for all eligible voters, in coming months, we know that League of Women Voters

volunteers will push to modernize our voting systems, streamline the voting process, and make it easier for all eligible citizens to become active participants in our electoral process.

**Follow Elisabeth MacNamara on Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/@lwv](http://www.twitter.com/@lwv)