



**Jon Husted**  
Ohio Secretary of State

180 East Broad Street, 16th Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215  
Tel: (877) 767-6446 Fax: (614) 644-0649  
[www.OhioSecretaryofState.gov](http://www.OhioSecretaryofState.gov)

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**Secretary of State Husted Addresses Ohio Elections Officials, Pushes for Continued Modernization of Ohio's Election System**

*Calls on Republicans and Democrats to implement online voter registration to save taxpayer dollars and streamline process for voters.*

*COLUMBUS* – Speaking to more than 500 local elections administrators today at the 2013 Ohio Elections Officials Summer Conference, Secretary of State Jon Husted called for the continued modernization of Ohio's election systems, specifically making the case for the implementation of an online voter registration system.

A copy of the Secretary Husted's speech has been included below.

**Modernizing Our Election System**

*The Case for Online Voter Registration in Ohio*

*Secretary of State Jon Husted speaking to the Ohio Association of Elections Officials Summer Conference*

Good afternoon. I am happy to join you today at the 2013 Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAE) Conference Summer Conference.

I am elated that after three years, my staff decided I was *finally* prepared to give the keynote address at my own conference. But let me tell you, it didn't come easy. They first tried to get the former Kentucky Secretary of State Trey Grayson, who serves on the President's commission on elections. I know this because Trey tipped me off about their lobbying efforts. Then, after Ken Blackwell and Jennifer Brunner turned them down, they were left with no other choices but to ask me to do it.

It is worth noting that this conference has record attendance (about 550 registrants). Now, I know you are here because you care about training and about getting the latest elections information. But I'd like to believe it's because I am the keynote speaker. Of course, that can cut both ways. Some of you are watching me deliver this speech like you watched the tightrope walker cross the Grand Canyon Sunday night – just waiting for him to fall. Well, to those in that category, I hope to disappoint you!

It's hard to believe that at this time last year, we were in full-preparation mode for the presidential election. We are Ohio after all – the most important swing state in the nation. We have the kind of jobs where every four years, the focus of the nation and the world are on what we do. Ohio elections face the most scrutiny, and so our election system must be the best. We did a good job last November, but we must strive to be even better

in the future -- and we are well on our way.

## **Modernizing Our Elections**

Our goal is to make it easy to vote while improving the integrity and efficiency of our elections. We want to make it **easy to vote** and **hard to cheat** and that's exactly what we're doing.

I hope my remarks help put into perspective why *what I do* and *what you do* work together, hand in glove, to build the best election system in the county.

### ***Step 1: Maintaining the voting rolls:***

I want to take a moment to thank all of you, the board of elections members and staff, for your hard work. Since we last met, you have continued to work to keep our voter rolls in the best shape they have been in since Ohio launched the Statewide Voter Registration Database eight years ago.

When I took office, we had complete information on only 20 percent of voters. Because of our partnership with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) and your hard work, we now have complete information on 80 percent of voters. That's right -- in two short years, we have *quadrupled* the amount of valuable voter information. It is amazing what we can do when we *actually try*.

In the same time period, you have verified and removed 220,500 deceased Ohioans from the voter rolls, ensuring less chance of fraud. You have also been diligent on duplicate registrations. In January 2011, there were more than 340,000 duplicate records identified on Ohio's voter rolls. Just before the 2012 election, you had that number down to 1,400 and you just keep plugging along.

I am also very pleased with the fact that since we launched our Online Change of Address System at MyOhioVote.com in August of last year, more than 109,500 people have used this service. That's 109,500 registrations you haven't had to hand-key and process! The Online Change of Address System has also allowed us to streamline the federally-mandated National Voter Registration Act process, where statewide, we will contact more than 300,000 voters, giving them an opportunity to update their information or confirm their registrations to stay on the rolls before we are required to remove them under federal law. (Let me repeat: We tried to help them stay **on** the rolls).

These are not just numbers. It is a modernization strategy built around the idea that "good enough" is not *good enough*. We want to pursue perfection and be the best in the nation.

Technology is already improving the way we run elections in Ohio and saving tax dollars, but we must continue to modernize. The regular and consistent electronic transfer of data between the BMV and Secretary of State's office (this is new, never been done before), and through our Online Change of Address System (also new), has streamlined the voter registration process. This efficiency has also benefitted voters and boosted our accuracy.

### ***Step 2: Public Accountability – Together We Issued First Ever Voter Fraud/Suppression Report:***

You heard them, and so did I -- the wild stories that follow a presidential election about the "irregularities" surrounding voting. And you know that lies left unchallenged can become conventional wisdom.

To get the facts and set the record straight, in January of this year, I issued a directive requiring county boards of elections to look into all substantiated irregularities in voting that were reported to you. In carrying out this task, you have made great strides in helping to promote the integrity of our state's elections system.

In May, my office issued the first ever statewide report on voter fraud and voter suppression. Out of 625 reported irregularities, 270 cases (to date) have been referred to law enforcement for further investigation and possible prosecution should wrongdoing be found. As part of that and through a new partnership in the Interstate Crosscheck Program, my office has also referred 20 voters to the Attorney General who we believe voted in **both** Ohio and another state this past November.

Why was this important? In a word: **Confidence**. It would not be good for any of us or for Ohio voters if unsubstantiated rumors, innuendo and hyperbole surrounding voter fraud and voter suppression were allowed to stand.

Our report demonstrated that voter fraud does exist, but it is not an epidemic. However, when we identify fraud, we take it seriously. We want to send a clear message to those who play by the rules and follow the law – your vote will not be diluted by those seeking to game the system. And if you do cheat, you will get caught and there will be consequences.

On the suppression side, you did not make any referrals to law enforcement. However, we will continue to work together to make it as easy as possible for all eligible voters to participate in our elections. Ohio has been a national leader in voter access and we want to keep it that way!

### ***The Next Step – Online Voter Registration***

If you want to win the future, you can't live in the past. I push my team every day to use technology to improve our system of elections. I have a simple test: Does it improve the voting process for our customers -- the voters of Ohio? Is it cost-effective? And does it improve the integrity of our elections?

I have tried to pursue reforms that account for the partisan concerns that tend to rise up in our line of work, and that is why one of my first recommendations to modernize our system of elections was online voter registration.

I began advocating for this reform three years ago. At that time we would have been a leader, with only a handful of states providing this option. Unfortunately, the legislature did not act, and we have gone from a leader to a follower. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, at least 19 states (including politically very red, very blue and purple) have adopted an online registration system and many more are considering legislation.

We are six months into this General Assembly and we have yet to see legislative action on this important reform. I recognize there are other important issues that demand attention, like Medicaid expansion and tax reform. However, it seems to me that surely there is time to include a provision for online voter registration.

But there is reason for optimism. We have bipartisan support in Ohio for online registration. Senator Frank LaRose of Akron, a Republican, and Representative Mike Stinziano of Columbus, a Democrat, are working on proposals to allow for online registration in Ohio.

The passage of online registration is a real opportunity for the legislature and all of us to show the public we can work together as Republicans and Democrats to improve voting for all Ohioans.

No matter your political leanings, online registration has something for you.

If you are a person most concerned about voter **access**, you should be pushing for online voter registration. It's convenient and easy for voters to use.

If elections **security** is at the forefront of your mind, then you should be pushing for online voter registration. It is actually more secure than the antiquated paper-based system because it allows for real-time verification.

If you are concerned about tight **budgets** and not having enough resources to do your jobs effectively (that probably applies to everyone in here), guess what, you should be pushing for online voter registration. We know that in other states online voter registration has saved local elections officials significant time and money. We've even heard this from some of you who have found our Online Change of Address System has increased efficiencies at the local level.

If you value the **accuracy** of the voter rolls, you should be pushing for online voter registration. It requires less paper-processing and therefore, fewer data entry errors.

And take it from me: It is music to a legislator's ears to hear of policies that could eliminate waste, fraud and abuse. And so I would say very clearly to those in that camp, if you want an effective way to **eliminate waste, fraud and abuse**, you should be pushing for online voter registration.

And who better to deliver that message than all of you, the OAEO members – Republicans and Democrats alike – who regularly work together to administer local elections!

I have a summer project for you (and I hope you will be more excited about it than the workbook I got my six-year-old daughter to work on during break). I want each of you to reach out to your state representatives and state senators of both parties and ask them to pass online voter registration. Whether you write to them or talk to them in person, let's commit to working with the legislature to get this done.

## **Compare the States**

If you run into skeptics, here are a few facts you can use to make your case. When you consider the 19 states which allow for online registration, they are both red **and** blue. In fact, it's a pretty close split (11 blue and 8 red). And when you consider the size of Ohio's voting age population and the volume of voter participation in our state compared to the others, it's clear that Ohio should be among the states offering this service to voters.

In 2002, Arizona was the first state to implement online voter registration and we can glean much from their successes. A 2010 PEW Study showed that in the first eight years, Arizona's online registration system has been extremely popular with voters. In fact, 70 percent of all voter registration activity in Arizona is now conducted online.

Arizona officials will tell you that from the perspective of running an election, it takes them less time and less money to process voter registrations because it eliminates data entry. One of Arizona's largest counties, Maricopa County (where Phoenix is located), has reported an \$.80 savings per registration processed when you use online registration vs. paper forms. Less data entry also has meant less human error and therefore, their rolls are more accurate.

And when it comes to Ohio, I've got some good news for you – we are actually ahead of the game because

we won't have to start from scratch! In Ohio, we are already sharing electronic data between the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV), the Secretary of State and all 88 county boards of elections. And we have already built the Online Change of Address System. This puts Ohio in a much better position than Arizona was to get full online voter registration up and running.

Yes, all that work you have done to improve our voter rolls will continue to pay off!

## **We Can Do Better**

Ok, if facts aren't persuasive, how about a hypothetical story about Billy Buckeye to demonstrate how online voter registration might work better for Ohio.

Meet Billy Buckeye.

It's early October and Billy sees on the 11 o'clock news that the voter registration deadline is looming for the upcoming election. From the comfort of his favorite armchair, he goes online to the Secretary of State's secure online registration site and prepares to register to vote.

Billy enters his name, address, date of birth, driver's license number, the last four digits of his Social Security number and passes the security test.

Within moments (and before Billy's transaction is complete), the secure online voter registration system compares the information Billy has entered with BMV records.

If the information matches, Billy gets a transaction number for tracking, and the county board of elections receives a secure transmission from the Secretary of State's office with Billy's voter information, including his electronic signature.

Meanwhile, back at the board of elections, the diligent staff has a full plate. They are working 12+ hours a day, 7-days a week to help early voters, process vote by mail applications and train poll workers among other things. In the case of Billy Buckeye, all they have to do is accept the data transmission from the Secretary of State -- no paper or data entry required, and there is no additional step of sending Billy's information to match at the BMV because it has already been verified.

Billy is now a registered voter. He is sent an acknowledgement card telling him where to vote on Election Day.

There's no question. Online voter registration would be more convenient for voters like Billy, and more streamlined for all of you.

As it relates to potential cost savings, let's put things into perspective for Ohio. Between 2010 and 2012, collectively, county boards of elections processed approximately three million paper registration forms. Conservatively, let's assume a savings of between \$.50 and \$1.00 per registration. So, had online voter registration been in place over those two years, local boards of elections could have saved up to \$1.5 - \$3 million.

In a time of tight budgets, cost savings are always important to talk about, but the value of online registration to voters and to the integrity of our elections system – well, that's **priceless!**

## **Call to Action/Summer Assignment**

Online voter registration in Ohio would be *more convenient, more accurate, less costly, more efficient* and *more secure*. I believe we can get this done, and I am committed to making the case to the people who represent you in the legislature. I have already begun those discussions, but I am going to need your help.

During this summer legislative break, please talk to your local legislators about why this is so important for your county.

If our lobbying efforts are successful, we will have shown the General Assembly what you already know – that *it is* possible for Republicans and Democrats to work together to improve our elections system, benefitting of voters and taxpayers alike!

Thank you.

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*For more information, please contact [Matt McClellan](#) at (614) 995-2239.*