



# Oregon Secretary of State

Elections Division

255 Capitol St. NE, Suite 126, Salem, OR 97310

503-986-1518

<http://sos.oregon.gov/voting-elections>

## Oregon Vote-by-Mail

On Nov. 7, 2000, Oregon became the nation's 1st all vote-by-mail state. Here's how history was made.

### 1980s

- 1981 Oregon Legislature approves a test of vote-by-mail (VBM) for local elections.
- 1987 VBM made permanent; majority of counties use it for local/special elections.

### 1990s

- June 1993 First special statewide election by mail; 39% voter turnout.
- May 1995 Second special statewide election by mail; 44% turnout.
- Spring/summer 1995 Legislature OKs proposal to expand VBM to primary and general elections. Governor vetoes the bill.
- December 1995 Oregon becomes 1st state to conduct primary election totally by mail to nominate candidates to fill a vacancy in a federal office; 58% turnout.
- January 1996 Oregon becomes 1st state to conduct general election totally by mail to fill a vacancy in a federal office, when it selects Sen. Ron Wyden to replace Sen. Bob Packwood; 66% turnout.
- March 1996 Oregon holds country's 2nd VBM presidential primary; 58% turnout. (First VBM presidential primary held by North Dakota, just weeks prior to Oregon.)
- May 1997 Sixth special statewide election by mail; 42% turnout.
- Spring/summer 1997 Oregon House of Representatives approves proposal to expand VBM to primary and general elections. The bill dies in a Senate committee. The Governor would've signed the bill into law.
- November 1997 Seventh special statewide election by mail; 60% turnout.
- May 1998 Primary election at the polls. 41% of registered voters in Oregon are permanent absentee voters. Overall, the state posts a record-low turnout of 35%. Absentee ballots represent nearly  $\frac{2}{3}$  of all ballots cast. Oregon becomes 1st state to have more ballots cast by mail than at the polls during a polling place election. Absentee voter turnout was 53%, compared to 22% at the polls.
- June 1998 Supporters of expanding VBM to primary and general elections use the initiative process to put the issue on the November general election ballot. No paid signature gatherers are used to put measure on the ballot – a first since 1994.
- Nov. 3, 1998 Voters decide to expand VBM to primary and general elections, by a vote of 757,204 to 334,021.
- Nov. 2, 1999 Eighth special statewide election by mail; 38% turnout.

### 2000s

- May 2000 Presidential primary election VBM; 51% turnout.
- November 2000 First VBM presidential general election; 79% turnout.
- May 2002 Primary election VBM; 46% turnout.

- September 2002 Special election for 2 statewide measures VBM; 44% turnout.
- November 2002 General election VBM; 69% turnout.
- January 2003 Special election for a statewide measure VBM; 66% turnout.
- September 2003 Special election for a statewide measure VBM; 35% turnout.
- February 2004 Special election for a statewide measure VBM; 63% turnout.
- May 2004 Presidential primary election VBM; 46% turnout.
- November 2004 Presidential general election VBM. Voter registration exceeds 2 million, with 86% turnout.
- May 2006 Primary election VBM; 38% turnout.
- November 2006 General election VBM; 70% turnout.



# Table of Contents

Letter from the Secretary of State	1
County Election Offices	2
How Vote by Mail Works	3
Frequently Asked Questions	4
Facts & Figures	6
Candidate Deadlines	8
Schedule of Campaign Finance Accounting Periods & Filing Deadlines	9
Oregon Vote by Mail History	10

For administrative rules governing vote by mail elections, visit the Secretary of State's website and access Chapter 165 of the Administrative Rules: <https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/ruleSearch.action>  
For Oregon laws relating to elections, visit the Legislature's website and access Chapter 254: [https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills\\_laws/ors/ors254.html](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/ors/ors254.html)



STATE OF OREGON  
SECRETARY OF STATE  
136 STATE CAPITOL  
SALEM, OREGON 97310-0722

On November 7, 2000, Oregon will become the first state in the nation to conduct a presidential election entirely by mail. This will be yet another "first" for vote by mail in Oregon.

This brochure is intended to explain the ins and outs of Oregon's pioneering vote by mail program. We have included general information such as a brief history of Oregon's progression toward an entirely vote by mail system, how vote by mail works, a list of frequently asked questions, vote by mail facts and figures and candidate information with deadlines for the 2000 elections.

Oregon's history with vote by mail has proven time and again that the system raises voter participation, decreases costs and increases the overall integrity of the election process. It is a system that the vast majority of Oregonians love, having been adopted by the voters in 1998 with nearly 70 percent in favor.

No discussion of vote by mail could be complete without an acknowledgement of the efforts of two of my predecessors who have made our system possible. Secretary of State Norma Paulus, who conducted the first mail-in elections, and Secretary of State Phil Keisling, whose efforts helped make all vote by mail elections a reality.

Over the past 19 years, Oregon has conducted hundreds of local and several statewide vote by mail elections. In January 1996, Oregon gained national attention by holding a statewide special election to elect the country's first United States senator by mail.

Oregon's vote by mail system will again be the focus of national attention in 2000 as we help to elect a new president using the mailbox. I invite you to also browse the Secretary of State's web page for additional information at **[www.sos.state.or.us](http://www.sos.state.or.us)**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Bradbury".

Bill Bradbury  
Secretary of State

# County Election Offices

COUNTY	PHONE	FAX
Baker	541/523-8207	541/523-8240
Benton	541/766-6756	541/766-6757
Clackamas	503/655-8510	503/655-8461
Clatsop	503/325-8511	503/325-9307
Columbia	503/397-7214	503/397-7266
Coos	541/396-3121	541/396-4861
Crook	541/447-6553	541/416-2145
Curry	541/247-7011	541/247-6440
Deschutes	541/388-6546	541/389-6830
Douglas	541/440-4252	541/440-4408
Gilliam	541/384-2311	541/384-2166
Grant	541/575-1675	541/575-2248
Harney	541/573-6641	541/573-8370
Hood River	541/386-1442	541/387-6864
Jackson	541/774-6148	541/776-7028
Jefferson	541/475-4451	541/475-4454
Josephine	541/474-5243	541/474-5246
Klamath	541/883-5134	541/885-6757
Lake	541/947-6006	541/947-6015
Lane	541/682-4234	541/682-2303
Lincoln	541/265-4131	541/265-4950
Linn	541/967-3831	541/926-5109
Malheur	541/473-5151	541/473-5523
Marion	503/588-5041	503/588-5383
Morrow	541/676-9061	541/676-9876
Multnomah	503/988-3720	503/988-3719
Polk	503/623-9217	503/623-0717
Sherman	541/565-3606	541/565-3312
Tillamook	503/842-3402	503/842-1599
Umatilla	541/278-6254	541/278-5467
Union	541/963-1006	541/963-1013
Wallowa	541/426-4543	541/426-5901
Wasco	541/296-6159	541/298-3607
Washington	503/846-8670	503/693-4854
Wheeler	541/763-2400	541/763-2026
Yamhill	503/434-7518	503/434-7520
Secretary of State Elections Division	503/986-1518	503/373-7414



# How Vote by Mail Works

Vote by mail (VBM) packets are mailed to all eligible voters. Each packet contains a secrecy envelope, ballot return envelope and ballot. Ballots cannot be forwarded. Those ballots that are undeliverable are returned to the county election office.



Any time after the ballots are mailed, if a registered voter has not received a ballot, the voter may call the county election office and request a replacement ballot. If the voter is qualified, the ballot will immediately be mailed.

Each ballot is checked upon return to its respective county election office.



- Outer envelope signatures are verified using an electronic signature on computer, or by comparing each signature by hand to the most current registration on file.
- Voter signatures are verified on each return envelope. If a signature cannot be verified, the ballot is set aside for further investigation. If the envelope is not signed, an effort is made to contact the voter.
- Once verified, the ballots are sorted by precinct.

***All outer envelopes are kept sealed until the Thursday before the election.***

The county election boards begin opening the outer envelopes, one precinct at a time.

- The secrecy envelope is separated from the outer envelope.
- Outer envelopes are retained by precinct and serve as the “poll book.”
- The secrecy envelope is opened. Election boards unfold and straighten the ballots.
- Each ballot is pre-inspected to check for irregularities and prepared for the tallying process.



***Ballots are held for counting until election day.***



Counting of ballots begins on election day. The first results are released after 8:00 p.m. Nearly all ballots will be tallied immediately following the close of the election.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is vote by mail?

Vote by mail is a method of distributing ballots for an election. Instead of using traditional polling places where voters go to cast ballots on election day, a ballot is mailed to each registered voter. The ballot is then voted and returned to the county election office to be counted.

If you need a private, secure place to mark your ballot, contact your county election office. Every county provides privacy booths where ballots can be voted. Usually, you can drop off your completed ballot at the same location.

## Why are elections conducted by mail?

- Increases voter participation.
- Removes barriers that can keep people from getting to the polls.
- Allows more time for people to study issues and candidates before marking the ballot.
- Saves taxpayer dollars.
- Has built-in safeguards that increase the integrity of the elections process.

## As a registered voter, what do I have to do?

If your registration is current, your ballot packet will automatically be mailed to you. Inside the packet you will find the ballot, a secrecy envelope and a return envelope. Once you vote the ballot, place it in the secrecy envelope and seal it in the pre-addressed return envelope. Be sure you **sign** the return envelope on the appropriate line. After verifying that the return envelope has your name and current address, simply return the ballot either by mail or at a designated drop site.

## When are the ballots mailed to the voters?

In Oregon, ballots will be mailed any time between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> days before an election.

## I will be out of town when the ballots are mailed. How do I get a ballot?

Absentee ballots are available 45 days before the election. You may request an early absentee ballot from your county election official either in person, by mail or by fax. You will need to include your name, residence address and, if different, your mailing address.

## What if my ballot doesn't come?

If you have not received your ballot within a week after they are mailed, call your county election office. They will check that your voter registration is current. If it is, they will mail you a replacement ballot.

## What if I have moved and have not updated my registration?

If you were registered to vote by the 21<sup>st</sup> day before the election, but now have a different address, you may contact the county election office. They will instruct you as to available options.

## How do I get information about the candidates and issues?

You will receive a voters' pamphlet from the Secretary of State for all statewide elections. Many counties also produce a local voters' pamphlet, which is either included with the state pamphlet or mailed separately. In local elections, the county may include a county pamphlet with the ballot.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## What if I make a mistake?

If you make a mistake, you may call your county election office and request a replacement ballot. One will be mailed to you provided the request is received with sufficient time for mailing. Otherwise, you may pick up a replacement ballot in person at your county election office.

Your ballot has been cast as soon as you deposit it in the mailbox or at a drop site. After that, you cannot receive a new ballot to re-vote.

## Do I have to return my ballot by mail?

You have the choice of mailing your ballot or returning it to any county election office or any designated drop site in the state. The times and



locations of drop sites are published by and available from your county election official.

## How much postage is required to mail the ballot back?

Your voted ballot can usually be returned without extra postage. In those instances where additional postage is necessary, it will be clearly indicated on the ballot materials.

## When must the voted ballot be returned?

The voted ballot must be **received** in any county election office or designated drop site by 8:00 p.m. on election night.

**Postmarks do not count.**

## How do I know my ballot was received?

You may call your county election office and ask if they received your ballot. A record is kept showing each voter whose ballot has been returned.

## Will my vote still count if I forget to put my ballot into the secrecy envelope?

Yes, the ballot will still be counted.

## Can the public watch the election process?

All steps of the process are open to observation by the public. The major steps include:

- Preparation for mailing (about one month before the election).
- Ballot reception and signature verification (during the two weeks before the election).
- Opening envelopes and preparing ballots to be counted (usually starts 5 days before the election date).
- Counting ballots (election day).

## When will election results be known?

Ballot counting cannot begin until election day. Initial results are released at 8:00 p.m. election night and will continue to be updated through the evening until all ballots have been counted.

## What if I have more questions?

Call your county election official. Each office will be more than happy to assist you.

# Facts and Figures



## Oregonians like voting by mail

- Sixty-nine % of ballots cast in 1998 for vote by mail Ballot Measure 60 were “yes” votes.
- Measure 60 passed with a clear majority in each of Oregon’s 36 counties.



## VBM increases turnout and results in more citizens having a stake in their government

- Vote by mail mobilized those already predisposed to vote to turn out at higher rates, as found in a University of Michigan study in 1998.
- Participation is higher in elections conducted by mail.

1994 Regular Primary	Poll	38.0%
1995 Special Senate Primary	VBM	57.9%
1996 Presidential Preference	VBM	57.6%
1996 Regular Primary	Poll	28.4%

- Some of the most ardent supporters of VBM are busy parents who no longer have to squeeze voting in between soccer practice, fixing dinner and helping with schoolwork.
- Drop sites are also provided for voters in each county where a sealed mail ballot may be deposited, rather than mailed. These sites are open until 8 p.m. election night.



## VBM results in more thoughtful voting, enhancing the democratic process

- When a voter receives a ballot in the mail two weeks before an election, it is a tangible reminder that an election is imminent.
- One of the most often cited benefits of VBM is the opportunity voters have to sit with spouses, friends, co-workers and children to discuss the issues and contests on the ballot.
- Another cited benefit is a chance to consult the voters’ pamphlet while marking a ballot. Many voters find contests and measures on the ballot that they were not expecting. At the polls, this circumstance may have forced voters to make an uninformed choice.



## VBM offers greater procedural integrity

- Each voter must seal the marked ballot and return it to the elections office in a signed “ballot return envelope.” Each signature must match the original on the voter’s registration card before the ballot can be counted. This safeguard was not in place for poll elections in Oregon.
- VBM elections provide increased validity of voter registration addresses, as ballot envelopes cannot be forwarded if they are not properly addressed. Any envelope not properly addressed is returned to the county election office.
- In a VBM election, fewer temporary workers are required and all ballot preparation is done under the close supervision of the election clerk – a precaution logistically impossible in a polling place election.

# Facts and Figures

## VBM does not favor either of the major political parties and negates fears of undue influence

- A 1998 University of Michigan study found that there was no direct impact of VBM on the mobilization or retention of Democrats more than Republicans, or vice versa, in the political process.
- Oregon has prosecuted only four cases of fraud since VBM's inception.
- A study conducted by an Oregon political scientist in 1984 found no evidence of illegal influence. A 1996 study found less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one percent felt pressured to vote a certain way.

## VBM benefits voters

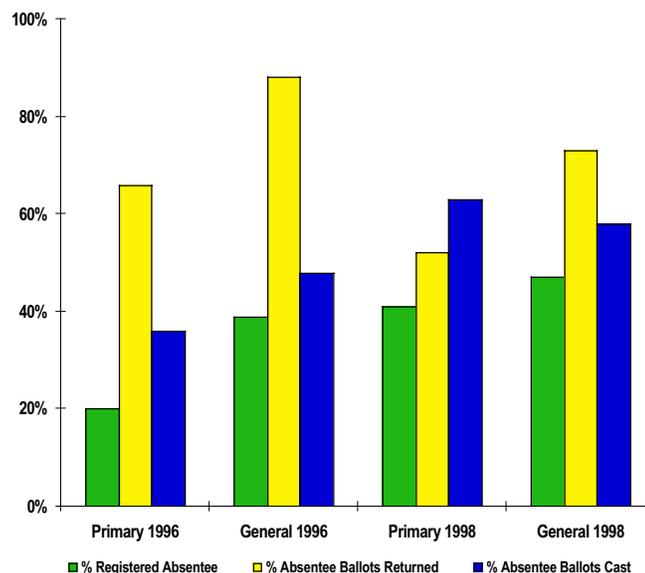
- As VBM ballots are received in election offices, counties match the signatures on the outer envelopes with the voter registration card on file, using either an automated signature database or manually checking the voter registration card. These signatures serve as a virtual 'poll book.' Even though the ballots are neither opened nor counted at this time, candidates are still able to access data as to who has and has not voted on a day-to-day basis for two weeks prior to the election.

## VBM saves taxpayer dollars

- The total election cost in the 1998 primary election was \$3,396,272. The total election cost in the 2000 primary election was \$2,812,481, saving Oregonians \$583,791.
- Reductions in the number of temporary staff needed for polling place work account for the majority of these savings.

# Absentee Voter History

Election	Number of Registered Voters	Registered Absentee	Absentee Ballots Returned	Voted Absentee in Election
Primary 1996	1,851,499	20%	66%	36%
General 1996	1,962,155	39%	88%	48%
Primary 1998	1,909,798	41%	52%	63%
General 1998	1,965,736	47%	73%	58%



# Candidate Deadlines: 2000 Elections



*State Capitol at night.*

## Major Party Candidate Filing Deadline 2000 Primary Election

5:00 p.m., March 7, 2000

## Candidates Other than Major Party Filing Deadline 2000 General Election

5:00 p.m., August 29, 2000

## State Voters' Pamphlet Filing Deadlines 2000 Elections

Primary Election      5:00 p.m., March 9, 2000

General Election      5:00 p.m., August 29, 2000

# Schedule of Campaign Finance Accounting Periods & Filing Deadlines: 2000 Primary and General Elections Only

Required Reports	May 16, 2000 Primary Election	November 7, 2000 General Election
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Pre-Election Report*</b>		
Accounting Period	From: * To: April 6, 2000	From: * To: September 28, 2000
Filing Period	NST: April 7, 2000 NLT: April 17, 2000	NST: September 29, 2000 NLT: October 9, 2000
New Transaction Deadline	May 16, 2000	November 7, 2000
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Pre-Election Report</b>		
Accounting Period	From: April 7, 2000 To: May 7, 2000	From: September 29, 2000 To: October 29, 2000
Filing Period	NST: May 8, 2000 NLT: May 11, 2000	NST: October 30, 2000 NLT: November 2, 2000
New Transaction Deadline	June 9, 2000	December 4, 2000
<b>Supplement to 2<sup>nd</sup> Pre-Election Report**</b>		
Accounting Period	From: May 8, 2000 To: May 14, 2000	From: October 30, 2000 To: November 5, 2000
Filing Period	NST: May 8, 2000 NLT: May 15, 2000	NST: October 30, 2000 NLT: November 6, 2000
<b>Post Election Report</b>		
Accounting Period	From: May 8, 2000 To: June 5, 2000	From: October 30, 2000 To: November 27, 2000
Filing Period	NST: June 6, 2000 NLT: June 15, 2000	NST: November 28, 2000 NLT: December 7, 2000
New Transaction Deadline	July 14, 2000	January 5, 2001
<b>Supplement to Post Election Report***</b>		
Accounting Period		From: November 28, 2000 To: December 31, 2000
Filing Period		NST: January 2, 2001 NLT: January 5, 2001
<b>Supplemental Report****</b>		
Accounting Period	From: June 6, 2000 To: September 1, 2000	From: November 28, 2000 To: September 1, 2001
Filing Period	NST: September 2, 2000 NLT: September 11, 2000	NST: September 2, 2001 NLT: September 10, 2001
New Transaction Deadline	October 10, 2000	October 9, 2001

Abbreviations: NST means Not Sooner Than and NLT means Not Later Than

\* The accounting period begins on the date the first contribution is received or the first expenditure is made, whichever is sooner, or on the day following the last day of the accounting period for a post-election or supplemental report filed for a previous election.

\*\* If a candidate, principal campaign committee or political committee receives \$500.01 (or more) in aggregate contributions from one source during the period beginning on the 8<sup>th</sup> day before the election and ending on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day before the election, the candidate, principal campaign committee or political committee must file a supplement to the 2<sup>nd</sup> pre-election report which discloses all contributions which exceed an aggregate of \$500 during this accounting period.

\*\*\* If a candidate, principal campaign committee or political committee affiliated with a candidate for the offices of Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Treasurer, Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries, State Senator or State Representative or a political committee affiliated with a political party, caucus of either house of the Legislative Assembly receives \$500.01 (or more) in aggregate contributions from one source during the period beginning the 21<sup>st</sup> day after the election and ending on December 31<sup>st</sup>, the candidate or principal campaign committee must file a supplement to the post-election report which discloses all contributions which exceeded an aggregate of \$500 during this accounting period.

\*\*\*\* A candidate or political committee who was active in the primary election and will be continuing their account to the general election does not need to file a supplemental report during the even-numbered year. The ending balance of the post-election report for the primary election must be the beginning balance for the first pre-election report for the general election.

# Oregon Vote by Mail (VBM) History

