

Presentation by Linn County Auditor Joel D. Miller at the 2017 State of the County Luncheon

April 19, 2017
Linn County, IA



Auditor Miller was one of four Linn County officials to speak during the event hosted by the Linn County League of Women Voters.

Let's ponder the Elections Modernization & Integrity Act also known as the Voter ID Act and the Voter Suppression Act.

What problem does the new law solve? What will be the cost? And how will it affect you?

If you are in the habit of voting by mail, the Auditor's Office will no longer be able to accept your request for an absentee ballot greater than 120 days prior to an election. That means, if a general election was held on November 7th of this year, you could not submit your absentee ballot request to the Auditor's Office prior to July 7th.

In addition, unless you are living overseas, the Auditor's Office cannot mail out your absentee ballot until 29 days before the election, i.e., not before October 9th.

And further, we cannot mail out absentee ballots after October 27th, i.e., within 10 days of the election. **My advice: sign-up for reminders from the Elections Office and request an absentee ballot as soon as possible, but not sooner than 120 days prior to the election.**

If you are in the habit of voting early in the Auditor's Office or at a satellite polling place at one of the colleges, the libraries, or Hy-Vees, then you will have to wait until October 9th, i.e., 29 days before the election to vote. Our Elections Office is going to be doing 40 days of work in 29 days so that is going to increase the early voting lines the closer we get to election day.

My advice: take advantage of satellite voting or voting in the Auditor's Office, but don't wait until the day before the election to vote early like one voter did last

November who ended up leaving the voting booth in our office at 7:05 p.m. BTW, he was in-line prior to 5pm.

And finally, if you did not vote by mail and you did not vote early in our office or at a satellite polling place, then vote at the polls. Please get in the habit of bringing your ID to the polls. And when the law goes into effect, be ready for lines because the poll workers will be required to ask for your ID and compare your face to the face on the ID. They will be required to verify your signature.

And if they don't consistently do both of those tasks, then be prepared for a poll watcher – a person appointed by a party – to ask the poll worker why they didn't check the photo and/or the signature.

Picture yourself as a poll worker. Imagine a voter who has had a bad day and is slightly aggressive with no patience. You ask the voter for his ID and the 8-year-old photo on his Iowa ID does NOT mirror his face. You rationalize that, and then he signs the election register and you compare his signature to his Iowa ID, and it does not match. Do you confront the voter? The law says you should. Do you issue a regular ballot or a provisional ballot?

What does the poll watcher do? Does the voter accuse you of profiling him? Does the poll watcher? What happens next is anyone's guess, but what happens to the voters who are next in line? They wait and wait some more. Some leave because they have kids in tow, kids in the car, or have to get to another job. Or they just become impatient.

That scenario has me wondering: Will I need peace officers in every precinct on Election Day?

My advice: If your Iowa ID does not look like you look now and/or your signature on your ID does not look like your signature now, then I urge you to get an updated ID for voting purposes.

And if you do not have an Iowa ID, then I urge you to apply for a new Voter ID as soon as they become available.

By the way, I invited Representative Ken Rizer to be a poll worker in an upcoming election. And he accepted. I plan to invite every Linn County legislator to be a poll worker in either the upcoming school election or the city election.

What will be the cost of this legislation?

The Secretary of State and certain legislators have gone to great lengths to say that no County needs to buy ePollbooks to comply with this legislation. I say it's an unfunded mandate regardless of the political double-speak.

Supposedly, not using ePollbooks is going to be slower than our present methods – it's been compared to going through the self-checkout lane at the grocery store.

But the real problem is going to be for voters doing Election Day Registration. If we cannot check our voters against the Felon Database, then anyone doing Election Day Registration will have to vote a provisional ballot.

In the November election, we had 510 voters vote a provisional ballot. I expect thousands of provisional ballots to be piling up on Election Day due to voters not having IDs, as well as, ballots being challenged by poll workers and poll watchers due to disagreements on photos and signatures.

The other real problem I have with not having ePollbooks is because elections across the State of Iowa are supposed to be administered in a uniform manner. I want the voters in Linn County to have the same experience and be processed in the same manner as voters in Jones, Benton, and Johnson counties.

Eventually, we will need to purchase ePollbooks and the startup cost of those will easily exceed \$300,000.

Another unfunded mandate is the post-election audit. Based upon Linn County being the second largest county in the State, we are likely to be audited after each general election. And worst case, that audit could cost you up to \$19,000 if, e.g., we had to audit the absentee precinct.

The new law changes straight party voting. I actually agree with this change.

Almost 24,000 voters voted a straight party Democratic ballot in 2016 versus 16,000 voters who voted a straight party Republican ballot. Once enacted, straight party voting will no longer be an option on the ballots.

Another law, but not the Elections Modernization & Integrity Act, will change when we have school elections.

School elections will be combined with city elections in November of each odd numbered year. The law does not go into effect until 2019 so we have time to get ready for the change. I agree with this change, too. Here again, we are going to need ePollbooks to administer these elections because we will have multiple ballots at any given precinct due to school boundaries not following city precinct boundaries.

What problem does the new law solve? What will be the cost? And how will it affect you?

Maybe the new law will deter a wannabe impostor. The fact is: in my 10 years as Linn County Auditor, we've had one impostor voter cast one ballot out of over one million voted ballots.

What will be the cost? I estimate that you, the taxpayers of Linn County, will spend over \$300,000 on ePollbooks and post-election audits and other costs attributed to this law.

How will it affect you? Even if a poll worker knows who you are, by law, they are going to have to ask you for your ID. They can no longer presume that the person living in their neighborhood, even if they know him or her, is who they say they are for voting purposes.

This law was supposedly made to protect us from **those other people** who want to commit election fraud, but the reality is: it's going to affect you and me because it says we cannot trust each other anymore. **And there's something unlowan about that new reality. And I don't like it!**

Thank you!