**Meeting of the Select Committee on 2020 Emergency Election Support**

Wednesday, May 20, 2020 - 2:00 p.m.

Members:

* Bradford E. Cook, Chairman
* Representative Barbara J. Griffin
* Katherine M. Hanna
* Kathy L. Seaver
* Senator Tom Sherman
* Eugene Van Loan III

Also participating:

* David Scanlan, Deputy Secretary of State
* Orville “Bud” Fitch, Legal Counsel, Secretary of State’s Office
* Nicholas Chong Yen, Assistant Attorney General

Select Committee meeting

* Chairman Cook opened the meeting at 2:00 p.m.
* Chairman Cook called the roll; all members were present and attending remotely, alone.
* Today we’ll hear from colleges, universities, and schools, and hopefully clerks of cities and towns that host colleges and universities; then we’ll hear from representatives of the US Postal Service about various things surrounding mail. Then we’ll have a work session, then discuss schedule for the rest of our work.
* Approval of last meeting’s minutes: Mr. Van Loan moved adoption; Ms. Hanna seconded. Minutes adopted by roll call vote, with Ms. Hanna and Rep. Griffin abstaining as they hadn’t yet reviewed the minutes.
* Chairman Cook: The reason to invite colleges and schools is we’ve heard there are issues in towns that host larger institutions concerning same-day registration on election day. Certainly colleges have had an interesting semester with complex issues and many don’t know what next year’s first semester will look like, which is when the primary and general elections will take place.
  + We want to hear about how they approach matters of student voting and registration and how they interact with the towns, and to inform them about our work and the opportunities for doing things by mail, and then urge them to work with their town clerks to work out a system that will keep from clogging up the polling places on election day.
* Judy Krassowski, Hooksett NH, secondary school educator, addressing the committee as member of public.
  + Is fielding questions from kids who are active in NH’s Youth in Government program and are civically engaged.
  + On the day before the NH Primary we travel around the state to enjoy rallies, house parties, candidate events, etc. for an immersive experience for students.
  + Students are running into road blocks like paperwork and uncertainty about the voting process.
  + Maybe this committee can urge the Attorney General’s office and the Governor to include postage paid absentee ballot applications and absentee registration package to voters along with their congratulatory graduation letter? They need something referring them to this registration and voting process.
* Todd Leach, Chancellor, University System of NH: We do anticipate having students back in the fall. If we do, we know communities containing universities and schools will still have some reservations about contact and voting this fall.
  + I think one of the keys here needs to be providing information as clear as possible about what students can do for absentee registration and voting, including students from other states, and helping them to vote in those states remotely, as well as native Granite Staters or those seeking to register to vote here.
  + Majority of our students seem to fall into same-day registration category and I think that’s one of the things we want to address in advance by encouraging an absentee process that doesn’t require students to go to the polls in-person to register and vote. The more we can engage students in a no-contact method of voting, the better.
  + We’re prepared to help in any way we can. It might also be possible for our campuses to serve as satellite voting spots—might be a way to facilitate student voting, keeping them out of other polling places, and facilitate more community voting for community members. We want to ensure we’re working as closely as we can with the state to ensure accurate delivery of information to students. If there’s a push toward absentee voting, materials and forms need to be readily accessible. Affidavits that require witnessing may represent a challenge.
* Chairman Cook: We’ve been talking about the process by which people can vote absentee in-person, and perhaps we could have satellite locations for that. If clerks coordinate with institutions to do this on-campus, that would be a way to keep the polls from becoming congested by students. If we provided a stack of applications for absentee ballots to campuses that would be available to students, that would give them more information, especially on how the voting process is going to change.
* Mr. Van Loan asked Chancellor Leach: Do you have any suggestions for us in specific terms as to what the university system could offer in terms of making applications for absentee registration and voting available? More particularly, how can we address clogging at the polls? Anything we can do to encourage anyone who wants to register to do so prior to election day? Do you have any suggestions for us on what the university system could do to help?
* Chancellor Leach: To any extent we can be satellite sites for getting those absentee registration packages and absentee ballots on campuses, we would be very supportive of that, as would our students. The more we can have materials in advance we can encourage students to fill out, or a process where clerks can come on campus and register students on campus, or at least address the affidavit and registration process, the better. The things that will be really important are having clear information we can give students to help them clearly understand who’s eligible, what they need to do, what they need to have, and any way we can reduce the crunch on town clerks offices and polling sites, we’re prepared to help do that.
* Rep. Griffin asked Chancellor Leach: In regards to on-campus activity, I want to be clear: Are you envisioning municipal staff clerks coming to campus for this process, or are you envisioning school staff or other people on-campus doing that?
* Chancellor Leach: We’re open to working with municipalities and the state in either fashion, whether it’s setting up space where staff can help facilitate registration process, or whether it’s deputizing staff on campus be an extended arm of those clerks offices, we could support the activities in that way as well. We want to make sure the information we provide students is representative of what the statutes and laws are.
* Rep. Griffin asked Chancellor Leach: You expressed you expect students back this fall. I’m curious as to how you have determined you’re going to have students back on campus, but you think it’s important we have a non-contact method of voting? It seems there will be contact schooling going on at UNH if students are back.
* Chancellor Leach: We anticipate honoring social distancing and adjusting our learning environments. We’re sensitive to the fact the communities themselves would like to limit contact where we can, and to be mindful of social distancing. I think the sense that non-contact voting would be important is largely about trying to keep polling places from being overly crowded, which would make social distancing more difficult.
* Davis Bernstein, Student Body President at Keene State College: We want to ensure we enforce students’ rights to vote. I’ve been to several meetings where we discuss the idea of how do we keep students in NH after college? One of the best ways to do that is show them we care about their right to vote, and we still want them to vote despite the pandemic. We should still try to reduce contact as much as possible, even if we are back to having in-person classes.
* Chairman Cook asked Mr. Bernstein: What’s your sense of how many students will vote in the primary versus general election?
* Mr. Bernstein: It’s traditionally hard to turn people out for primaries, as the fall is an especially busy time on campuses. We work in a bipartisan fashion on campus to turn out the student vote in every election. Providing students with forms and paperwork will be hugely helpful. Student government can be really helpful with disseminating information to the student body.
* Sen. Sherman asked Mr. Bernstein: There’s been some statement along the way that students tend to register same-day and one of the things we’ve discovered through this process is that the absentee registration process is somewhat cumbersome to access. Do you think students who need to register would be willing to participate in the absentee registration process so they wouldn’t have to go to the polls in-person to do that?
* Mr. Bernstein: It’s true that more than half of Keene State students likely register on election day, so I think we can encourage them to engage in the absentee process. It’ll require more effort but definitely can be done.
* Ms. Hanna asked Mr. Bernstein: Do you think having stacks of the applications for absentee registration and absentee voting available would be helpful?
* Mr. Bernstein: That would be hugely helpful and we could have volunteers trained to answer questions and assist students with filling these forms out.
* Rep. Griffin asked Mr. Bernstein: When do you normally get back to school?
* Mr. Bernstein: I’m not sure what our schedule is in relation to Labor Day.
* Rep. Griffin: The primary is the day after Labor Day. So, we’re having talks about trying to have registration and participation in the primary, and you indicated students are more interested in the general. Is it fair to assume any information campaign on campus will be more productive if based around general election timeframe versus the primary?
* Mr. Bernstein: I think that’s generally fair, but as pandemic still develops we don’t know what on-campus life will look like yet. An information desk for the primary on campuses would be very helpful.
* Lorrie, Durham Town Clerk: I think as much as we try to inform college students about registering ahead of time you’ll still see a huge amount of election day registration. We do sometimes go on-campus to try to register students, but I don’t know how the pandemic will impact that practice this year. Students tend to be unreliable on filling out and returning paperwork.
* Sen. Sherman asked Lorrie: We’ve discussed simplifying the absentee registration process so it more closely mirrors the in-person process and is less onerous. What would it take to make that process more doable? If you had an attestation and had to have a photo, rather than requiring all the various proofs currently required, do you think you’d get more student participation and buy-in?
* Lorrie: That’s kind of what we do now. We set up sessions towards the end of September and in October to go on campus, be there physically, and register students ahead of time. Then they can either show up on election day to vote or request an absentee ballot. For us, we already try to do that, although again I’m not sure how the pandemic will impact that this year.
* Sen. Sherman asked Lorrie: In your mind, would it be any threat to the system to make those applications readily available on campus so that an RA, for example, could give it to an interested student? Is there any downside to making the application forms widely available on campus?
* Lorrie: If the Secretary of State’s office says we can do that, I’m happy to.
* Ms. Hanna: You said in the past you’ve gone to campuses to try to register students and that it replicates what would happen with same-day registration.
* Lorrie: Basically. Our supervisors, when they go on campus, are registering students the same way they’d do on election day for the same-day registration process.
* Ms. Hanna: So that means my understanding is that on same-day registration, a potential voter can sign an affidavit if they don’t have the requisite forms. Is that also true when you go to campus ahead of time?
* Lorrie: Yes.
* Mr. Van Loan asked Deputy Secretary Scanlan: Is that permitted for registration that isn’t same-day? To use that affidavit process if the applicant lacks the requisite evidence of eligibility?
* Deputy Secretary Scanlan: Yes. The supervisors of the checklist sometimes, in conjunction with the clerk, conduct voter registration drives and set up at a public location and allow folks to register to vote. Those registrations would be the same as the voter showing up on election day and registering on the spot or physically showing up at the clerks’ office or a supervisors’ meeting and filling out a registration form and/or an affidavit, as needed.
* Ms. Hanna asked Deputy Secretary Scanlan: If one were completing an application for absentee registration from one’s own house versus on-campus, could one complete that same affidavit?
* Deputy Secretary Scanlan: No. If a voter is filling out an absentee registration form, they’d fill in the absentee registration form and would have to provide some form of documentation as proof that they are a qualified voter, which would not include either of the affidavits mentioned. It would have to be a NH driver’s license or government-issued ID or a combination of other permissible proofs, as listed in statute.
* Patty Little, Keene City Clerk: Echoed Lorrie’s comments about having elected officials on campus; we’ve been doing that for about 20 years and if we get 75 students to register, that’s considered good. You need to go beyond just offering information if you’re going to make a dent in same-day registration. I’d be inclined to combine it with food; that’s always a draw. Time in classrooms, pizza parties, all with assistance available, might be effective. Wouldn’t be opposed to a satellite station on campus, though that option is only available to towns, not cities. That would be the most effective way: have a staffed registration station on campus manned by trained faculty and students.
* Josie, Plymouth Town Clerk: I’m very supportive of the idea of hosting elections on PSU’s campus. Some of the issues that are non-COVID-related about hosting at school is having limited space, meaning we often have fewer booths than we’re supposed to have and fewer volunteers, which creates longer wait times for voters.
  + With COVID being a concern, utilizing campus would be very meaningful because it would provide luxury of space and eliminate concern around crowds. In Plymouth, PSU has maintained good track record of working with local election officials and have always allowed us to host registration drives on campus. I like the idea of Plymouth officials working with the university and student orgs to spread election awareness—even classroom or freshman seminar participation would be impactful.
  + I believe many students do care about voting, as many consider NH to be their home. They’ll take advantage of voting absentee, but I want to make it clear it’s ultimately up to us to provide a clear line of communication so students understand their options and opportunities.
* Luke Cuomo, Dartmouth student body president: worked hard on election awareness this year: voter registration drives and readily provided information to students. Turnout is paltry because students know they have the same-day registration option so there’s little incentive to register ahead of time. That problem will likely apply this year as well if there isn’t an easier way to register ahead of time. We’ve collaborated with the town in the past and would be happy to do so again.
  + Has developed a website prototype where students could electronically submit their applications to town and city clerks.
* Mr. Cuomo demonstrated the prototype portal for the committee, which electronically transmits applications to city or town clerks offices.
* Sen. Sherman asked Mr. Cuomo: This is just the application. The signature, like any signature submitted for voting, is subject to criminal penalty if there’s inaccurate information being forwarded. Do you see any security risk to putting this in this format?
* Mr. Cuomo: Confirmed this is just the application, not the ballot or registration. I don’t see security concerns that don’t already exist with paper forms. If I wanted to fraudulently vote absentee I could already do that by mail, theoretically.
* Sen. Sherman asked Mr. Cuomo: A link to this kind of application could be embedded on the Secretary of State’s website easily, correct?
* Mr. Cuomo: Yes, this could easily be embedded in any website.
* Heather Drinan: Dartmouth hasn’t made a decision about the fall yet, so I’m not ready to formally contribute to the conversation at this time, but appreciate learning about folks’ efforts.
* Chairman Cook urged her to work with town administration in preparation of elections.
* Mr. Van Loan: We need to distinguish between the roles of clerks and supervisors. Registration is done by supervisors, is that correct?
* Ms. Seaver: As general course they’re asking the clerk’s office, and the supervisors don’t work in the office, so clerks handle the majority of those requests, and supervisors do some. Clerks register far more people during the off times than the supervisors do, then the supervisors do it all on election day and when they have their formal meetings. On a daily basis it’s clerks receiving requests for absentee packets and sending those out.
* Ms. Hanna asked Ms. Drinan: Is there an ability for you to communicate to students who may not have left yet for the summer about the process for registering and voting absentee?
* Ms. Drinan: I don’t work in student affairs but that seems like a reasonable request.
* Mr. Cuomo: Based on my interactions with college leadership I think they’d be willing to help. Student organizations will certainly be willing to help as well.
* Sen. Sherman asked Mr. Cuomo: What about giving college credit for documented participation in the voting process as a mini Civics 101?
  + I’d love to see the Secretary of State put these application downloads on their website. Would an online registration process be technically possible?
* Mr. Cuomo: I certainly think that could be professionally done.
* Betsy McClain, Dartmouth Town Clerk: Shared that her office has seen a handful of what must’ve been Mr. Cuomo’s prototype of the absentee ballot request form, and we loved it here mostly because they were some of the only legible forms we received. We hope to see more use of those in upcoming cycles.
  + There’s been much discussion about roadblocks with current absentee voter registration process. There already exists currently a voter registration process that is one page, pdf fillable, which can be emailed to the town clerks’ offices with a trackpad signature, and that’s the Federal Postcard application. Currently only available to UOCAVA voters, but I’d really like to encourage the committee to consider relaxing the eligibility for that postcard, much as you have relaxed the definition of “disabled” for the purposes of this election. This is an existing process and infrastructure we could easily expand upon without recreating the wheel.
* Lauren Starks, SNHU, Associate General Counsel and Director of Government Affairs for SNHU:
  + Chandler Center and City of Manchester and Town of Hooksett have partnered to share roster of residential students, which is proof of domicile. We host on-campus events to encourage registration. We partner with student organizations, as well as share information at key inflection points during the year, and provide election day support like transportation to and from polling locations. We also developed and distributed by-state voting guides which we share with students, families, and faculty.
  + Timely guidance: We’re looking forward to supporting the committee in sharing guidance and clarifications around election operations during this cycle. We think it’ll be essential for our own partnerships and messaging and we look forward to doing that as early as possible.
  + We’re hearing questions from students about engaging in voting if campus is closed. As you issue further guidance we’d be glad to send you the questions we’re receiving from students.
  + Virtual training and education: In the early conversations of this committee you discussed the expanded role of virtual trainings and how important that could be in expanded voter education. As the Secretary of State’s office considers development of these trainings we’d welcome the chance to inform those materials to ensure they resonate with students.
  + Encourages the committee to explore creation of target tool kits designed for students specifically.
  + Potential of readily accessible technology is a real opportunity; encourages the committee to expand these tools in your outreach toolkit.
  + Referenced the Amazon app the Secretary of State’s office developed and encourages the committee to expand upon that.
  + Interested in exploring the development of a brief survey which could ask about student concerns around 2020 election process.
* Neil Levesque, Saint Anselm College: Town clerks have been particularly insightful in the information they provided today as it relates to students. We don’t know yet if we’ll come back a week early (before or after Labor Day)—the college’s sports schedule will largely inform that.
  + There are four things we think voting needs to be: safe, concise information, accessible, and legitimate. Our goal in the fall is to keep students on campus and keep other groups away, so if that means the town sets up a polling site on campus, that still means the town clerk has to come on campus and be exposed to students. We don’t necessarily like the idea of an on-site location on campus; I think it’d be controversial. We don’t want responsibility of being the town clerk for all intents and purposes.
  + Our students are very motivated to vote. I think we’re also going to have record turnouts this cycle. Our own polling indicates record numbers of people replying to political polls and being civically engaged.
* Dr. Wayne Lesperance, VP of Academic Affairs at New England College and professor of political science: Our origins are rooted in civics and service. This community is very excited about voting and participating. We work hand in glove with our supervisors and clerks and hold multiple registration drives each cycle. The approach is to meet students where they are. We provide transportation to the polls for students. COVID-19 changes all this. We plan to beg back on August 24th and resume face-to-face instruction, but in a way that embraces CDC and NH guidelines and social distancing.
  + Space: We have space on campus that if Henniker needed larger venue we could work to provide that with no cost.
  + Registration process: We look forward to getting updated process from you. We’re all regularly in contact with our students and will be happy to add material about registration to our students in our regular communications with them. Also partnering with other states to provide students with information about voting in their home states. We don’t want to tell them where to register, just hope they exercise their right to vote.
  + To whatever extent we can do more electronically up front and engage the students virtually we should embrace that as quickly and responsibly as we can; will save a lot of time on election day.
* Ann Shump, Durham Supervisor: Disappointed we haven’t heard from an official from UNH. It’s important to know the supervisors are intimately involved in voter registration. Town clerks are very busy registering people at town hall, but it’s supervisors that go to college campuses to register students to vote. I’m not sure the colleges will want us on campus this fall.
* Deputy Secretary Scanlan: I don’t know if current statute would accept an electronic request and signature for absentee ballot/registration.
* Attorney Chong Yen: I will research this question and get back to the committee.
* Mr. Van Loan: Would the list of people who requested absentees be discoverable or be able to be bought?
* Deputy Secretary Scanlan: The only people who can buy the list of absentee request information are the political candidates or their representatives.
* Ms. Hanna: Is there any reason we can’t readily print and make available stacks of absentee applications?
* Deputy Secretary Scanlan: That could be done. Right now anyone can do that, in fact many candidates and political parties do so regularly.
* Anne Cordero, manager of business mail for Northern New England district of Postal Service: We anticipate a huge influx in absentee ballots. We’ve engaged with conversations with NH and surrounding states discussing ideas about inbound and outbound ballots. Open to any ideas or questions about mail processing.
* Chairman Cook asked Ms. Cordero: If we think 50-60% of voters may vote absentee, is the postal service able to handle that volume? If we change the size of the envelopes that are used, what’s that do to cost?
* Ms. Cordero: Business reply mail is the most common prepaid mail: US Postage Paid. Not prepaid—paid when it’s reprocessed. Bigger envelopes are more expensive. 8.5x11” is $1.00, whereas letter size is $0.55.
  + There could be prepaid envelopes the state could send. If you mail to every registered voter and put in a metered reply piece, it would be prepaid and would go directly to the state and any unused envelopes with that meter strip could be returned to the state, and 90% of unused meter strip cost would be reimbursed to the state.
* Chairman Cook asked Ms. Cordero: I assume if return address is a town, it has to be a town permit and the state can’t get one permit and have every town and city on that permit?
* Ms. Cordero: Correct, but they can be financially linked. They’d need separate permits, though.
* Ms. Hanna asked Ms. Cordero: There’s been lots of talk about the feasibility issues of the postal service. Can you comment?
* Ms. Cordero: We echo those concerns but there’s nothing I can discuss here today.
* Sen. Sherman asked Ms. Cordero: I’m assuming there’s no bulk rate for these mailings?
* Ms. Cordero: Not for return pieces, just for outgoing pieces. If there’s an outgoing mailing you could use a permit imprint and get additional imprints.
* Sen. Sherman: We’ve talked about drop boxes. Looks like its’ $1.40 or $1.85 to send these absentee ballots back. Is it possible that you could have an arrangement with the town post office to have people be able to drop off securely at the post office without paying postage and the town clerk could come by and pick up that mail because it would go into a separate slot? Is that permissible?
* Ms. Cordero: That would have to come from headquarters at the national level. I think it’s a good idea, it’s just not something we could decide to do at the local level.
* Sen. Sherman asked Ms. Cordero: I know there’s an “every household” mailing—we’re talking about different ways to get the word out to voters about changes. Is there a price for every household mailing, and is there a limit to what can be sent by that method?
* Ms. Cordero: That would be the “every door” direct mail option. We have two options for that service: retail version for smaller customers who do local business, and then we offer the same product saturation mailing for commercial mailers who have permits, and there are no quantity limitations with that. The state could do an entire all state mailing with every door direct mail for every voter, reaching every household through the commercial option.
* Sen. Sherman asked Ms. Cordero: Could we use that to send absentee ballot requests to every door in the state?
* Ms. Cordero: Yes. The state has a permit and could mail out a mailing like that. The rates vary depending on saturation—in this case it would be highly saturated mailing piece. For every door direct mail it is 75% of all deliveries within a delivery route or 90% of all residents on a route. If your target audience is voter registered people you might want to use a mailing list, but that wouldn’t get you the deeper discount a saturation mailing would give you.
* Sen. Sherman asked Ms. Cordero: Could you get back to us with that pricing for those levels?
* Ms. Cordero: Yes.
* Attorney Fitch asked Ms. Cordero: As the committee considers changes in sizes of mailings going out and coming back in, are there any differences the committee should consider in transit time to and from the voter?
* Ms. Cordero: Service standards are based on class of mail. A flat mailing versus a letter-sized mailing are two different categories, but if they’re both first class mail they have the same service standard.
* Attorney Fitch asked Ms. Cordero: I heard you have to manually count if you use the permit process. Does that slow down the timeframe?
* Ms. Cordero: Those pieces are more automation-compatible than a handwritten envelope or a printed address on a mail piece; they have a bar code the machines read. There’s no delay in processing those pieces. When it arrives at delivery unit, those pieces are pre-sorted as having to be manually sorted and counted, so clerks do that early in the morning and give them to carriers to bring to intended recipient. Then, in cases for voting specifically, if it’s on the day of the election and an absentee ballot comes in on a later truck and misses carrier, the postmaster will drive it to wherever it needs to go. During primaries we’ve made concerted efforts to drive absentee ballots found in delivery units or late mailings to ensure they get where they need to go.
* Chairman Cook: Scheduling for next week:
  + Tues at 11, Wednesday at 2, and Thursday at 11:30.
* Chairman Cook sent out a revised condensed decision-making matrix.
* Tomorrow we have one leftover witness from the healthcare group. Then we go into decision-making mode.
* Mr. Van Loan asked if there’s a mechanical reason we can’t print on both sides of ballots or is it just that we’re worried voters won’t flip them over.
* Deputy Secretary Scanlan: We are concerned about the latter.
* Ms. Seaver moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Hanna. Committee unanimously adjourned by roll call vote.