



Kim Wyman

State's gradual move to vote-by-mail elections has increased turnout without higher cost

May 15, 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. We've conducted four interviews by Zoom.

Our latest, the May 15, 2020, interview of Washington Secretary of State Kim Wyman, addresses that state's experience in adopting and using its vote-by-mail election system.

In the interview, Washington state's Secretary of State Kim Wyman, a Republican first elected in 2012, is a firm believer in election voting by mail, a system authorized in the state 15 years ago. She said vote by mail (VBM) costs about the same as traditional elections, but has made a positive difference in voter turnout, with Washington now in the top six states in turnout.

Wyman said the state's move to VBM was a gradual process that began in the 1980s:

- Before 1983, the Washington Legislature authorized "permanent absentee" ballots for voters with disabilities and those over age 65. Those voters would automatically be sent absentee ballots for every election, while all other voters would have to request an absentee ballot in writing for each election.
- In 1983, the Legislature allowed special elections to be conducted by mail ballot.
- In 1991, the Legislature expanded the permanent absentee ballot system to allow *any* voter to join the list by request. Once on the list, they were sent ballots for every election.
- In 1993, the small-precinct VBM law was expanded to precincts with fewer than 200 voters.
- In 2005, the Washington Legislature authorized VBM for all elections, allowing counties to choose whether to adopt the system.
- In 2011, since 38 of 39 counties in the state had adopted VBM, the Legislature required VBM statewide.
- In 2018, prepaid postage for the ballot-return envelope was added. There are also drop-off locations.

Wyman discussed election security and prevention of fraud with VBM. Federal security partners and resources have helped protect elections from hacking and foreign interference, she said. Also, she said, voter fraud has been negligible. She said people's confidence in the fairness of elections is of utmost importance. "Once people lose faith in fair elections, we will have anarchy," she said.