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Hawaii is poised to pass universal mail-in balloting

By Richard Borreca

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If HB 1401 goes into effect, every registered voter in Hawaii would be mailed a ballot: you fill it out, sign it and mail it back. If your signature doesn't match the one on file with the state, you are likely to get busted and be found guilty of a Class C felony.

Is it possible that this is year the Legislature does something that has nearly universal support from both voters and government officials?

Well, yes, if the lawmakers act to finally change Hawaii's voting laws and make us the fourth state to go to universal mail-in balloting.

A bill to do that, [House Bill 1401](#), is moving steadily and without drama through the House and Senate and is now awaiting what could be a final vote in the Senate.

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The state elections office, the county clerks, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, plus the League of Women Voters and Common Cause all say, "Do it." There has not been a single dissenting vote on the bill, not on the House floor, not in any committee, not even a "Yes with reservations;" so far it is straight thumbs up.

Elections officials like the bill so much that they are asking that if anything needs to be changed, it is that the start date should be moved from 2020 to 2018. When do bureaucrats ask for something to happen earlier instead of later?

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For those with just a tad of voter fraud in their heart, consider the case of Steve Curtis, a conservative radio host and former Colorado Republican Party chairman, who last year spent an entire program telling his audience "that virtually every case of voter fraud I can remember in my lifetime was committed by Democrats."

The Washington Post, however, reported "Colorado prosecutors threw a wrench into that already dubious theory, accusing Curtis of voter fraud for allegedly filling out and mailing in his ex-wife's 2016 ballot for president."

Curtis could do up to 18 months in jail for the misdemeanor count of election fraud and up to three years in prison for the felony count of forgery.

Across the country, political and voting experts say vote-by-mail helps with voter turnout numbers, and is way cheaper than holding walk-in elections.

“States that have adopted all-mail ballot elections swear that it increases turnout, especially for non-presidential general elections. Oregon’s combination of all-mail ballot elections plus automatic registration probably yields the highest turnout. But, the real selling point is that all-mail ballot elections are cheaper,” said Michael P. McDonald, a University of Florida professor in charge of the United State Election Project.

In Oregon, the first state to go to mail-only balloting, voters love it. Polling research shows that not only do voters like it, politicians can stop worrying — it doesn’t give a special advantage to any group.

“Based on my extensive research, and that of others, vote by mail does not favor either party, simply because all type of voters can experience such difficulties in getting to the polls,” Priscilla Southwell, chairwoman of University of Oregon’s political science department, said in an interview.

“The 1998 vote by mail ballot measure in Oregon, sponsored by the League of Women Voters, passed by 79 percent, and remains incredibly popular,” she added.

Here in Honolulu, Ann Shaver, president of the League of Women Voters of Hawaii, said the bill appears popular because it builds on the supporters already shown with mail-in absentee voting.

In the last primary election, nearly 55 percent voted absentee and mailed in their ballot.

Finally, election officials across the state predict saving \$800,000 per election by closing the polling places and telling voters to just mail it in.

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