

Costs of Internet Voting for Military and Overseas Voters in WA One Vendor's Estimate

According to records received in response to a Public Records Request, the Secretary of State's office has been looking into the costs of the Internet voting scheme these bills would authorize. On January 18, in response to a request from the Secretary of State, Everyone Counts - a vendor of Internet voting systems - submitted a "UOCAVA Voter Scoping Strategy" document. The document outlines implementation phases for an Internet voting plan and the estimated costs of each phase.

<http://www.votersunite.org/info/WA-PRR-ScopingStrategy.pdf>

After examining this document, I would like to point out two important considerations:

1. The cost for each voter that might be assisted by this program would be significantly greater than paying to have them FedEx their ballots back to the counties or possibly even hiring a state-commissioned courier to collect the ballots. The excess cost might be as high as \$500 per year per voter.
2. It is almost certain that the taxpayers of this state will end up paying for the on-going annual fees (which could be \$4M or higher), and it is highly likely they will end up paying for much of the development costs (estimated to be between \$2.5 and \$4.4M). Thus, this bill is an unfunded mandate.

Regarding Consideration #1.

The "possible estimated price range" in the document referenced above is from \$2,500,000 to \$4,440,000 for the six development phases, which are projected to extend over a three-year period.

The on-going annual licensing fees after that period are estimated between \$20,000 and \$120,000 per county, with an additional \$2 to \$7 per registered UOCAVA voter. With 39 counties, that's from \$780,000 to \$4,680,000 per year, with an additional cost per registered UOCAVA voter.

In 2008, according to the Secretary of State's office, there were 67,423 registered UOCAVA voters, and 48,746 UOCAVA ballots were counted for a total turnout of 72.3%. The turnout for local voters was 84.6% statewide.

I realize that the number of registered UOCAVA voters will change over the next three years, but it's instructive to examine how many UOCAVA voters might have been assisted by the proposed plan if it had been in place in 2008, and what the cost per voter would have been.

- A) Given the statewide local turnout of 84.6%, it could be logically argued that the UOCAVA voter turnout would have been 84.6% if the system had been in place in 2008 to enfranchise additional voters choosing to vote. That means 12.3% of our UOCAVA voters may have been disenfranchised - approximately 8,300.
- B) The annual licensing fee for the proposed plan would be between \$796,600 and \$4,738,100.

- C) That's a cost of between \$96 and \$570 per voter per year who might have been assisted by this program (a very large range for budget planning). A low-tech solution, such as using FedEx or even a state-commissioned courier, would be significantly less costly - and less dependent on a cost structure that the vendor could easily change at any time.

Regarding Consideration #2.

Since the "possible estimated price range" is from \$2,500,000 to \$4,440,000 for the six development phases, the Secretary of State must secure outside funding for that amount in order to fully develop and implement the system.

While it might be possible (though doubtful) for the state to obtain grant funding for that amount to develop and implement an Internet voting system, it is unrealistic to think that any foundation would be willing to fund Washington State's on-going annual licensing fees for using the system after it was developed.

The taxpayers of this state will end up paying for the on-going fees and quite likely much of the development costs as well. These bills are an unfunded mandate.