



Steve Simon

Mail-in voting needed in Minnesota's current health emergency and democracy emergency

April 24, 2020

Watch and listen to the April 24, 2020, Civic Caucus Zoom interview of Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon. Connect to the Zoom recording [here](#).

Dear Readers,

Like so many other organizations, the Civic Caucus has changed its way of doing business during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order. Instead of our traditional in-person interviews, we've joined the world of Zoom meetings. We've conducted three Zoom interviews.

Our latest, the April 24, 2020, interview of Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon, addresses the issue of assuring that Minnesotans could vote safely in both the August primary election and the November general election.

In the interview, Simon says the average number of people voting at each in-person polling site across Minnesota is 1,000 people, with many more voting at certain sites. He says we need to put a sizeable dent in that number during the August primary election and the November general election. We're in a health emergency, he says, and a democracy emergency. He says many people might choose not to go to polling sites because of health concerns and it might be difficult to get election judges to work at the polls.

Simon says about 24 percent of Minnesota voters currently vote by absentee ballot. Even if that percentage went up to 50 percent this summer and fall, he says, there would still be an average of 500 people voting at each of the state's polling sites.

Simon has proposed to the Legislature that Minnesota allow an expansion of mail-in balloting-for 2020 only-to include all registered voters in the state. He said currently 130,000 voters in the state are allowed to cast mail-in ballots-those living in any township outside the seven-county metro area and those living in cities with fewer than 400 registered voters. Under a statewide mail-in balloting system, he said, ballots would automatically be sent by mail to *all* registered voters in the state. Voters could then return the ballots by mail, with the ballots required to arrive before or on election day, or they could vote at an in-person polling site, although there would be many fewer polling sites set up.

Simon says a mail-in balloting system differs from our current absentee ballot system. Under a mail-in system, every registered voter would *automatically* receive a ballot by mail. In contrast, he says, voters must *proactively apply* for an absentee ballot to be mailed to them.

Simon discusses the possibility of mail-in voting and other election changes he's proposed passing the Legislature this year.