

## Election Commission urges voting reforms

Written by Freddie Allen, NNPA Washington Correspondent  
Thursday, 06 February 2014 13:23

---



WASHINGTON (NNPA) – In order to make sure no voter waits in line more than 30 minutes before casting a ballot, states need to adopt a series of election changes, the Presidential Commission on Election Administration proposed after a 6-month study.

President Obama acknowledged the difficulty that some voters experienced during his re-election speech in November 2012.

"I want to thank every American who participated in this election," said President Obama. "Whether you voted for the very first time or waited in line for a very long time."

President Obama added: "By the way, we have to fix that."

Fixing that problem is not easy the report stated.

"The United States runs its elections unlike any other country in the world. Responsibility for elections is entrusted to local officials in approximately 8,000 different jurisdictions," it said. "In turn, they are subject to general oversight by officials most often chosen through a partisan appointment or election process. The point of contact for voters in the polling place is usually a temporary employee who has volunteered for one-day duty and has received only a few hours of training."

Still, the report recommended that all states adopt online voter registration procedures and that states compare voter rolls to maintain accuracy across state lines. It also suggested the use of mail-in ballots and the expansion of in-person early voting opportunities to reduce overcrowding at the polls on Election Day.

In addition, the commission urged states to turn schools into polling centers where one-third of voters already cast ballots. It noted that many of the voting machines in use are at least a decade old, and said that the process of certifying new voting technology has to be updated.

The report said that no citizen should have to wait more than 30 minutes to vote; jurisdictions can solve the problem of long lines. Yet many people had to wait as long as six hours to vote.

"Long wait times at select polling places result from a combination of mismanagement, limited or misallocated resources, and long ballots," stated the report.

Long wait times plagued Black voters disproportionately. A joint study by OurTime.org, a nonprofit group that organizes young people online for political engagement, and the

## Election Commission urges voting reforms

Written by Freddie Allen, NNPA Washington Correspondent  
Thursday, 06 February 2014 13:23

---

Advancement Project, a multiracial civil rights group, found that long lines constituted a "time tax" replacing poll taxes and literacy tests that blocked Black and poor eligible voters from casting ballots during the Jim Crow era.

"Florida voters experience some of the longest voting lines in the country, with an average wait time of 39 minutes to cast a ballot. That was three times the national average in 2012, of 13.3 minutes," stated the OurTime.org/Advancement Project report.

According to that report, Blacks waited 23 minutes to vote in the 2012 presidential election, compared to Whites who waited an average of 12 minutes.

The election commission report failed to address the often racially-charged issue of and the phantom pursuit voter fraud and controversial voter ID laws that some civil rights leaders claim suppress the minority and poor vote.

"Black youth reported that the lack of required identification prevented them from voting at nearly four times the rate of White youth (17.3% compared to 4.7%). Latino youth (8.1%) were also affected at higher rates than White youth," stated the OurTime.org/Advancement Project report.

As the country grows more diverse, protecting the voting rights of young, minorities will become more significant.

A study by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University reported that voter challenges, voter caging, voter intimidation, and other deceptive practices often block eligible voters, disrupting the democratic process.

"When [anti-fraud initiatives] target voters based on race, ethnicity, or other impermissible characteristics; when they cause voter intimidation and confusion; and when they disrupt the voting process," stated the Brennan Center report. "Unfortunately, ballot security operations have too often had these effects, both historically and in recent elections."

According to the Brennan Center report, "A federal appeals court recently found that ballot security operations planned or conducted in recent years have by and large threatened legitimate voters."

The report continued: "The court's opinion indicates that not only do such initiatives often target eligible voters for disenfranchisement, but they also tend to disrupt polling places, create long lines, and cause voters to feel intimidated. Moreover, these effects are often felt disproportionately in areas with large concentrations of minority or low-income voters, where such operations have typically been directed."

Despite the absence of recommendations addressing restrictive voter ID laws and voter intimidation, civil rights leaders still praised the report that comes on the heels of the Voting Rights Act of 2014, a bipartisan bill crafted to patch parts of the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 that the Supreme Court invalidated in June 2013. Civil rights leaders remain cautiously optimistic

## Election Commission urges voting reforms

Written by Freddie Allen, NNPA Washington Correspondent  
Thursday, 06 February 2014 13:23

---

about reforms needed to protect voters under the Voting Rights Act of 1965 after the Supreme Court decimated the VRA with their ruling in *Shelby v. Holder* last summer.

"We appreciate the president's initiative in forming this bipartisan commission and welcome their thoughtful and specific recommendations to fix the problem of long lines and other voter access issues," said Laura W. Murphy, director of the Washington Legislative Office of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). "Overall, these are a series of recommendations that make sense, but we have to analyze them comprehensively both for their civil rights and privacy implications. We welcome efforts to improve election administration in this country, which is woefully out of date in far too many jurisdictions."

Michael Waldman, president of the Brennan Center for Justice said that the commission's report marks a significant advance in the way we think about voting.

"The Commission makes clear that there are achievable, bipartisan reforms that can be implemented now to transform voting in America," said Waldman. "Most importantly, it recognizes that we can't fix long lines until we first fix our outdated voter registration system."

Wendy Weiser, the director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice, agreed.

"Especially important is the consensus that we need to modernize voter registration, make early voting available to all Americans, and put systems in place so no one waits longer than 30 minutes to vote. These will be the new benchmarks against which future elections will be judged," said Weiser.

She continued: "However, more must be done to make sure the voting system works for all Americans. We need to fix the Voting Rights Act, which the Supreme Court eviscerated last year, in order to protect against restrictive and often discriminatory voting laws."

The report stated that each election presents unique opportunity for reform as new problems are discovered.

"There has never been a perfectly run election in the United States or elsewhere, and perhaps there never will," stated the election commission's report. "Any process that depends on human management of hundreds of millions of people, machines or paper will inevitably produce some errors."