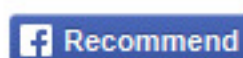




Reporting

02/07/2014 by Dean C. Logan

An election official's perspective: The line starts here!



(photo credit: Anita R itenour)

Do you know why we vote on Tuesdays? The answer dates back to our history as an agrarian society and the time needed to travel by horse and buggy to and from the County Seat to vote on a day that didn't conflict with crop yielding and selling goods at the market. While interesting trivia, this historical reference underscores a fundamental issue with our current elections process; it's losing touch with how voters live today.

The [Presidential Commission on Election Administration](#) released its [report](#) in response to President Obama's 2013 State of the Union call to "fix" the long voting lines of 2012 on January 23, 2014. In California, we may have been quick to pat ourselves on the back because we didn't have long lines but, the real message of the report is: elections have to change – and that is as true in California as it is anywhere.

In the 18th century, setting Election Day on a Tuesday was responsive to an agrarian life style. Just as locating a polling place at the local Moose Lodge was responsive to life in the 1950's. Today, the notions of restricting the franchise to a specific day and time at a polling place fixed to an artificial neighborhood boundary are becoming as outmoded and arcane as riding a buggy to the local Wal-Mart or dialing a rotary telephone.

Today's eligible electorate is mobile. Increasingly, we define community not by place but by medium (social media, mobile communications, wireless connectivity, etc.). Information consumption is a 365 day/ 7 days a week/24 hours a day cycle with 85% of American adults now having access to the internet.

We are also in the midst of major generational shifts. Registered voters under the age of 30 are now the plurality in Los Angeles County. At the same time, our population is living longer. California has become a majority-minority state, making its electorate the most diverse in the nation. The voter experience and the systems that preserve and protect it must be responsive to these changing demographics.

Perhaps then, we do need lines — lines of modern reforms and responsive options — that is, to make systemic changes to how we conduct elections and cast votes. Given our size, diversity and complexity, California has a historical opportunity to get in the front of the line and lead major reforms proposed by the Commission. The line to the future of elections can – and should – start here.

Recently the state passed important legislation paving the way to broader reforms. In 2012, California implemented online voter registration. In 2013, we took a first step toward Election Day Registration and enacted one of the most significant reforms to voting system certification in the nation. On their own, these reforms will not transform the overall voting experience for Californians, but they can serve as the starting point.

Election officials together with legislators, advocates and voters must continue to advance important election reforms that modernize the voting experience. Three important themes highlighted in the Commission's report should lead the next phase of election reform in California.

1. Further modernization of voter registration – expanding online registration to mobile devices and sharing data across public agencies to keep voter rolls clean and to identify eligible, unregistered citizens for targeted engagement;
2. Expanding options for when and where to cast a ballot through early voting and vote center models that provide security and access at convenient locations throughout an election jurisdiction; and
3. Implementing voting systems that are agile and support a wide array of voter tools like a more interactive sample ballot and look up tools that allow a voter, after Election Day, to confirm that their ballot was counted.

It would be easy to set aside the recommendations released last week to improve elections citing the incremental changes that have already been made in California. We should resist doing so and take up the call to action inherent in the Commission's report and secure our place in front of the line to build and support an election process that serves the 21st century voter and beyond.



Dean C. Logan is the registrar-recorder/county clerk of Los Angeles County. Mr. Logan serves on the Executive Board for the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials (CACEO). He also serves on the California Secretary of State's Statewide Voter Registration System Advisory Committee; the National Election Center's Task Forces on Education & Training and Election Reform; the James T. Irvine Foundation task force on the Future of California Elections; and the Pew Center on the States' Voter Registration Modernization and Performance Index for Elections working groups.

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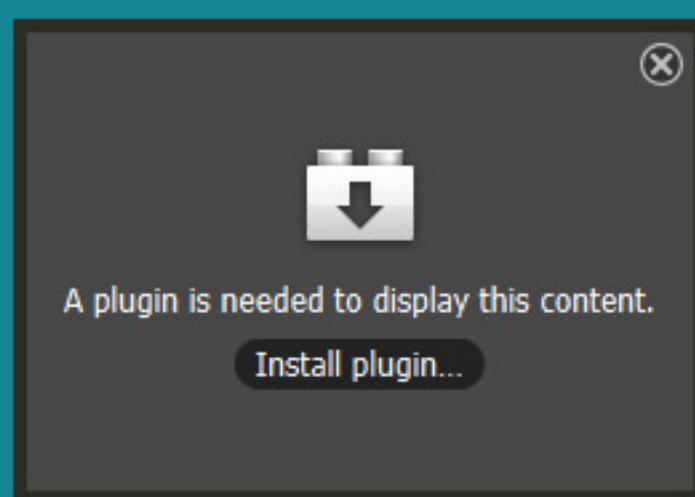
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