Support HF 45: Automatic Voter Registration

What is Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), and how does it help voters?

AVR streamlines the election process by registering voters automatically during an interaction with a state agency. Many states use their driver's license applications and renewals for automatic registration. Some states expand this to other agencies, like a health insurance marketplace or a government assistance program. The agency then electronically transfers the relevant information to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State determines whether the individual is eligible to vote, and then forwards data for eligible voters to county auditors to update voter rolls. **AVR increases the accessibility, integrity, and efficiency of voter registration.**

Minnesota's current voter registration system has strong accessibility and integrity, but registering may still be difficult for some eligible voter.[1] AVR removes barriers for voters by automating the registration process. Opposing AVR keeps voter registration more difficult, more expensive, and more error-prone. Opponents make a variety of arguments against AVR, but those arguments do not stand up to scrutiny.

Fiction: AVR is a controversial, liberal, or leftist policy.
Fact: AVR has been passed on a strong bipartisan basis in several states.

- AVR was **unanimously passed** in Illinois, where it was signed into law by a Republican Governor, and **Republican-controlled** West Virginia.

- In 6 other states that approved AVR by legislation, it **passed by more than 60% by each chamber**.

- In the 3 states where AVR was implemented by ballot initiative, voters passed AVR by more than 60% in each, **including the strongly Republican state of Alaska**.

- 65% of Americans favor automatically registering voters.[2] Over a third of Americans reside in the 15 states and D.C. that have already approved AVR.[3]

Fiction: AVR is untested and too expensive to implement.
Fact: AVR is backed by strong evidence of its success in other states, where it has increased voter registration and turnout, long-term savings, and government efficiency.

- Under the current bill, the Office of **the Secretary of State will absorb the costs** of implementation.

- States with AVR have **cut election-related costs** by spending less on staff time, paper processing, and mailing.[4]

- It is **costlier to maintain the current system without AVR**. Transfer of information from state agencies to the Secretary of State would reduce errors and costs associated with paper forms

and manual data entry. Reducing reliance on paper-based registration, like implementing AVR, saves on average $3.54 in government labor costs per registration; even modest savings can add up given the number of registrations involved.[5] **A vote for AVR is a vote to reduce government waste.**

Fiction: AVR will create opportunities for voter fraud.
Fact: We all care about the integrity and fairness of our elections. A modernized system with AVR increases election integrity.

- Modernizing the election system with AVR strengthens democracy and would decrease the burden on election officials to examine paper registration forms and manually enter the information. Use of electronic registration is proven to **improve accuracy and security for elections**.[6]

- On Election Day in 2016, 72% of same day registrants used their Minnesota driver's license or identification card.[7] If these voters' information is entered into the registration system earlier and automatically, we can **reduce data errors** and protect the integrity of our elections.

- Under the current bill, the Secretary of State will check whether an individual is eligible to vote before they are registered. **Ineligible persons are not registered**.

Fiction: AVR will violate the privacy of voters.
Fact: AVR is optional, and leaders can use this opportunity to prioritize our data privacy.

- Under the current bill, the form will include **the option to decline** to be registered.

- Requirements for form design, font size, or specific language could **ensure individuals are aware of any privacy risks**. For example, the Data Practices Office recommends that while government does not need to give notice when collecting public data, it might consider doing so in some circumstances (a "reverse Tennessen warning"). For example, the form could explain that under current law, some voter information becomes public data.[8]

- Other states have built **additional mechanisms to opt out** after the initial agency interaction. In Oregon, people who registered through AVR receive a letter after the registration is processed. Individuals may respond within a certain timeframe to opt-out.

- Elected officials could also lead on protecting voter privacy by **further restricting what information is public**.

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[1] Office of the Legislative Auditor, Voter Registration Evaluation Report, March 2018.
[2] Pew Research Center, Elections in America: Concerns Over Security, Divisions Over Expanding Access to Voting, October 2018.
[3] Brennan Center for Justice, Automatic Voter Registration, November 2018.
[4] Brennan Center for Justice, The Case for Automatic Voter Registration, July 2016.
[5] Doug Chapin and David Kuennen, The Cost (Savings) of Reform: An Analysis of Local Registration-Related Costs and Potential Savings through Automatic Voter Registration, March 2017.
[6] Brennan Center for Justice, Automatic and Permanent Voter Registration: How It Works, 2015.
[7] Office of the Legislative Auditor, Voter Registration Evaluation Report, March 2018
[8] Minnesota Department of Administration, Data Practices Office, Tennessen Warning Notice. https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/data/warnings/tennessen/