

Discussion Proposal from Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Oregon)
(April 28, 2016)

Vote by Mail in Federal Elections

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 represent significant burdens for eligible voters and 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.

The proposal 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 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. Voters residing in states with in-person, same day elections would still have the option to vote at a polling station in lieu of voting by mail. Key proposal components include:

1. ***Promoting Ability of Voters to Vote By Mail*** - If an individual in a state is eligible to cast a vote in an election for federal office, the state may not impose any additional conditions or requirements on the eligibility of the individual to cast the vote in such election by mail, except that the state may impose a deadline for returning the ballot to the appropriate state or election official.
2. ***Provision of Ballot Materials*** - The state shall have the responsibility of mailing ballots to all individuals who are registered to vote in an election for federal office at least two weeks before Election Day.
3. ***Casting Ballots*** - The state shall allow individuals to return their ballots by mail, to specified secured drop off locations, or to cast their ballots at polling stations.
4. ***Authorization of Appropriations*** – Congress shall appropriate such funds as necessary to the United States Postal Service (USPS) to cover costs associated with mailing ballots in federal elections. This feature will allow states to save money by transitioning away from polling stations with the federal government absorbing the cost associated with USPS delivery.