

Vote by Mail Act of 2016

Voting rights are under attack across the country: 17 states will have new voting restrictions in place for the first time in the 2016 presidential election, ranging from strict photo ID requirements, to registration restrictions, to cutbacks on early voting windows. These new laws not only represent significant burdens for eligible voters, they often serve to disenfranchise voters altogether. Ensuring all Americans have the ability to cast their vote by mail would restore voting rights to thousands of Americans affected by these voter suppression tactics. Additionally, automatic voter registration would both increase the accuracy of our voter rolls and reduce the burden on individual voters by requiring state governments to ensure that eligible citizens are registered to vote.

Building on innovative electoral reforms being implemented in Oregon, this bill would amend the Help America Vote Act of (HAVA) 2002 to require states to mail ballots to all eligible voters in Federal elections at least two weeks before the election. Every registered American voter would then have the ability to return their ballots through the mail, using prepaid envelopes, or drop them off at predetermined drop-off locations. This bill also updates the National Voting Registration Act of 1993 to shift the burden of registration from the individual to the government. It calls on state governments to collaborate with state motor vehicle agencies to maintain updated voter registration rolls for all citizens who apply for a driver's license and who do not ask to remain unregistered.

Key components include:

1. ***Promoting the Ability of Voters to Vote by Mail*** – Voters across the country continue to face unreasonable delays and obstacles to voting. Under this bill, all registered voters would receive ballots in the mail weeks before Election Day, allowing them to carefully research candidates and issues well ahead of Election Day to inform their vote.
2. ***Casting Ballots*** – This bill would allow all registered voters to cast their ballot through the mail or a drop-off site. Voters residing in states with in-person, same day registration would still have the option to vote at a polling station in lieu of voting by mail.
3. ***Funding for the United States Postal Service*** – Under this bill, the United States Postal Service (USPS), in collaboration with state election officials, would deliver ballots to all registered voters. Congress would provide the USPS funding to cover costs associated with mailing ballots in federal elections. This feature would allow states to save money by transitioning away from polling stations with the federal government absorbing the cost associated with USPS delivery.
4. ***Automatic Voter Registration*** – This bill also requires states to ensure that each citizen who provides identifying information to the state motor vehicle authority is automatically registered to vote. Voters are given 21 days to “opt out” if they do not wish to remain registered. The result is easier voter registration and more accurate voter rolls, both of which reduce the burden on busy working Americans.