

A Look Back at North Carolina's Historic 2020 Election & Looking Ahead at 2021

Presentation to House Election Law & Campaign Finance Reform Committee

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NORTH CAROLINA
STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Historic Election

- First Super Tuesday Primary
- 2nd Primary & New Election held June 23 with pandemic protocols
- Launch of Democracy Heroes
- Online Absentee Request Form
- Redesign of Absentee By Mail Envelope
- Intelligent Mail Barcoding and BallotTrax
- Secure electronic ballot option for military, overseas, & visually impaired
- Completely new design and platform for SBE website
 - More data than ever provided (more than 140 reports published)
- More than 14 million PPE items delivered, plus 6 million single-use pens

Historic Election

- Most registered voters: 7.3+ million
- September 4: First in the nation to send out absentee by mail ballots
 - 1.4+ million requests
 - 1+ million ballots cast
- October 15-31: One-stop early voting period
 - Most sites ever (471)
 - Most hours ever (77,887)
 - Most voters in a single day (348,000)
 - 3.6+ million votes cast

Historic Election

- November 3: Election Day
 - 2,660 sites open
 - Approximately 900,000 ballots cast
 - Last results upload: 12:28 a.m., 11/4
- 75.4% voter turnout (5.54 million ballots cast)
 - 18% absentee by mail (4% in 2016)
 - 65% one-stop early voting (62% in 2016)
 - 16% Election Day in-person (33% in 2016)
- Civitas Institute Poll: 68% of North Carolinians think the election was conducted “fairly”
- No COVID case spread linked to voting

Historic Election

Chief Justice of State Supreme Court Recount

- Closest statewide contest in modern history
- At time of state canvass, separated by 416 votes and pending protests; could not certify
- Statewide machine recount of all ballots cast (401-vote difference)
- Sample hand-to-eye recount
 - Beasley gained 28 votes; Newby gained 39 votes
 - Beasley conceded; candidates withdrew protests
- December 18: SBE certified the contest results; Newby prevailed



How This Was Achieved

- Direct field support – 8 Security & Support Technicians
 - 4 interim directors; 14 new directors
 - Operations continued through quarantine
- 143 enhancements completed in our legacy SEIMS system
- Certified voting systems (first since 2012) procured, delivered, tested, and implemented in 30+ counties in 8 weeks
- More than 6,000 ballot styles coded and proofed
- Ballot on demand and highspeed scanners strategically deployed statewide
- 32 Numbered Memoranda issued as guidance to county boards of elections
- 80+ press releases and 100+ tv/radio/podcast interviews; 7 press conferences
- Completed 470 campaign finance audits
 - 13,062 items scanned (2020); 2,287 items scanned (January 2021)
- Administration of \$26 million in HAVA and CARES Act for elections



Meeting the Challenges

- Continued Growth in Voter Registration
 - 2008 – 6.2 million
 - 2012 – 6.6 million
 - 2016 – 6.9 million
 - 2020 – 7.3 million
- Growth in campaign committees and reporting
- Main phone line, central email, & mail processing:
 - Highest calls in a week: 2,102; highest in a day: 453; Election Day: 600+ calls
 - 5,930 voter registration forms received & distributed to CBEs in a single week
- 33 lawsuits (25 currently)
- Jan. 2017 – Critical Infrastructure designation
 - Assessments by DHS, National Guard, DIT, and cyber advisors yielded Security Roadmap to protect our systems from cyber and physical attacks
 - Mis- and disinformation (#YourVoteCountsNC)
 - 6 regional cybersecurity workshops, 2 state conference presentations, 3 CISA webinars, & online learning modules
 - Supported 3 separate counties through ransomware attacks that occurred in county government during election periods
 - Hosted Acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf



Securing the Election: Pre-Election Processes & Audits

- Certified voting systems – all paper ballot system
 - Election Systems & Software (ES&S)
 - Hart InterCivic
 - Rigorous certification process: federal and state standards, independent review by certified lab, public demonstrations, acceptance testing, and \$17 million bond
- By law, voting machines and tabulation software are NOT connected to the internet
- Logic & accuracy testing before every election on every component
- Chain of custody and reconciliation checks
- Bipartisan, trained election officials
- Criminal background checks of SBE employees and CBE directors

Securing the Election: Post-Election Processes & Audits

Election Night Results:

- Clean transfer of data with each upload
- Monitoring
- Unofficial until canvass complete

County canvass process for each election:

- Sample hand-to-eye audit
- Reconciliation
- Confirm all eligible ballots have been counted
 - Ballots that were unable to be read in the precinct (ballot jams, torn ballots, etc.)
 - Absentee ballots
 - Provisional ballots

Audits before State canvass:

- Voter history audit
- Manual edit audit
- Sample audit
- Close contest audit

Key Agency Initiatives in 2021

- IT/Voting Systems
 - Reconciliation audit tools for counties
 - Migration of legacy SEIMS to new system; complete several phases of SEIMS modernization
 - Risk-limiting audits
 - Vulnerability scanning
 - Voting Systems Certification (new systems & modifications)
 - Help Desk software to build knowledge base, provide consistent guidance to counties (currently receive 10,000-14,000 Help Desk tickets annually)
- Election Administration
 - County board wellness checks to ensure compliance
 - Pollworker e-pollbook training
 - County board member orientation and training (new appointments in June 2021)
 - Preparing for redistricting and upcoming elections
- Operations
 - County physical security (HAVA grants)
- Communications
 - SEIMS/Voter Tools working changes/updates to make more voter friendly
- Campaign Finance
 - Modernizing campaign finance reporting software

66 initiatives or projects identified to begin or complete in the next 6 months



Legislative Priorities

- Budget requests
 - Secure physical building
 - Authorization to use HAVA funds:
 - SEIMS modernization development
 - SSTs and voting systems admins
 - Security and infrastructure improvement
 - Consultant to create ePollbook standards
 - ERIC membership to improve list maintenance and cross check efforts
 - Campaign finance modernization
 - Historical data project
- Review of IT consolidation with DIT
- Conform state law to ADA for blind voters, add compliance attorney
- Require disclaimer for mailers sent by third parties
- Campaign finance:
 - Waiver requests considered by State Board prior to filing a contested case with OAH
 - Remove reference to April for reporting schedule for odd-numbered year filing
 - Clarify that 48-hour reports in even-numbered years are only required for candidates on the ballot in even-numbered years
 - Create (judicial) and adjust (non-statewide) campaign finance threshold to \$3,000

Legislative Priorities

Election schedule changes due to census delay (eta September) and redistricting:

- Municipal Elections
- 2022 Primary
- 2-month process for geocode changes for filing and ballot styles
- Municipal filing currently set for July
 - Census data needed to address municipal district & ward elections (62 municipalities)
 - Other municipalities may require districts or wards
- Recommendations:
 - Move all 2021 municipal elections to 2022
 - Address redistricting
 - Reduce voter confusion
 - Reduce municipal expenses
 - Move 2022 elections to May 3 primary, July 12 second primary, and November 8 general

Thank You!



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