

November 7th Voting Becomes More Accessible to Disabled

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Deschutes County Clerk Nancy Blankenship announced Thursday that the State of Oregon has implemented requirements of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to make voting in the November 7 election easier for people who have had challenges in the past. Persons with disabilities and who are currently serving in the military are being assisted with new voting technologies and outreach tools.

"I'm thrilled that we've been able to harness new technologies to help people vote" especially persons with disabilities who've never been able to vote privately and independently," said Secretary Bradbury. "We've worked hard to make 21st century technology answer the needs of 21st century voters."

New technologies available at the County's Election Office on November 7th include the following:

The Accessible Ballot Marking System (ABMS) enables voters with disabilities to mark their ballot independently and privately. The ABMS uses a telephone and fax as a ballot marking assistive device. Using the telephone keypad the voter completes their ballot, verifies the selections, submits the ballot and hangs up the phone. Within seconds, the system faxes back a ballot that is marked with the voter's selections. The system does not store any information and does not tally any votes. The voter places the ballot in the secrecy envelope, signs the signature verification envelope and casts their ballot.

HTML ballots are ballots for voters with disabilities who access printed material or complete forms with the aid of technology. The HTML ballot can be emailed to the voter. An additional application of the HTML ballot is for our service personnel in other countries who have access to email. The HTML ballot is opened by the voter using a computer with a web browser application, but does not engage or require connection to the internet in any way. The voter completes the ballot using a computer, prints it out, and then mails it to their county elections office, just like a typical vote by mail ballot. These ballots will also be duplicated by the county for tabulating purposes.

A phone line has been created to give disabled voters the opportunity to practice using the ABMS before coming to their local county clerk's office to vote with it. Voters can call from any location, 24 hours a day: 1-866-483-8683. A brief generic ballot is available immediately, using the ballot access code 010.

Voters can practice using the ABMS on their own specific local ballot by using their individual ballot access code, which can be obtained by calling the Deschutes County Clerk's office at (541) 388-6547. Use of the practice ballot does not register ballot choices in any way. It is for practice purposes only.

Election Day is Tuesday, November 7th. Registered voters who have moved or had a name change since their

last vote can update their information and request a ballot as late as Election Day at the County Clerk's office, Deschutes County Services Center, 1300 NW Wall St. (second floor).

Remember: postmarks do not count when returning your ballot. Ballots must be turned in to official drop sites or the County Clerk's office by 8:00 pm on Election Day, Tuesday, November 7th.

More information about the ABMS and other tools available to those who need assistance or who need further information about voting, can be found at www.oregonvotes.org, or by calling the Election Line toll-free phone number at 1-866-ORE-VOTES (1-866-673-8683).

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