



## Is Same-Day Voter Registration a Good Idea?

by Amy K. Frantz

Iowa's Secretary of State Chet Culver wants the State Legislature to approve election reform that would allow same-day voter registration in our state.<sup>1</sup> Secretary Culver believes this change would be beneficial because it would increase voter turnout. While increasing the number of citizens that cast a vote on Election Day is a worthy goal, it should not be undertaken at the expense of increasing the potential for voter fraud and other problems.

Under current state law, Iowans that meet the qualifications to vote (such as being a resident of the state and being at least 17 ½ years old) must register to vote at least ten days before an election in order to vote in that election. An individual can register to vote in person at their local County Auditor's office, can register while renewing or obtaining a driver's license, can request a voter registration form be sent in the mail, can pick up the form at the local library, can print off the form from the Secretary of State's website, or can even find a form toward the front of many local telephone books. In addition, many organizations hold voter registration drives in the weeks or months leading up to an election.

But even with all these options for registering to vote, apparently it still isn't easy enough for some. Evidently, despite the numerous ads on television for months and political signs popping up in yards around the town, some individuals don't realize there is an election coming up and fail to register to vote within ten days prior to that election, depriving them of their ability to vote. The Secretary of State wants to make sure that even those individuals who only become aware of and interested in voting in an election at the last minute are still able to cast a vote.

According to the Secretary of State's website "95% of eligible Iowans registered to vote" for the 2004 General Election.<sup>2</sup> Is it worth it to change the law to accommodate the five percent of Iowans who are eligible to register to vote but can't be bothered to do so at least ten days before the election like the other 95 percent of us?

There are six states that currently allow same-day voter registration: our neighbors Minnesota and Wisconsin, as well as Idaho, Maine, New Hampshire, and Wyoming.<sup>3</sup> And yes, four out of those six had a higher voter turnout in the 2004 Presidential election than we did here in Iowa.<sup>4</sup> But has the increase in voter turnout in those states come at the expense of other problems?

Wisconsin, a same-day voter registration state, had a higher voter turnout than Iowa in the 2004 General Election. However, investigations have also uncovered evidence of fraud as well as incompetence among those running the elections. A federal-local joint investigation found that in the city of Milwaukee "some 1,300 same-day registration cards were processed by poll workers who allowed people to vote even though the cards were incomplete. Some 548 had no address listed and 48 gave

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no name — yet the person was allowed to vote.”<sup>5</sup> At least three individuals have been charged with casting two ballots in Milwaukee on Election Day.<sup>6</sup> However, it may be difficult to determine how many other problems with same-day registrations are due to fraud and how many are due to incompetence. It is impossible, however, to take back the votes of those who voted twice on Election Day for whatever reason.

Problems with same-day voter registration in Wisconsin are not limited to the most recent General Election. “The U.S. Postal Service returned at least 3,500 Election Day registration confirmations as undeliverable” following the 2000 General Election.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the potential for fraud, same-day voter registration poses other problems for officials in charge of elections. The Secretary of State in Minnesota, Mary Kiffmeyer, “admitted she was tired of hearing her state’s same-day registration extolled. She compares it to holding a party and not knowing how much food to buy because no one sent in an RSVP. Some precincts run out of ballots, while others are overstocked.”<sup>8</sup> Secretary of State Kiffmeyer also mentions the delays caused by same-day voter registration. “We have long lines because of same-day. People get frustrated and leave.”<sup>9</sup>

Ninety-five percent of Iowans that were eligible to vote managed to follow the current Iowa law and registered to vote at least ten days in advance of the 2004 General Election. Being a citizen of Iowa and of the United States provides us with many rights, but along with those rights come responsibilities of being a citizen. One of those responsibilities in Iowa is to register in order to be able to vote. I don’t think it is too much to ask that Iowans that want to vote must register to vote at least ten days in advance of an election.

## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup>“Culver to seek sweeping election changes in Iowa,” *Quad-City Times Online*, November 25, 2004, <[http://www.qctimes.com/internal.php?story\\_id=1040286&t=Iowa+%2F+Illinois&c=24,1040286](http://www.qctimes.com/internal.php?story_id=1040286&t=Iowa+%2F+Illinois&c=24,1040286)> (April 5, 2005).

<sup>2</sup>Iowa Secretary of State’s homepage, September 7, 2005, <[www.sos.state.ia.us](http://www.sos.state.ia.us)> (September 7, 2005).

<sup>3</sup>“Time to support same-day voter registration,” Staff Editorial, *Iowa City Press-Citizen Online*, November 30, 2004, <<http://press-citizen.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20041130/OPINION03/411300302/1021>> (April 5, 2005).

<sup>4</sup>Research by Dr. Michael McDonald, Department of Public and International Affairs, George Mason University, GMU’s United States Elections Project, <<http://elections.gmu.edu>> (September 7, 2005).

<sup>5</sup>Greg J. Borowski, “Inquiry finds evidence of fraud in election,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Online*, May 10, 2005, <<http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/may05/324933.asp>> (September 8, 2005).

<sup>6</sup>Derrick Nunnally, “2 more charged with voting twice,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Online*, June 23, 2005, <<http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/jun05/336082.asp>> (September 8, 2005).

<sup>7</sup>John Fund, *Stealing Elections: How Voter Fraud Threatens Our Democracy*, Encounter Books, San Francisco, 2004, p. 140.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

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