



**Testimony of Bob Edgar
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Presented to Subcommittee on Elections of the Committee on House Administration on
Modernizing the Election Registration Process
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Common Cause strongly supports the Voter Registration Modernization Act of 2009 (H.R. 1719), a bill which will help encourage voter participation and provide a more streamlined, accurate and cost-efficient voter registration process by utilizing existing technologies to register voters online.

Currently, the voter registration process in most states involves the voter filling out a hard paper copy of the voter registration form. While most states provide downloadable paper forms that a voter can fill out and return, a hard copy must still be printed out so that it can be signed and mailed. This then requires a data entry process on the part of the state or county, which creates opportunities for manual error and adds unnecessary costs, delay and uncertainty.

H.R. 1719 will allow eligible citizens to register to vote in federal elections entirely online as well as to update or correct their existing registrations online. More people of all ages are using the Internet to carry out daily transactions ranging from online banking to making airplane reservations to filing taxes. The ease of this type of transaction should expand to voter registration over the Internet. Several states have already begun this process, with encouraging results.

State Programs

After passing its program in 2002, Arizona has seen a dramatic increase in the number of people registering to vote, as well as significant cost savings. Arizona saw a 9.5% increase in registrations from 2002 to 2004 after implementing online voter registration.¹ In 2007, 72% of people registering to vote in Arizona used the online voter registration process.² Additionally, Arizona saw major cost savings with the online voter registration program. In 2006, cost savings from online registration in Maricopa County (Arizona's most populous county) were equivalent to the salaries of eight full time employees because online registration reduced data entry needs.³

¹ Office of the Washington State Secretary of State Sam Reed, *Online Voter Registration – Frequently Asked Questions*, http://www.secstate.wa.gov/elections/online_reg_faq.aspx.

² Joseph Rendeiro, *Arizona and Washington Leave Other States in Dust on Online Voter Registration, OHMYGOV!*, July 22, 2008, http://ohmygov.com/blogs/general_news/archive/2008/07/22/arizona-and-washington-leave-other-states-in-dust-on-online-voter-registration.aspx.

³ California Senate Bill Analysis, SB 381, *available at* http://info.sen.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/sen/sb_0351-0400/sb_381_cfa_20080823_110553_sen_floor.html

A paper registration in Maricopa County costs a minimum of 83 cents to process, compared to only 3 cents for online registration.⁴

Washington state has also already seen a large number of potential voters registering online, with 1,634 doing so in just the first three days of the program in 2008.⁵ In the first six months of the program, Washington state found between thirty to forty percent of all registrations were processed via the Internet.⁶ Online voter registration led to a new record of registered voters in that state.⁷

Other states are quickly following suit to supplement traditional voter registration methods with online registration. California enacted an online registration bill in 2008 and Colorado, Indiana, Oregon and Utah have done so in 2009. Kansas Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh announced this summer that his office would begin implementing an online registration program as well.⁸

Congress Should Act

Congress should act to provide a national process so that voters can easily register online regardless of their state of residence. H.R. 1719 will improve the voter registration process for both voters and election officials. It will also allow for easier matching of duplicate records and other issues that arise when a voter moves from one county to another, and will remove the need for large amounts of manual data entry.

When Common Cause has worked at the state level to advance this reform, we have found it widely embraced by both Democrats and Republicans. Wide majorities of state legislatures are voting to streamline and modernize this basic expression of democratic participation.

⁴ PEW CENTER ON THE STATES, Issue Brief, BRINGING ELECTIONS INTO THE 21ST CENTURY: VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION, August 2009, at 3, *available at* http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Election_reform/Voter_Registration_Modernization_Brief_web.pdf?n=5270.

⁵ Gregory Roberts, *Washington Starts Up Online Voter Registration*, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER, Jan. 14, 2008, *available at* http://www.seattlepi.com/local/347217_voterregistration14.html.

⁶ California Senate Bill Analysis, *supra* footnote 3.

⁷ Noelene Clark, *Statewide, New-Voter Registration Hits Record*, SEATTLE TIMES, Oct. 8, 2008, *available at* http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2008238624_voterreg08m.html.

⁸ Scott Rothschild, *Kansas' Online Voter Registration Application Unveiled*, LAWRENCE JOURNAL-WORLD, July 28, 2009, *available at* <http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2009/jul/28/kansas-prepares-announce-online-voter-registration>.