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**Capitol View**

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**Voter ID Proposals are Anything but Cut and Dried**

Three proposals to cover the solution looking for a problem -- voter ID -- have proven to be about as confusing as the proponent’s explanation as to why the idea was necessary. After a lot of listening and a bunch of head scratching, I'm still not convinced.

The only thing I know for sure, in Sen. Steve Erdman's world there would be no mail-in ballots. Tell that to the 11 Nebraska counties that hold mail-only elections right now. Better yet, convince my 85-year -old neighbors that it's a good idea.

I’ve been voting by mail since Covid and I am happy to say that in the 50-plus years I have been voting, I’ve never felt more secure.

Voters approved an initiative petition in November and it was dumped on the Legislature’s doorstep to implement. There was a lot of grousing before the election that the measure didn’t give a clue about implementation. Well, that’s the nature of the initiative petition. It’s a big trust me, so here we are.

Comments on three measures, two from Republican farmer Erdman and one from Gretna Democrat Jen Day, were heard for more than seven hours by the Legislature’s Government, Military and Veteran’s Affairs committee. Yes, friends, they are all unnecessary.

In a nutshell, Erdman’s LB228 would eliminate voting by mail except for military personnel and those living in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. It would also establish primary and general election days as statewide holidays; stipulate that all ballots be counted at the precinct level on election day; and limit early voting to in-person at either a county election or county clerk’s office.

Erdman reasons that mail-in voting is expensive and doesn’t necessarily increase voter turnout. Requiring votes to be cast and counted at the precinct level on election day would ensure that ballots are secure and not in danger of being “messed with,” he said.

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His LB230 would define qualifying photographic identification for voting purposes. The bill also would limit the option of early voting to those who are “handicapped” or members of the armed forces or Nebraska National Guard. It would also make it a criminal offense for an election official to fail to require a voter to show photo ID and would require an agent delivering a ballot to include a color photocopy of the registered voter’s qualifying photo ID. A qualifying ID would be one of the following: driver’s license or state issued ID, Nebraska voter ID, U.S. passport or tribal ID issued by a recognized Indian tribe. A qualifying photo ID could not be more than 60 days past its expiration date.

As a bonus, an American flag symbol would be placed on the front of each driver’s license or state ID card issued to individuals who have verified status as a U.S. citizen. “We have an opportunity to accomplish what the voters required us to do by their vote,” Erdman said. “It’s not our intent with this bill to [prevent] anyone from voting.”

Day’s LB675 is much broader and would require: the state to provide funding to the Nebraska secretary of state’s office to ensure that all Nebraska polling places are ADA compliant; require the state Department of Motor Vehicles to expand hours and staffing beginning two months prior to the start of in-person voting; require the secretary of state to provide capacity at each election location to print qualifying ID on election day; provide additional locations where qualifying ID can be obtained for voting, including libraries and nonprofit organization offices; and require increased election office staffing and training.

Throw in $1 million for a public awareness campaign regarding new photo ID requirements and identify more than a dozen types of qualifying ID, including student ID cards, Social Security and Medicaid cards — even if expired.

Day says the bill would address voting rights while protecting the marginalized. “Election integrity has two sides — protections and safeguards of the process, but also accessibility of the election itself. No election has integrity when an eligible voter is turned away.”

A woman from Washington County likes hand-counted ballots. A guy from Crofton said voting on election day and hand counting would encourage civic engagement. A woman from

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Grand Island said expanded hours for DMV would be a plus. She named three counties where the DMV is only open one day a week.

Douglas County election commissioner Brian Kruse said hand counting would require adding precincts and staff, all at additional cost. He said many precincts in Cherry County do not have a location for people to vote in person that is ADA compliant, and some have no physical location other than a private home.

If something is worked out by the committee and reaches the floor for debate, depending on Senator Machaela Cavanaugh’s demeanor that day, it could be an interesting debate.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years*.