

Governor Carney: Let's Remove Barriers to Voting

Op-ed by Governor John Carney

I was in Millsboro on Election Day, and in addition to greeting old friends as they went to the polls, I had an especially meaningful experience. A young man was walking nervously toward the fire station that doubled as his polling place. As I stuck out my hand to introduce myself, he said, "Do you know how this works?" I looked at him funny and he said, "I'm a first-time voter. I've never done this before."

Fortunately, poll workers were able to tell him what he needed to know and he walked out a happy voter.

As Governor, I get to travel our state every day and talk to Delawareans from all walks of life.

Part of my job is to encourage more Delawareans – like that young man in Millsboro – to participate in our democratic process. To have their voices heard. And, most importantly, to vote in elections. **We ought to make it as easy as possible, not harder, for eligible Delawareans to exercise their right to vote.**

I hear all the reasons why Delawareans choose not to cast a ballot when the time comes:

Voting is inconvenient.

My vote doesn't really matter.

Once elected, politicians do what they want, anyway.

Last November, in one of the most consequential midterm elections in memory, just over half of eligible Delawareans went to the polls. And that was considered a good turnout

because only 36 percent voted in November 2014.

Even in the Presidential year of 2016, turnout was only 65 percent. That means that 35 percent of Delawareans didn't help choose their President.

Far too many Delawareans are choosing not to exercise their right to vote – to engage the public officials they send to Washington or Dover.

That's why – as we head back to Legislative Hall to begin the 150th General Assembly – I'm encouraging members of both political parties to support common sense reforms to our election laws that will get more Delawareans involved in discussions about their own future.

Put plainly, we should make it easier to cast a ballot.

First, we should pass legislation allowing same-day voter registration. Delawareans should not be prevented from voting because they did not register in time. All of our citizens have a fundamental right to vote – and allowing voters to register on Election Day is a sensible reform that could encourage more Delawareans to show up and vote.

It's also important that we allow Delawareans more options about when to vote.

Last year, Representative David Bentz introduced legislation that would have allowed early voting at polling places up to 10 days before Election Day. I urge legislators to send that legislation to my desk this session.

More time to vote means fewer excuses to sit out an election. It also means reduced lines at polling places on Election Day. And early voting reduces the chance that bad weather or another unforeseen event will have an adverse effect on

Election Day turnout.

There is additional legislation we should take a hard look at – reforms that would more seamlessly register voters at the Division of Motor Vehicles, move primary elections to coincide with presidential primary dates, and allow for no-excuse absentee voting. All three would make it easier for more Delawareans to participate.

Legislators like Representative Bentz, former Senator Margaret Rose Henry, Representative John Viola, Representative Earl Jaques, Representative Stephanie T. Bolden, and others already have been champions on this issue – and I look forward to working with all members of the General Assembly to make progress.

Throughout our country's history, Americans have sacrificed to secure voting rights for women and African Americans. We have an obligation to build on that legacy by taking additional steps that will strengthen voter access for Delawareans and increase participation in our elections.

This should not be a partisan issue. Democrats and Republicans have an interest in getting more Delawareans to the polls.

Most importantly, we all have an interest in removing barriers to vote, and making sure all Delawareans are involved in our Democratic process.

We live in a small state where it's common to run into your representatives at Wawa, in the grocery store, or your local Little League game.

We should also make it easier to have your voice heard at the ballot box.

Visit de.gov/votingreforms to support common sense voting reforms.