

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing.

I commend both Chairman Allen and Chairman Ridley Thomas for tackling one of the most important issues facing our country – the lack of voter participation.

The 2014 elections saw the lowest voter turnout since World War II.

Even with the low turnout nationwide, California ranked 43rd in voter participation.

California was at the bottom of participation in a year when participation bottomed out.

Clearly we can and do should do more.

The Secretary believes we must recognize that each of us has a civic duty to improve participation in our democracy.

For Secretary Padilla he is focused on 4 ways to improve voter turnout:

- Modernize our voter registration process
- Explore new options for voting
- Establish new partnerships to promote election information
- Strengthening civic education

Voter registration

Voter registration is one of the biggest barriers to participation in our democracy.

20 years ago the National Voter registration Act or Motor Voter was enacted by Congress.

The law begins with Congressional findings that:

- The right of citizens to vote is a fundamental right.
- It is the duty of federal, state, and local governments to promote the exercise of that right to vote.

The first purpose of the Act is to to establish procedures that will increase the number of eligible citizens who register to vote in elections for Federal office

These findings and purpose remain true today in 2015.

This is why, yesterday, Secretary Padilla announced his support of Oregon's law to modernize Motor Voter.

A new, enhanced Motor Voter law would strengthen our democracy. It would be a game changer.

There are nearly 7 million eligible but unregistered voters in California, ranking our state 38th in voter registration.

A new, modern Motor Voter would utilize our 21st century electronic data technologies to make voter registration easier, more convenient and more efficient.

This change may not happen overnight, but if we are serious about increasing voter turnout, we should follow Oregon's lead and commit ourselves to registering as many California citizens as possible.

The new Oregon law will register citizens to vote or update their registration when they get or renew a driver's license.

Specifically, the new Oregon Law:

- Directs Oregon Department of Transportation to provide Secretary of State (SOS) with electronic records containing legal name, age, residence and citizenship information and electronic signature of each person who may qualify as voter.
- Directs SOS to register as voter each nonregistered person who is qualified to vote and to notify persons on how to decline registration and how to select political party affiliation.
- Protects voter registration information for persons registered to vote who are under 18 years old.

The Secretary is prepared to work with the legislature to craft California's version of the law.

Voting Options

Secretary Padilla is also focused on exploring modern options for voting.

There are states we can learn from.

This May, Secretary Padilla will be visiting Denver, Colorado during their municipal elections to see what we can learn from their modernized election system.

Colorado ranked 3rd in voter turnout in 2014 – so there likely lessons to learn from them. (54.5% turnout of eligible voters compared to 30.1% in CA)

Colorado has

- full, same day registration.
- vote centers.
- e-pollbooks.

- ballot on demand.
- and they mail every registered voter a ballot.

Colorado's Vote centers allow any voter in a county to cast a ballot at any vote center.

They no longer connect voters to specific polling places.

Colorado's same day registration allows any eligible voter to show up to a voter center, register to vote or change an address and cast a full ballot.

Their e-pollbook system allows them, in real time, to verify registration and if they have cast a ballot.

Colorado also mails every registered voter a ballot pre-paid. If they lose their ballot, or decide to vote in person they may go to any vote center and cast a ballot in person.

We will learn more details on the trip and will bring back ideas and options for California.

Partnerships

In the spirit of reminding everyone of the civic responsibility to keep our democracy strong, Secretary Padilla will be reaching out to

- media,
- transit authorities,
- Silicon Valley,
- government agencies,
- community organizations,
- private foundations,
- and others.

We will ask newspapers to fulfill their civic responsibility and place on the front page of the paper elections information and deadlines.

We will ask them to include important voting information in any story they write about an election – the date of the election, registration deadlines, and links.

We won't just be reaching out to newspapers, but also radio, television, cable and Internet providers and build a media coalition to make voting information ever-present.

We will be reaching out to social media companies like Facebook, Google, Twitter and others to do their part to help motivate people to vote.

In fact, Google has taken the lead with their Voting Information Project, which is a partnership with the Pew Charitable Trusts. VIP helps voters online by finding answers to some of the most common election questions;

- Where's my polling place?
- What's on my ballot?
- How do I vote?

We also want to work with groups like the League of Women Voters Rock the Vote and Maplight who are working on new ways to consolidate and distribute candidate and proposition information from President all the way to dog catcher.

We will work with our Department of Transportation to use our digital Freeway Signs to post election information and deadlines. The signs are used to make us aware of the drought in our state. What about the drought at our polls?

Assemblymember Alejo has introduced legislation on this issue, AB 400 – which the Secretary strongly supports.

We will work with public transportation agencies to post election information on buses, rail, transit stops, and more. We should use the idle time on mass transit to reach potential voters with signage and video.

Civic Education

One of the toughest parts of increasing turnout is addressing the attitude that a vote doesn't mean anything.

I can sit here and go through the list of close elections just last year, but apathy towards civic engagement goes deeper than that.

The Secretary wants to focus attention on civic engagement in K-12 and college when youth are developing their habits and behavior.

In 2014 an 18 or 19 year-old was more like to be arrested than vote in a statewide election. (Paul Mitchel)

8.2 percent of eligible California youth cast a ballot in the 2014 November election. (Mindy Romero)

In California, a survey of 2,366 high school seniors revealed that just 60 percent could correctly answer questions designed to test their knowledge of current political issues and the structures and functions of government. (Taskforce on K-12Civic Ed)

Less than half of California high school seniors participating in the same survey viewed being actively involved in state and local issues as their responsibility. (Taskforce on K-12Civic Ed)

We need engage young people earlier and more often and develop lifelong habits of voting and interest in civics.

To start, the Secretary wants to strengthen voter registration at our schools and colleges.

High schools and colleges are required to offer voter registration under California's Student Voter Registration Act.

Over the past 3 years there has been a significant decline in student voter registration.

Online registration hit 23,000 in 2012 (its first year), but declined to 9700 in 2014.

In 2012 the Secretary of State received 11,000 paper forms, and only 2500 in 2014.

To improve these numbers, we're looking at Ohio, Tennessee, and Maine where they designated high schools as voter registration agencies under the National Voter Registration Act.

Maryland, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Virginia, and West Virginia have used that same authority to designate their public universities as voter registration agencies.

The Secretary also recently attended a Voter Registration Day at the Met High School here in Sacramento. The event was part of a month's long program to educate students about the voting process.

The best part? It was initiated and ran by the students themselves.

The Sacramento County Registrar of Voters, Jill Lavine, worked with the students to organize the event. She said it was one of their most successful voter registration events.

We want to use models like these and promote them statewide.

We will also work with the Taskforce on K-12 Civic Learning led by our Chief Justice and Superintendent of Public Instruction, to promote youth participation.

The Secretary is committed to successfully implementing pre-registration of 16 and 17 year olds next year. That law is dependent on VoteCal being fully deployed.

Closing

We just came off one of the worst voter turnouts in seventy years, yet this year we are celebrating the March on Selma and the signing of the Voting Rights Act.

Let's not just celebrate, but let's honor this year's anniversaries by carrying on the work of past generations.

We know the ideas and technologies that have a strong potential to increase voter participation. Let's poke, prod, and kick the tires to see if they're good for California.

We have a strong coalition of election officials, civil rights groups, and community groups there are aligning their agendas and working together as the group - Future of California Elections.

We have leaders in the legislature that are dedicating their time and energy to solving the voter turnout dilemma.

We have Secretary of State is committed to turning this trend of apathy around and making California the leader in promoting democracy and civic engagement.

The timing is right.

Let's work together and increase participation in our elections.

Thank you.