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5 Fixes For State's Broken Election System

Connecticut is a slowpoke on election results compared to other states. This will not do. Voters need to know on election night who their new governor is. They shouldn't have to wait till the next morning.

Here are a few ways for the state to catch up with the rest of the nation.

1. Take humans out of it.

Other places let machines do their work for them. So should Connecticut.

In Philadelphia, for example, every voting machine has a card inside it that gets taken to headquarters on election night. (Connecticut machines have similar cards.) The card gets read by a computer.

Philadelphia, with 1,700 polling places, has complete unofficial total results by 10:30 p.m.

Not so in Connecticut.

Here, poll workers in every city and town have to print out the numbers on thin strips of paper that stretch on and on. The poll workers have to copy the numbers from the paper strips and type them onto forms that go to the state. For larger towns and cities, this is a huge amount of work that has to be completed by midnight Tuesday.

Those forms ask for details down to the number of absentee ballots in East Hampton for the Amigo Constitution Liberty Party candidate. (We're not making that up.)

Any wonder it takes so long to learn statewide results on election night?

We aren't quibbling with the state's need for the detailed breakdown. We're just wondering: Can't the state let poll workers prioritize the totals and later work on the details?

If such exquisite detail is critical by midnight on Election Day, how about letting machines do the work? They are so much faster and more accurate than tired poll workers.

Absolutely not, says the state. Why not? Because of fears of Russian hackers.

But how is hand-typing numbers into a computer at town hall late on election night any more secure?

2. Stop using pens and rulers.

When you show up on Election Day to do your civic duty, a poll worker checks you in, using a pen, a ruler and a paper poll book.

Hello? We are living in the 21st century. Again, there are machines that can do this.

Electronic poll books are used successfully in other places. With e-books, blurry-eyed poll workers don't have to hand-count voter check-ins hours after polls close, thus delaying election results. The e-book does the count faster and more accurately.

3. Send in state help.

Every four years, a city is blamed for gumming up the works. In 2010, Bridgeport didn't order enough ballots. In 2014, Hartford was so unprepared that the governor had to wait to vote. This year, New Haven drowned in a flood of unregistered voters.

The cities need help. The state has to provide more of it.

The state doesn't have direct oversight of registrars. These local officials answer only to the voters who elect them. But it's unrealistic to expect that poll workers can do this highly technical work once a year without a hitch or an extra hand.

The state provides candidates with millions of dollars in grant money to run for office. Surely it can find enough money to help local officials run their election operations more smoothly.

4. Appoint professionals.

State law on registrars is peculiar. It guarantees every town and city at least two registrars of voters — one Democrat and one Republican. (So they can keep an eye on each other, presumably.)

But occasionally a third-party candidate gets more votes than the D or the R. That's how a town as small as Westbrook (population 6,956) can end up with three registrars of voters.

No other state has this quirky law.

This is a complex job, folks. It requires not political charm, but a lot of training and know-how.

It would speed things up to have one professional nonpartisan registrar in town. How about it, legislators?

5. Vote Earlier.

Voting is crammed into a single inconvenient day in this state. That makes for long lines in places like New Haven.

Then polls close, and the mind-numbing number-crunching begins.

In early-voting states like Colorado, a lot of this onerous work is done ahead of time.

Mail ballots were sent to all registered voters in Colorado starting in mid-October. State law allowed county clerks to begin counting mailed-in ballots on Oct. 22. Ballots are scanned, although results are not tallied or released until after the polls close.

This year, by 8:06 p.m. on Election Day, Colorado had half of its statewide votes reported. That state called the governor's race well before midnight. Connecticut voters didn't know who their next governor was till the next day.

No election is problem-free, of course. But just think how vote-by-mail might speed up results in Connecticut. Even more important to this strapped state is that voting by mail has saved Colorado a lot of money. It needs many fewer polling places and polling workers.

To get early voting in the Land of Steady Habits won't be simple. The state Constitution requires voters to appear on Election Day. Voters said no to changing that language in 2014.

Let's keep trying. It may be asking too much to cram an election into one busy workday and expect results a few hours later.