

## **Election Day Registration is a Reform That Works: A Demos Response to the Electionline.org Case Study of Montana EDR**

**February 15, 2007**

The time has come for Election Day Registration. As documented in Demos' newly released report, *Voters Win with Election Day Registration*, EDR states continue to enjoy turnout rates that top the nation, obviate the need for provisional ballots, and bring more voters into the political process. Demos applauds electionline.org for focusing attention on this vital reform with its publication of *Election-Day Registration: A Case Study*. The report is generally accurate and balanced, but a few erroneous or questionable statements merit a response. We offer them here.

The report points out that EDR bills have been "repeatedly" defeated. That's not quite the case. Some states have seen EDR bills introduced for years, but never given them any serious consideration. In others, EDR bills were actually passed by the legislature. The Connecticut General Assembly passed EDR legislation in 2003 and sent it to Governor Rowland for his signature. It was the veto of that now-disgraced chief executive that stopped EDR there.

The same was true in California, where both houses of the state legislature passed an EDR bill in 1999. The legislation was only withdrawn after Governor Gray Davis pledged to veto it. Four years later, the legislature passed another bill that would have authorized an EDR pilot project in Alameda County. Governor Davis again defeated the proposal, this time by going ahead and issuing a veto.

The report also references Paul Gronke's observation that electoral reforms such as same day registration are likely only to change voter turnout by a few percentage points. Gronke notes that the major barriers to electoral participation are voter interest and motivation.

No one can dispute the fact that voter interest and motivation are essential elements to citizen participation. But there's no overlooking the fact that states with Election Day Registration have consistently averaged turnout rates 10 to 12 points higher than non-EDR states. No one reform is a silver bullet for reversing recent declines in voter participation. But the turnout data on EDR states is not easily dismissed.

And then there is Curtis Gans' suggestion that EDR can exacerbate fraud in states with a history of such problems. Gans is an individual with strong opinions, but this one just hangs out there with little support. If you put aside the seductive rhetoric of voter fraud and speak to officials in EDR states, they will tell you that there's just no evidence that Election Day Registration has led to more fraud – or in most cases, to any fraud at all. When the rare incidence of a voter casting more than one ballot does arise, existing

state safeguards kick into place. In the words of Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, “we always catch them.”

And finally, the prospects for passage of EDR legislation are not bleak at all, as electionline.org reports. There are active campaigns in at least a dozen states this year--including Iowa, Michigan, New Mexico, Washington, Oregon, North Carolina, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont—far more activity than in past years. Not all these states will adopt Election Day Registration in 2007, but that’s to be expected. Most important voting reforms are multi-year efforts. What can’t be denied is that a growing number of legislators and reformers are giving EDR serious attention in state houses around the country. The logic of the reform is powerful; in 2006 elections, EDR states had voter participation rates about ten points higher than states without. That’s an important step toward an inclusive democracy, and we hope states will take it.

Demos just released a report on Election Day Registration, *Voters Win with Election Day Registration*. We invite you to visit our website, [www.demos.org/pub1280.cfm](http://www.demos.org/pub1280.cfm) to read it.