

Approved: 1-27-97  
Date

MINUTES OF THE SENATE ELECTIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Vice-Chairperson Rich Becker at 1:40 p.m. on January 23, 1997 in Room 529-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Senator Hardenburger, excused  
Senator Praeger, excused

Committee staff present: Dennis Hodgins, Legislative Research Department  
Mike Heim, Legislative Research Department  
Bonnie Fritts, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Brad Bryant, Deputy Assistant to Secretary of State

Others attending: See attached list

Senator Becker asked for approval of the minutes from the meetings of January 16, 1997 and January 21, 1997.

Senator Lawrence moved to approve the minutes. Senator Vidricksen seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Brad Bryant briefed the committee on advance voting (Attachment 1). He testified that since the advance voting law was passed in 1995 and amended in 1996, it has only been used during one election cycle, thus making it difficult to tell whether advance voting might increase overall voter turnout in Kansas. He stated that in the 1996 primary election, 7.5 percent of the votes were in advance, and in the 1996 general election, 14.1 percent of the votes were in advance. The office of Secretary of State expects the advance voting process to gain in popularity in the next few elections. Also, recent changes in voter registration laws have increased registration opportunities, and advance voting has increased the accessibility of voting. He also testified that Kansas is one of less than ten states that have implemented some form of early voting, and other states are considering it.

One member stated that as he worked his district during his campaign, he found his constituents did not know advance voting was available to them until he informed them.

There was discussion on how to inform the public about the advance voting system and other ways of absentee voting. Committee members also asked about various rumors of voter fraud and reports of large volumes of ballots being delivered to post office boxes.

Mr. Bryant stated that the Attorney General's office looked into the situation and found nothing illegal. He also stated the office of Secretary of State intends to request introduction of a bill designed to prevent improper distribution of ballots and that the Attorney General supports this proposal.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 27, 1997.



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## STATE OF KANSAS

Senate Committee on Elections and Local Government

### Summary of Advance Voting

Brad Bryant, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State  
Elections and Legislative Matters

January 23, 1997

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the committee with an update on advance voting--one of the most significant, progressive and successful changes to Kansas election laws in recent years. I have attempted to summarize below key aspects of the advance voting program for those committee members who are not familiar with them.

#### Beginning

The advance voting law was passed in the 1995 legislative session and amended in 1996. Advance voting was originally conceptualized as no-excuse absentee voting; that is, it was a simple expansion of the existing absentee laws, the principal difference being that under advance voting, any registered voter could choose to vote by mail or in person before election day, whereas under absentee voting a person was required to qualify for an absentee ballot by claiming one of the following "excuses": absence from the county on election day, sickness or disability, or religious objection.

#### Levels of Participation

Although some local question-submitted elections had been conducted using advance voting, the 1996 primary and general elections were the first statewide elections conducted under the new advance voting rules.

In the August 6, 1996 primary election, 532,295 votes were cast statewide, 39,936 (7.5%) in advance.

In the November 5, 1996 general election, 1,073,520 votes were cast statewide, 151,646 (14.1%) in advance.

Before advance voting, absentee ballots usually accounted for approximately 4% of the total vote cast statewide in a general election.

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SENATE ELECTIONS + LOCAL  
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1-23-97  
ATTACHMENT 1

The number of advance ballots more than tripled between the primary and the general election, and the percentage nearly doubled. Part of this increase between August and November is due to organized public relations and advertising campaigns by county election officers, private groups and the Secretary of State, but much of it is due to word of mouth. Voters who cast advance ballots tell their friends about it. We expect the process to gain in popularity in the next few elections, with levels approaching 40% to 50% possible in some areas of the state by the 2000 election.

### Comments

Nearly all the voters we have spoken to like advance voting. Some county election officers were apprehensive before conducting their first election but most are very supportive after one or two elections.

It is difficult to tell after only one election cycle whether advance voting might increase overall voter turnout; in fact, the turnout in Kansas in 1996 was average. However, advance voting does encourage turnout by making voting easier than it has ever been. With advance voting, one of the last few barriers to voter participation has been removed. Recent changes in voter registration laws have increased registration opportunities, and advance voting has increased the accessibility of voting. Our attention is turning now to education of voters to increase their awareness of the importance of voting and the issues they are voting upon.

We have found no evidence that advance voting reverses the outcomes of races. That is, the candidate who wins the overall vote nearly always wins the advance vote, and usually in roughly the same proportions.

Kansas is one of fewer than ten states that have implemented some form of early voting, and other states are considering it or experimenting with it. So, early voting has arrived in some states, it is coming in others, and Kansas is among the leaders.

### Legislation

The experience election officers gained in 1996 has pointed out some things that we wish to recommend be changed. We intend to request that this committee introduce an advance voting administration bill, the main focus of which is to prevent the improper distribution of ballots. The Attorney General supports this proposal and will send someone to testify before the committee if it would be helpful.

Thank you. I will try to answer any questions the committee members might have.