

## **Jim Howell: Sedgwick County is ready for 'vote anywhere' elections**

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Last year, Sedgwick County helped draft and then pass a great voter empowerment law. SB130 passed with nearly unanimous support in both the Kansas House and Senate. Parts of that new law were fully implemented but one provision has stalled. We have dubbed this piece the "vote anywhere" provision.

We worked hard in 2019 to pass this popular law so that we would have sufficient time to make the necessary adjustments. SB130 became Kansas law more than seven months ago, but the vote-anywhere provision remains on hold. Sedgwick County has the best election equipment and most robust security tax dollars can buy.

Sedgwick County is ready. In fact, our interconnected electronic poll books, deployed in 2017, have been securely cross-communicating for 14 elections already. Since 2017, we have added layers of additional security. These electronic poll books are connected to a countywide voter registration database over an encrypted Virtual Private Network or VPN. According to our information technology experts, it does not get any better than that.

Please know, the only equipment virtually connected is the electronic poll books where voters check in to vote. This is to ensure the voter has legally registered to vote and they have not already voted in this election. Electronic poll books also tell the election worker which ballot style is the correct ballot for where the voter resides.

In the Eagle article, "County, lawmakers battle secretary of state over law saying where you can vote," Secretary of State Scott Schwab is quoted saying he's not too concerned about Sedgwick County's ability to implement voting centers: "I believe Sedgwick County's got an answer," he said.

Schwab's admittance that Sedgwick County is not a problem, that it has good security in place and is technologically ready, is assuring. Nevertheless, he continues to prohibit Sedgwick County from implementing the "vote anywhere" provision. This is inexcusable in my opinion.

The reality is, without the "vote anywhere" provision, we should anticipate another 1,000 to 2,000 provisional ballots again this year from voters who choose to vote away from their assigned poll site on Election Day. We can also expect longer lines and more time for many voters to get in and out of their assigned poll site.

Furthermore, election workers will have to manually process thousands of provisional ballots and many of the smaller races on the provisional ballot will not count, because voters cannot access their correct ballot in the wrong location on Election Day.

I have the highest regard for our outstanding election workers, but manually processing thousands of ballots takes a lot of time and creates an opportunity for human error. These ballots also will not be counted on Election Day but in the days following the election.

Finally, there must be some influence on election results when 1,000 or more voters are partially disenfranchised. All of these negative impacts can be solved by implementing the "vote anywhere" provision.

Sedgwick County has the technology to accommodate every voter on a voting machine at any poll site regardless of their address, but we will not be permitted to utilize this technology, that is unless the Secretary of State chooses to authorize Sedgwick County to exercise this technology for the 2020 elections. Unless we receive authorization by the end of February 2020, the "vote anywhere" provision will not be possible this year.

If you want to learn more about Sedgwick County's voting equipment and how voting works in Sedgwick County, check out this informative video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XC2brSAbSkA>.

Jim Howell represents District 5 on the Sedgwick County Commission.