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AK: Alaska Politics Blog

AK: Andrew Halcro Blog

AK: Progressive Alaska

AL: Archiblog

AL: Doc's Political Parlor

AL: South Union Street

AL: Sweet Home Potomac

AR: Arkansas Blog

AR: The Tolbert Report

August 13, 2013

E-Voting: It May Be a While

By Ed Smith

When it comes to voting, there's not an app for that and there's not likely to be one anytime soon.

A group of lawmakers and elections officials debated the pros and cons of voting electronically Tuesday during a session on e-voting at NCSL's Legislative Summit in Atlanta. While some on the panel were more bullish on electronic voting than others, everyone agreed "baby steps" were likely to dominate the process in the near future.

Senator Whitney Westerfield of Kentucky said his state has approved a first step in electronic voting – distributing ballots electronically – but expected it will be a while before the state would take the next step of allowing election officials to receive ballots electronically.

"We almost have no choice but to take these baby steps," he said, but added that much of the concern about electronic voting stems from a lack of "knowledge of and comfort with the technology."

Douglas Kellner, co-chair of the New York State Board of Elections, saw it quite differently. He noted that proponents of electronic voting frequently point out that if banks can handle electronic transactions, election official should be able to do the same.

"There's a reason why we can bank online but can't vote online," Kellner said. "It's mainly because in banking it's not secret and you can verify and audit the trail of the money."

Kellner said he favored voting electronically or by fax only in rare circumstances, such as members of the military on the front lines and far from postal services.

"It is critical for confidence in the election process that one be able to verify the election process. There needs to be a trail where you can verify the voting process and that trail does not yet exist when voting by email or fax."

A third panelist, Delegate Jon Cardin of Maryland, said states would continue to study the issue with an eye toward allowing "every person who is eligible to register and vote efficiently and effectively and in a transparent way."

There are reasons, however, to be concerned since the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Election Assistance Administration all have expressed concerns about the security of the current technology.

One member of the audience, however, pointed out that maybe the officials were being too ethnocentric in surveying the electronic voting landscape. Jonathan Brill of SOE Software said electronic voting takes place in 18 developed countries without serious problems.

Ed Smith is the director of digital communications for NCSL.

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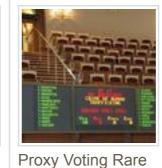**You might also like:**

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