



May 12, 2017

Legislative Activity

VOTER ID

IOWA: The Hawkeye state became the latest to enact a voter-ID law to protect the integrity of its election process, and the state's elected leaders are already bracing for a legal challenge seeking to invalidate that law before it can go into effect next year. Gov. Terry Branstad, a Republican who is the longest-serving governor in the nation, signed the bill on May 5. House File 516 specifies voter-identification requirements to cast a ballot in elections, shortens the time period for early voting, and updates the state's absentee-voting procedures. Acceptable forms of identification include passports, driver's licenses, non-operator IDs, and military IDs. The state will also issue free voter identification cards to provide a form of ID for voters who do not have any of the other documents, ensuring that no one may be excluded because they do not fit into any other category. Voters without proper identification may still cast a provisional ballot on Election Day, which must be later authenticated before the ballot can be tabulated and added to the vote total. The law also reduces the window for early voting in the Hawkeye State from 40 days to 29 days. Many conservatives object to long early-voting periods, positing that it facilitates voters casting ballots while campaigns are still underway, before the candidates have been fully vetted by the public.

"Protecting the integrity of our election law system is very important," Branstad declared as he signed the bill into law. "We're very proud that Iowa has a tradition and history of doing so, and this is going to strengthen our ability and make it more effective and efficient."

<http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2017/05/06/iowa-adopts-voter-id-law/>

NEBRASKA: An effort to amend the Nebraska constitution to require voters to present photo IDs is dead for the year after supporters failed to end an expected filibuster. The measure's sponsor, Sen. John Murante of Gretna, said he intends to travel Nebraska during the next eight months to gather statewide support. He's not ruling out asking Nebraska residents to amend the constitution through a ballot initiative. He said voters overwhelmingly support voter ID requirements to restore faith in the election process. Murante also is considering a run for Nebraska secretary of state and said he intends to announce a decision within the next few weeks.

<http://www.heraldonline.com/news/politics-government/national-politics/article149545924.html>

FELON VOTING

NEBRASKA: The Legislature failed to override the governor's veto of a bill that would restore voting rights to ex-felons. The bill, which needed 30 votes to override the veto, fell short on a 23-23 vote. Legislative Bill 75 would have changed the current law from a two-year waiting period to an immediate reinstatement of voting rights after an ex-felon's sentence or probation.

Gov. Pete Ricketts vetoed the bill on April 27, saying it would be unconstitutional, arguing that the Legislature would have to amend the constitution before being able to reinstate voting rights. Sen. Lydia Brasch of Bancroft said that the current two-year waiting period gives ex-felons a chance to reintegrate themselves into society and learn about the candidates in an election.

News article: http://columbustelegram.com/banner-press/news/ex-felon-voting-bill-withstands-veto-override-attempt/article_62c34b17-2958-580e-bf7b-52fef94c737f.html

To follow the legislation:

http://nebraskalegislature.gov/bills/view_bill.php?DocumentID=30782

VOTER REGISTRATION

MAINE: Town clerks vow they'll keep fighting for a proposal they say will make preparing for elections easier and that opponents say could result in fewer people voting. The clerks want a "gap day" on the Monday before elections where they would not be required to register voters or take in absentee ballots. They say they need that time to set up the polling stations and prepare paperwork, including the voter checklist. Voters could then register and cast their ballot on the day of the election. Opponents of a gap day, including Secretary of State Jim Condos, say about 7,300 people registered to vote statewide on the Monday before last November's election. Clerks say that number may be inflated because they counted weekend registrations when they were booked on Monday. An attempt to include a gap day failed on the Senate floor last week as part of an election reform bill that ultimately passed. That bill, H.512, was partly designed to avoid a repeat of what one lawmaker called the "debacle" connected with two recounts in House races last year. "We're frustrated," said Karen Richard, the Colchester town clerk, who is chair of the Legislative Committee for the Vermont Municipal Clerks' and Treasurers' Association. She said clerks have felt overwhelmed with extra duties required by lawmakers, particularly same-day voter registration, which passed three years ago and went into effect for the November election.

News: <https://vtdigger.org/2017/05/04/feeling-increased-election-burden-clerks-appeal-break/>

ABSENTEE MAIL BALLOTS

HAWAII: House Bill 1401, which would have enacted voting by mail uniformly across all Hawaii counties for all elections in 2020, died in conference. It's the third straight year that a vote-by-mail measure has failed to make it out of conference committee. Hawaii's voter turnout is mired at the bottom compared with other states, and lawmakers and good-government advocates have been embarrassed by the distinction. Testimony in support of HB 1401 came from the state Office of Elections, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the clerks' offices for all four counties. Lawmakers themselves also recognize that the trend among local voters is to increasingly vote by mail rather than trudge to polling sites.

<http://www.civilbeat.org/2017/04/all-mail-balloting-bill-dies-in-final-hour-of-conference/#.WQyrUzHV9eA.twitter>

TEXAS: Lawmakers are racing against the clock to pass a bill aimed at curbing mail-in vote fraud at nursing homes. The House bill and its Senate companion would amend the Election Code to allow election judges to collect mail-in ballots directly from voters at nursing homes or similar facilities. The new process would prevent political operatives from requesting mail-in ballots for unsuspecting seniors or the infirm and then returning to the facility to pick up the ballots before they reach the voter. It would also make it unnecessary for

a person other than an election judge to help a nursing home resident vote. Nursing homes that have more than five mail-in ballot requests would be put on a list maintained by the secretary of state's office. Election officials would then be notified to send two eligible judges, one Republican and one Democrat, to collect the ballots. "We're taking the post office and we're taking it to the voter," said Tom Oliverson, R-Cypress. "Not only will the elderly be less likely to have their votes taken from them and harvested, they are more likely to be able to vote."

<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/texas-legislature/2017/05/10/texas-lawmakers-racing-clock-pass-bill-aimed-curbing-mail-vote-fraud>

To follow the status of the bill:

<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=85R&Bill=HB3425>

STRAIGHT-PARTY VOTING

ALABAMA: With a U.S. Senate election later this year and statewide contests in 2018, Republicans are again trying to keep Democrats out of GOP runoffs. "We feel it's important, simply, that we pick our team and they pick their team," said Terry Lathan, chairwoman of the Alabama Republican Party. Senate Bill 108, which passed that chamber, and House Bill 372, require the Alabama Secretary of State's Office to create rules and procedures to keep someone from voting in a runoff if they didn't vote in the preceding primary. Both bills were sent to the House Constitution, Campaigns and Elections Committee subcommittee for further review. Some Republican House members were skeptical. "Cutting off crossover voting was the beginning of the end for the Democratic Party," said Rep. Chris Pringle, R-Mobile. "How do you enforce it?" Secretary of State John Merrill last week said electronic poll books would make it easier to know instantly if someone voting in a runoff had voted in a primary. They were piloted in 25 counties in last year's election. Wanting to keep others from voting in Republican races isn't new for the party in recent years. Last year, legislation to require party registration for primaries died in the Legislature.

http://www.decatordaily.com/news/other_news/state_capital/vote-delayed-on-bill-prohibiting-crossover-voting/article_f28322cb-5fd3-5ff9-b13a-c9973db00838.html

To follow the bill:

http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/Alison/SESSBillStatusResult.ASPX?BILL=SB 108&WIN_TYPE=BillResult

TEXAS: The Texas House on May 6 gave final approval to a bill that would eliminate "one-punch" voting, forcing voters to make an individual decision on every ballot item, starting with the 2020 election. House Bill 25, approved 88-57, could drastically change Texas politics considering straight-ticket ballots accounted for almost 64 percent of total votes cast in the state's 10 largest counties in 2016. Forty-one states don't allow straight-ticket voting, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The final vote fell largely on partisan lines; only three Democrats voted for it, while only seven Republicans voted to keep one-punch voting. State Rep. Ron Simmons, R-Carrollton, one of the authors of HB 25, said he filed the measure to foster more educated voters since they'd have to go down the ballot and make a decision on every race. "I think it'll give us better candidates and better elected officials. It won't have people getting voted out just because of their party identity." On the House floor, several Democrats, including state Rep. Chris Turner, D-Grand Prairie, expressed concerns that getting rid of one-punch voting would inconvenience voters and discourage them from participating in future elections.

http://www.wacotrib.com/townnews/politics/bill-to-abolish-one-punch-voting-approved-in-texas-house/article_dee53eb4-c6cb-5756-ad10-47b4fa2ea8e8.html

To follow the bill: <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=85R&Bill=HB25>

REDISTRICTING

ALABAMA: Alabama House Democrats on April 25 used a procedural maneuver to delay a vote on proposed new legislative districts they argue are racially gerrymandered to maintain Republican control of the state's largest county. Republicans, who hold a majority in both chambers of the Legislature, have the numbers to ultimately approve the new map. But Democrats delayed a vote by asking for the 539-page bill to be read aloud, a process that will take 13 hours. Federal judges in January ordered lawmakers to redraw some lines before the 2018 elections. The ruling came after the Legislative Black Caucus and the Alabama Democratic Conference filed a lawsuit arguing African-American voters were "stacked and packed" into designated minority districts to make neighboring districts whiter and more Republican.

<https://apnews.com/f44a4270830f48239435fadbfdf174b>