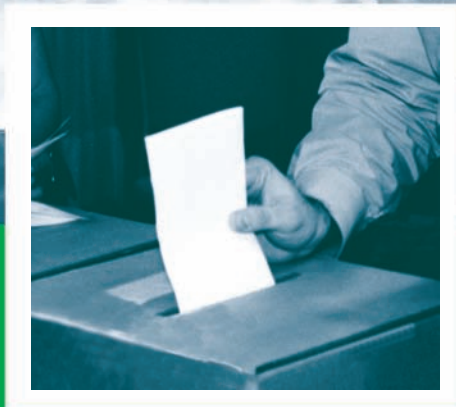


Remember in November

The AFSCME Retiree
Handbook for Voting
on Election Day





Celebrate *Your Right to Vote*

Seniors tend to be the most likely voters in U.S. elections. According to the Census Bureau, in recent Presidential elections, more than three-quarters of the older population was registered to vote and two-thirds actually voted on Election Day. With characters forged by the Great Depression, World War II and the Kennedy era (“ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,”), older Americans recognize that voting in the United States is central to our democratic way of life.

Through the years, however, the voting process has changed. A good example of this is the Motor Voter Law, passed by Congress in 1993. It allows people to register to vote whenever they get a driver’s license. Mail-in ballots are another innovation — in Oregon elections, everyone votes that way. Many other states changed their procedures after voting irregularities and system defects came to light in the 2000 elections.

Because of some of the problems associated with that election, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act in 2002. Its purpose is to make sure that every eligible voter gets to vote on Election Day, and that votes are counted accurately. We’ll all have to wait and see if the law has the desired effect and procedures improve in future elections.

Most elections are run by states, cities, counties or townships, so laws on voting vary a lot, depending on where you live. For more information on how to register and vote in your state, consult the official website of the National Association of Secretaries of State: www.nass.org.

Are You Registered?

Generally, you need to register before you can vote. This helps ensure that everyone votes in the right voting district (or precinct) and only casts one ballot. You can register by giving your name, address and other information to the government office that runs elections in your area. It will probably be a state, county or city office.

Most AFSCME retirees are already registered to vote. But just in case you aren't (perhaps you moved recently), here's the information you need to register before the next election. We urge you to share it with your voting age grandchildren (18 and over) and other friends and family.

Here are the most common ways to register to vote:

- **At motor vehicle and other government offices.** You can get registration applications in motor vehicle offices, public assistance offices, agencies that help people with disabilities, public libraries and other public buildings.
- **By mail.** You can start the registration process by calling your local elections office and asking them to send you a voter registration application in the mail. Fill it out and send it back. Although it may not be required, it's a good idea to include a copy of your photo ID with your voter registration application when you mail it in.
- **At the elections office.** The traditional way to register is to go in person to the local board of elections office or county courthouse and fill out a form. You don't have to mail anything — you just fill it out and hand it in.



- **In public places.** Sometimes, especially when elections are coming up, you may find volunteers at tables in public places offering to help you register. They might be at senior centers, shopping malls or other places where people gather. It's an easy way to get a registration form and start the process.

The Registration Form

Each jurisdiction will have a slightly different registration form, but the forms will always ask for your name, address, date of birth and U.S. citizenship. They usually ask for your driver's license number, if you have one, or the last four digits of your Social Security number. If you don't have either a driver's license or a Social Security number, the state will assign you a voter identification number. These numbers help states keep track of voters. Sometimes, local voting rules are on the back of the registration form.



This registration form may also ask for your choice of party: Republican, Democrat or a third party (such as Green or Libertarian). Choosing a party isn't necessary for voting in the November elections, but most states require it if you want to vote in party primaries.

When registering to vote, be sure to do the following:

- Write clearly on your application, so no one will have trouble reading it.
- Try to register well in advance of the deadline and avoid the rush.
- If you don't hear from the elections office within three weeks, call to find out what's happening with your registration.

Time to Register

Federal law says that you can't be required to register more than 30 days before the election. Most states set their registration deadlines at 30 days, but a few give you more time. Connecticut, for example, sets its deadline at 14 days before the election; Alabama's deadline is 10 days before Election Day.

In six states you can go to the polling place, register and vote, all at the same time: Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Wyoming. Be sure to bring identification and proof of where you live. In North Dakota you can vote without ever having to register at all.

A Change of Name or Address

If you're already registered but change your name— due to a marriage, for example — be sure to let your local election office know. Otherwise, you could be turned away on Election Day if your name isn't on the voting rolls.

You could also be turned away if you move to a new city or state and forget to register at your new address. It's a good idea to do it as soon as you arrive — while it's still fresh in your mind. A move within the same county or city, however, might not require that you register again, and you might be able to vote in the polling place for your old

address. Be sure to check out the local rules to see if it's allowed. Of course, you might prefer to re-register, provide your new address and vote at the polling place for your new location.



Voting Before Election Day

In some states and under certain circumstances, you can vote before Election Day. Here's how it works:



Absentee and Mail-in Voting

To vote early, many people get a mail-in or absentee ballot. That's a paper ballot listing all of the candidates and ballot measures that people will be voting on come Election Day.

The reason it's often called an "absentee" ballot is because it's particularly helpful for people who will be away from home on Election Day. But many states allow everyone (or, in some cases, everyone over a certain age) to vote by mail. You might prefer it for a variety of reasons. You might think you'll have difficulty getting to the polls on Election Day. Perhaps you're in frail health or have a disability. Absentee balloting ensures that you'll be able to cast your vote even if you can't make it to the polling place.

- To find out if you can vote by mail, contact your local elections office. The number may be listed in the phone book in the section for your city, county or township — under board of elections or elections department clerk, registrar or auditor. You can also call directory assistance.
- If you want to vote by mail, send a signed letter to your local elections office about 30 days before Election Day, saying you want an absentee ballot. When the ballot arrives in the mail, fill it out and mail it back. In some states, the return envelope for your absentee ballot needs to be signed by a witness, so read the directions carefully.
- If you are overseas, it's wise to write your elections office about 45 days in advance, but not much earlier than that. If you write too early, the ballots may not be ready and your request could get lost in the interim.

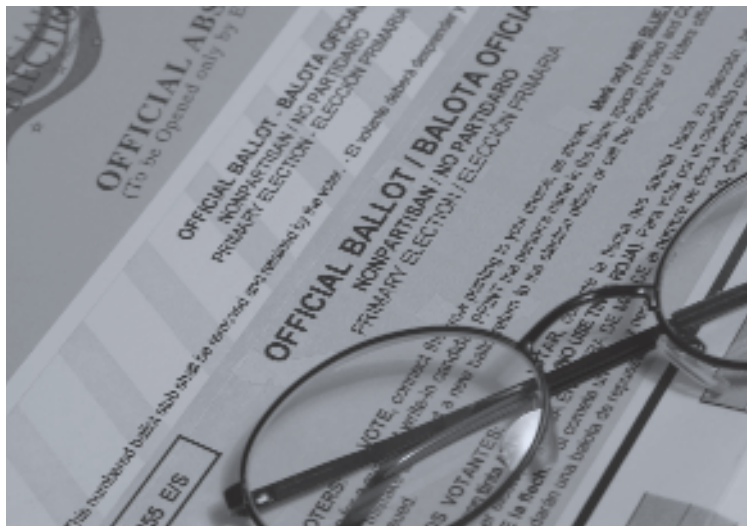
- In most states, for an absentee ballot to be counted it must be received by the end of Election Day. To be safe, mail it a few days before Election Day.
- If you registered by mail, eight states require you to vote in person the first time you vote. They are Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. And in all states, if you registered by mail, you will have to show identification the first time you vote. Check with your elections office about acceptable types of ID.

Even if you're absolutely sure that you'll be able to vote on Election Day, you may have friends, neighbors or relatives who are afraid they won't be able to make it the polls. If so, encourage them to vote absentee and help them obtain an absentee ballot. Their votes could decide the election in favor of the candidates you support.

Early Voting

Another way that some states help people vote when they can't get to the polls on Election Day is through a new approach called "early voting." It's different from a mail-in ballot because you have to cast your vote at a specific location. But it allows you to do it a couple of weeks early and beat Election Day lines. Usually the local government will set up specific times and places for early voting.

For details, check with your elections office.



Election Day

General elections in which you can vote for U.S. President, Senator or Representative are always held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Election Day is a thrilling time for millions of Americans because the entire country is focusing on a single experience and celebrating our democracy in action. The only way to join in is to cast your vote.

Your Polling Place

Public buildings and community gathering spots are the most common voting locations. These polling places include schools, libraries, city halls, churches, fire stations and recreation centers. In some cases, however, people vote in an apartment house or even a family's home.

To avoid last minute panic, try to find out where you will vote before Election Day. But in case you don't think ahead, here are a few ways to find out where your polling place is:



- If you got a sample ballot in the mail, it will probably tell you where to vote. Or, if you received a notice confirming that you recently registered, it may give you the address of your polling place.
- Call the local elections office, give them your address and they'll tell you where you can vote. Warning: On Election Day, it's often hard to get through on the phone.
- Ask a neighbor, because people who live in the same building or street usually vote in the same location.
- If you have access to the Internet, go to www.google.com or a similar site and look up "elections in ____ (insert the name of your city or county)." There's a good chance you'll find the website for the elections office, and it may list polling places.

If the location of your polling place has been changed, the local elections office should send you notification in the mail. Also, there should be a notice posted at the old polling place, giving you the new site.

Voting Hours

Polling hours vary according to location. Usually, the polls open between 6 and 8 a.m. and close between 6 and 9 p.m. The early and late hours give working people a chance to vote before or after work. For the times in your area, call your local elections office.

If you're running late on Election Day, don't give up and go home. As long as you get to the polls before closing time — even if there's a long line when you get there — you will be allowed to vote. But if you want to avoid those long lines, try voting between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. — not too difficult when you're retired. The polls will be less busy.



Getting to the Polls

If it's hard for you to get to the polling place, you can probably get a ride. Sometimes political parties or campaigns will offer rides to the polls. Watch local newspapers for phone numbers or call the local elections office for information. **Or call your local AFSCME office**, which can often provide assistance.

Make a date to go to the polls with a friend. Sometimes a person may not plan on voting, but if a friend calls and offers them a ride, they'll be happy to go along. AFSCME always urges members to take a **like-minded friend** to the polls. It doubles the value of *your* vote.

Don't Forget to Bring...

Some states require you to bring photo identification (ID) to the polling place. Even if your state isn't one of them, it's probably a good idea to bring a driver's license or other official ID — just in case. If it doesn't show your current address, also bring something that does.

ID is particularly important if you registered by mail or if this is the first time you are voting at a new location.

If you choose, you can also bring notes with you, or a sample ballot you've marked up or any other information that pertains to your vote.

Walk Right In

When you get inside of your polling place, you're bound to see some people with official roles. They'll include the following:

- Poll workers are the people who check in voters and explain where and how to vote. They aren't full-time public employees — they tend to be volunteers and all-around good citizens. Sometimes communities have a problem finding enough poll workers, which can lead to long lines of people waiting to vote. In other cases, poll workers aren't adequately trained. So try to be patient if you encounter difficulties. Most poll workers are trying their best.
- Observers — from political parties or other concerned organizations — may be in the polling place to ensure an honest vote.
- Usually there will be one or two people in charge of the polling place. They're often called election judges. Some states require one Democrat and one Republican election judge in each polling place.

If You Have a Disability

People with disabilities sometimes have difficulty voting on Election Day. Mail-in voting may be an option. But if you plan ahead, you can probably find a way to go to the polls and cast your vote.

Polling places are required by federal law to be accessible to persons with disabilities. If your own polling place isn't suitable — unable to accommodate wheelchairs, for example — other arrangements must be made. So, call your local election office, tell them you're disabled and ask them for the location of an accessible voting place that's close to where you live. Then, have them make arrangements for you to vote there.

If no official polling place meets your needs, ask if you can vote at the county courthouse or a similar public building. Some polling places make curbside voting available if the building is accessible. They'll bring a voting device out to the street so you can exercise your rights.

If you are blind or cannot read, you have a right to have a person of your choosing help you vote. That helper can read the ballot to you and help you mark it. This is a right protected by U.S. law.

If you're in a polling place and having problems voting or getting to a voting device, don't hesitate to ask a poll worker for assistance. Their job is to make sure everyone gets to vote.

If you go to vote and can't get to the voting device because it's inaccessible, you can phone the central voting office to complain. The problem is the phone number is going to be very busy on Election Day. A poll worker may be able to help you. **Contacting the election office in advance and learning about your options early can often help you avoid access problems on Election Day.**

Of course, you can always request an **absentee ballot** before the election and mail it in. (See section on mail-in ballots, starting on page 5.) Be sure to ask for it in a signed letter at least 30 days before Election Day. That way, the election office will have time to mail you the ballot and you will have time to mail it back. **If you think that *it's possible* that you won't be able to make it to the polls on Election Day, don't take any chances. Request an absentee ballot and vote by mail.**

Language Barriers

If you, a friend or relative is more fluent in another language than in English, you may be able to get special language help at the polling place.

In cities or counties that have large populations that speak a certain language, federal law says there should be ballots, instructions and other voting materials in that language. Special poll workers who speak the language may also be available to provide assistance. These rules don't apply everywhere, however. They generally apply in areas where a language is spoken by at least 10,000 people or 5 percent of the residents.

The languages covered by this law are Spanish, Asian languages, and American Indian and Alaskan native languages.

If you need language help and don't live in one of the communities covered by the law, you could seek help from friends or relatives, or an ethnic organization. In some states, a non-English-speaking voter can bring a friend or relative into the voting booth with them. Check with your election office for the local rules.

Signing In

When you arrive at the polling place, go directly to a table where a poll worker will check you in. If, for some reason, your name isn't on the list of registered voters for that polling place, stay cool. Ask them to look again. In some states, poll workers have access to the statewide



lists and can see if you're registered at some other polling place.

If your name is not on the list, you are entitled to a **provisional ballot** — a special ballot that will be counted separately from the others. If local election officials check and find out that you are eligible to vote, your ballot will be counted.

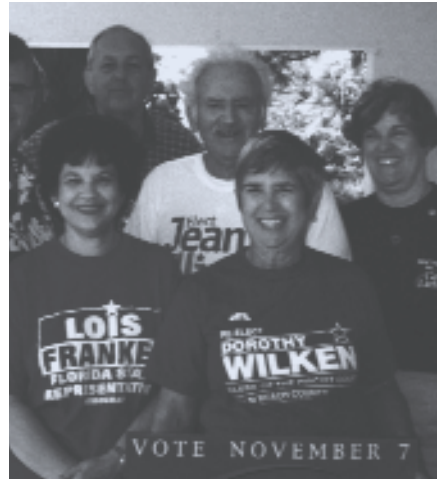
The bottom line? **When you go to vote at your polling place, you have the right to vote.**

The Act of Voting

After you have signed in with the poll workers, they'll point out the voting devices. Sometimes they will tell you briefly how the voting devices work — particularly useful if new types are being used for the first time.

If you have trouble figuring out how to use the device, ask for help at any time during the voting process. Just step outside your voting booth and signal to a poll worker (don't vacate the booth completely in mid-vote). They're allowed to come to your voting booth and show you how to proceed. Some states even let you bring a friend right up to the voting device with you to help you out.

Don't fret if you **make a mistake** on your ballot. A poll worker can give you a new ballot or take you to a new device if your voting machine breaks down.



Different Types of Voting Devices

Because voting in America is run by states, cities and counties, there are lots of different types of voting devices in use — many of them new and still getting the kinks worked out. Don't be frightened off by the new equipment. Remember that every voter will be learning how to use it. Poll workers will understand that voters need extra help.

Following are the five basic types of voting devices — one of which is probably used in your area.

Optical Scanning Machines

With this system, the poll workers give you a card or sheets of paper — your ballot — which you take over to a private table or booth. The ballot has the names of the various candidates and ballot measures printed on it. With a pen or pencil, you need to fill in a little box or circle, or the space between two arrows. In some places, you can feed your ballot into a machine that reads it right in front of you, so you can make sure you voted as you meant to.

When you're finished filling out your entire ballot, you will probably be told to bring it over to a ballot box, where poll workers will show you how to put the cards in the box. Or, you might be told to feed the completed cards into a computer device. When Election Day is over, the computer counts how many votes were cast for each candidate or issue.

Direct Recording Electronic Machines (DREs)

This is the newest kind of system in the U.S. — similar to your bank's ATM machine. All the information about who and what you are voting for is on an electronic screen. There are several variations of DREs

and many cities, counties and states are trying them out.



Some of these devices show all the candidates and ballot choices on one big screen. You push a button next to the name of the candidate you want to vote for. On other DREs, the screen is set up to show “pages.” On one screen/page you might vote for U.S. Senator. Then you'd move to the next page to vote for U.S. Representative.

Instead of a button to push, some of these systems have “touch screens.” You touch the screen next to the name of the person you want to vote for. Other systems have a keypad or a computer keyboard, where you type in your choice. DREs store votes on a computer device like a disk or a cartridge. At the end of the day, results from the disk or cartridge can be printed and read at the polling place or transferred to a central location.

DREs are currently the subject of much controversy because studies show the machines can lose data or be tampered with. Many citizens are demanding that these systems allow voters to get a print out of their completed ballot, to ensure a paper trail if electronic votes are lost.

Punch cards

With a punch-card system, a poll worker gives you a card or booklet of cards — each about 8 x 3 inches, with small rectangles that can be punched out. You take your cards to a small private table, where a booklet is mounted on a frame. The frame will have a place for you to slide your first card in.

The table will also have a small device (often a metal stick) for punching holes next to your chosen candidates. Make sure you study the cards or booklet carefully, so that you punch the right hole — the one lined up with your candidate’s name. Then, give it a firm punch, so you completely push out the little cardboard rectangle, known as a chad. Beware of “hanging chads.”

When you’re done, take all your cards (you may receive an envelope to put them in) to the ballot box and drop them inside. At the end of the day, the poll workers put all the cards into a sorter, which counts how many holes have been punched out for each candidate.



Mechanical Lever Machine

Here, you step into a voting booth and pull a big lever to close the curtain. You’ll see a printed display with the names of all the people running for office and all the ballot measures. Next to each name will

be a small mechanical lever about an inch long. To vote for your choice, turn the lever all the way. Do that again and again until you've cast all your votes. Then, pull the big lever to open the curtain—which signals the machine to record your ballot.

At the end of the day, the poll workers go to each machine and count the votes for each candidate and issue.

Paper Ballots

Paper ballots are one of the oldest ways of voting and are still used in some polling places, mostly in rural areas. Voters get a paper ballot and take it to a voting booth. Using a pen or pencil, you mark a box next to your candidate and issue choices, then drop the marked ballot into a sealed ballot box. At the end of the day, poll workers read the ballots and count the votes.

If You Make a Mistake

When you're finished voting, you should always check your ballot to make sure you actually voted as you intended to. Of course, there's



always the chance that you might change your mind while you're voting or make a mistake marking your ballot. What if you accidentally mark the wrong person for President?

If your polling place uses cards or paper to record votes, ask a poll worker to give you a new ballot. Do-overs can be accomplished with systems that use punch cards, optical scans and paper ballots.

If you are using a lever voting booth or a computerized system of direct electronic recording, there is no paper. So if you make a mistake while you're voting, you can just correct it yourself while you are in the booth. In a lever system, you can make corrections as long as you haven't pulled the big lever that opens the voting booth curtain. In a DRE system, you can make corrections as long as you haven't touched the final screen to say you've finished voting.

Here are some common mistakes that voters make:

- Voting for more than one person for a single office. If you do it, the vote won't count.
- Voting for one person when you think you are voting for another. This can happen if the voting device has a booklet that opens to let you see two pages at once. The names may line up in a confusing way, so be very careful, take your time and follow the arrows.
- Not following instructions. If the instructions say to vote by filling in a small circle with a pencil, your vote may not get counted if you circle the person's name instead.
- Accidentally skipping some of the choices. This can occur if you move through the ballot too quickly, missing some candidates or issues you really want to vote on. Always double check your ballot before you turn it in.

If you have questions, think your voting device isn't working properly or think you may have made a mistake on your ballot, ask a poll worker to help. Everyone at the polling place has the same goal: making sure you're able to exercise one of the greatest privileges we have as Americans — **the cherished right to vote.**





Your Voting Rights

Wherever you live, you have the right to be treated fairly and respectfully at the polling place. Here are some of the basic rights of all voters in the U.S.A.:

- The right to register and vote, regardless of race, religion, national origin, gender or disability;
- The right to privacy— no one has the right to know how you voted;
- The right to an accurately recorded ballot with all its votes counted;
- The right of access to a polling place and a usable voting device, regardless of personal disability;
- The right to receive assistance from poll workers, if requested;
- The right to be treated with courtesy and respect by officials at the polling place.



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