DENISE MERRILL
SECRETARY OF THE STATE
CONNECTICUT

Election Performance Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, August 31, 2011
10:00 a.m. in the Concourse and Room 1C of the Legislative Office Building

After one hour of voting technology demonstrations in the concourse, the meeting was convened at 11:06 a.m. by Secretary of the State Denise Merrill. The following members were present:

Kevin Ahearn; Judy Beaudreau; Ted Bromley; Tony Esposito; Pua Ford; Heather Gerken; Secretary Denise Merrill; John Murphy; Therese Pac; Urania Petit; Cheri Quickmire; Peggy Reeves; Deputy Secretary James Spallone; Kachina Walsh-Weaver; Shannon Wegele

Secretary Merrill commented on the various voting technologies that were on display in the concourse. The following vendors were present. Where available, product links have been provided.

Vendor	Website	Products
Inclusion=Solutions	http://www.inclusionsolutions.com	Ballot Call
Dominion Voting Systems	http://www.dominionvoting.com	ImageCast Tabulation
PCC Technologies	http://www.pcctg.com	CT Election Results
Election Systems & Software, LHS Associates	http://www.essvote.com, http://www.lhsassociates.com	DS200 Precinct Scanner and Tabulator; DS850 Scanner and Tabulator; VoteRemote AVES
Scytl	http://www.scytl.com	BallotSafe
Decision Support	http://www.decisionsupport.com	EViD
Votec	http://www.votevotec.com	VoteSafe
Datacard Group	http://www.datacard.com	Electronic Poll Book
SOE Software	http://www.soesoftware.com	Clarity Solution
Runbeck/Sentio	http://www.runbeck.net	On Demand Ballots

She then introduced guest speaker Doug Chapin, Director of the Program for Excellence in Election Administration at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

He also continues to consult with the Pew Center on the States, where he formerly served as Director of Election Initiatives.

He has worked on both legal and policy aspects of elections for more than 25 years, including campaign experience, experience at the Federal Election Commission and at Election Data Services, Inc. His background in election issues includes redistricting, election administration, the census and campaign finance. Today he was asked to discuss what is going on around the country in terms of new technologies and new methodologies of running elections.

Mr. Chapin began by explaining that his program at the University of Minnesota focuses on identifying the next generation of election administrators across the country. The program is helping to build a profession of election administration that includes things like a common language, approach and analytical tools like other professions such as accountants have.

Regarding the national perspective, there are a couple of issues percolating. These can be followed on an ongoing basis at www.electionline.org. Policy around election administration has evolved over the last decade since the problems in 2000. In the past, election administration has focused on turnout and convenience but after 2000, there followed for 18 months a focus on accuracy, specifically regarding what could be done with machines. There was more commitment to electronic voting, along with a concern of security in the systems themselves, including hacking, malware, black box attacks, etc., all of which became familiar language in election administration. Then in 2008 and 2010, as partisanship around election issues grew, the issue of fraud came up. The two parties emphasize different things—one worries about fraud, the other about disenfranchisement. Now the issue of cost is coming up.

The recession of 2008 has created a new normal in the way the economy works, the way we think about our government, and election administration is no different. In 2011, cost is a front burner issue. Previous concerns focused on values in elections. Mr. Chapin mentioned a quotation from Oscar Wilde about cynics knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing. He said until recently, in election administration it was the opposite—people tended to know the value of everything and the price of nothing. Everything was done for security, convenience, accuracy, and so on, and cost was not a major focus.

To save $10 million, the state of Washington canceled its presidential preference primary for 2012. A couple of newly-elected officials postponed their swearings-in to save the cost of a special election. This focus on cost has also manifested in consolidating of polling places, cutting back on poll workers, limiting hours, and non-precinct place voting.

The traditional polling place is a lot less popular. One in three voters in 2008 cast his or her ballot before Election Day. It used to be that Oregon with its mail-in only voting system was an outlier but now Washington and other jurisdictions are following suit, seeing such measures as cost-saving as well. To vote in person at the neighborhood polling place on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November is becoming a choice, not a requirement. It's a trend that can't be turned back.

Another subject that is seeing an increase in interest is improving the quality of voter registration lists and also improving access to registration. Arizona piloted online voter registration but now other states have followed suit. Voters are using the internet more and more and states will move to make services available online as a result.

Returning to the focus on cost, Mr. Chapin predicted the emergence of a buyer's market, as opposed to the seller's market that existed after Help America Vote Act money infused the system. A shrinking vendor base juxtaposed with increasing demand from voters, journalists and election administrators is causing this. A focus on return on investment will be an election official's best friend.

In order to be ready for the new reality, he suggests that we look at our election codes and make the laws match the reality on the ground. The new explosion of online voting, for instance, has made many election statutes obsolete. Second, we need to learn to love data—to take an empirical approach to election administration. Across the country, no one is measuring the cost of elections. One reason we focus on turnout is that it is the only statistic we regularly collect.

If we collect other data, knowing what is going right and wrong in the election system can help to inform decisions down the line. One thing the Humphrey School of Public Affairs hopes to do is work with election officials across the country to collect data in a way that it doesn't become a chore but that election officials have an active voice in what kind of data is needed to go from what we have to what we want to see in the future.

Mr. Chapin urged the task force to remember the relationship with the voter. As society becomes more mobile and relationships between organizations become more complex, we need to find a way to focus on individual voters. We are past the point where we can expect voters to come to us on one day. We now need to manage things like open data standards or uptime of websites. He urged us to learn to love the techies. As the field becomes more complex, we need to find a way to make the process simple for the individual voter. Voters are more aware of elections being a process rather than a one day event than they ever have been before, and they need us to provide them with information.

Mr. Chapin then took questions from the members of the task force.

Secretary Merrill was very interested in what other states are doing, particularly around online voter registration systems. Mr. Chapin acknowledged the concern of privacy around this issue— we need to be sure that the voter's information won't be compromised by providing it online. He also pointed to Arizona as a good model for online registration. They use voters' driver's license numbers to allow online voter registration. This interaction with another state database also serves as a way to validate the voter while protecting his or her information. Mr. Chapin also warned about uptime: Arizona recently had a big storm that took out the state mainframes including the voter system. This was near a registration deadline, meaning that if a voter was trying to meet that deadline, he or she would have to print paper registrations. Voters should always still have access to the registration system if power and/or computers go down; the system should be robust.

Mr. Chapin said he could recommend states for us to reach out to. Judy Beaudreau mentioned that Arizona's state and county election officials work together so that would be a good thing to look at.

In response to a question from Deputy Secretary Spallone, Mr. Chapin cited research done by Professor Paul Gronke through his Early Voting Information Center (http://www.earlyvoting.net/). Based on this and other research, some states are shortening the length of their voting processes. In order to determine the best window length for voting, he urged the task force to look at this data and see when most early ballots are returned.

Regarding the behavior of early voters, Mr. Chapin said they tend to be older, better educated and more partisan. By voting early, they are forfeiting their right to change their minds. California allows voters to hold onto their vote by mail ballot and drop it off in person on Election Day at any polling place—not just their own.

Regarding the behavior of candidates in response to early voting, Mr. Chapin commented that the longer ballots are in the field, the longer hard-hitting campaigns will be in the field. Campaigns tend to focus on getting early ballots completed by those who they know will support their candidate so they can focus on the undecided voters come Election Day.

Mr. Chapin also mentioned a story that Professor Gronke related to him about his personal experience with Oregon's mail-in early voting. Prof. Gronke found himself inundated with multiple candidate mailings on a daily basis during the first campaign season he spent in the state. About a week before the election he made up his mind and sent his ballot in. Two days later, the mailings stopped. What happened was that his ballot had hit the election office, they had notified the campaigns that it had hit the election office and the campaigns decided to stop spending their dollars on Prof. Gronke's vote since he had already made up his mind.

Early voting was a big aspect of the 2008 Presidential election. After the Wisconsin primary, then-Senator Obama was shown on camera thanking the local voters and dignitaries that were onstage with him. Then he turned to the cameras and reminded Texas voters that early voting in their state "starts tomorrow."

In terms of candidate and campaign behavior, there hasn't been a trend toward more negative or more positive campaigning; the nature of the campaign won't be affected, but rather the timing of the release of things may be. Early voting tends to make the campaign season longer.

In response to a question about whether the new plethora of independent expenditures might be increased or decreased in a state based on early voting behavior, Mr. Chapin said that any time ballots are in the field, they may attract money. However, he feels that electoral law has little to no impact on the nature of campaigns, just on the timing.

Secretary Merrill asked if any state has done early voting in the form of just the Saturday before Election Day and whether there is any cost benefit to how long before Election Day early voting occurs. Mr. Chapin said that much like we don't have data on the cost of elections in general, we don't have a lot of data on the cost of early voting. He mentioned that North Carolina has one-

stop voting, where voters can register and vote at the same time up to the Saturday before Election Day. Most states that have gone to early voting have layered it on top of their existing processes, giving voters multiple modes. Oregon, on the other hand, went from a multi-layered system to the single point of entry of vote by mail. As we learn more about which voters use what kind of process, we can make decisions about how much money we will put toward the different modes. At this point, it appears that younger voters like nontraditional voting places, whereas older voters prefer the Norman Rockwell-like neighborhood polling place on Election Day.

Secretary Merrill asked if generally younger voters prefer mail-in or non-precinct-place voting, might we see a decrease in turnout if we don't embrace these new technologies? Mr. Chapin doesn't think that election law affects turnout. However, if you make something new available and then take it away, that can have an effect on turnout.

Heather Gerken mentioned the amount of tension around where things should be located in terms of decision-making power (centrally versus locally) and compared it to the issue of online registration, which seems to have everyone's support. She asked if there are other easy questions or rules of thumb regarding what should belong to local versus state.

Mr. Chapin responded that there are some emerging best practices and there is general agreement around making information available to voters (for instance making sure voters get to the right place on Election Day). States and localities are seeing the benefits of cost-sharing like buying in bulk. There is interest in standardization if not outright uniformity of procedure so that if a voter goes to a polling place at any location in the state, the experience will be pretty much the same. We are also starting to see a growing interest in using other sources of information—especially state information—to smooth out the process. Partnerships with motor vehicle departments and social service agencies are cropping up.

Ms. Beaudreau said that the data she's seen on early voting and mail-in ballots shows that while turnout may not be increasing because of these, that more people are voting early or by mail than are showing up at the polls. Mr. Chapin agreed that if you think of voters as a pie, the piece of the pie that accounts for early voting and the piece accounting for mail-in ballots are both growing.

John Murphy asked how states that have electronic signatures handle the comparison of signatures that are collected on petitions. Mr. Chapin said he would have to get back to the task force on that. Even in states that allow electronic signatures, it is still an issue how they compare it to wet ink signatures or whether they do.

Secretary Merrill asked about whether further data exists on Election Day or same day registration. Mr. Chapin said that this is a hot topic. Maine recently repealed their same day registration and there is now a referendum brought by the people to restore it. There are also debates in Minnesota and Iowa about how to continue it. It's going to get folded into the larger concerns about how we validate people and how we manage voter lists in conjunction with other government data.

Secretary Merrill commented that to implement same day registration without a good statewide voter file would be more difficult so we should focus first on getting a more accurate voter file. Mr. Chapin agreed that to undertake such a large change without confidence in the voter list would be very hard.

Kevin Ahearn mentioned that Doug's statements that changing where and when we vote doesn't increase turnout make him wonder what the value in changing the system is, as opposed to the cost and security issues these changes would cause. Mr. Chapin said that the focus needs to be on providing a better experience to people who do come to the process as opposed to increasing turnout. The value is better customer service to those who come through the door, and there may be a secondary effect of nonvoters hearing how easy it has become to vote.

Secretary Merrill commented that she had heard that Oregon's voter turnout is higher largely because of their mail-in system. Mr. Chapin agreed that Oregon's turnout is higher than most but questioned how much voting by mail has to do with this. While it has had some effect, he doesn't know whether you can say that single thing has driven Oregon to the high turnout it has today. He cited a Seattle Times article about King County, Washington, titled "Voting by Mail Fails to Increase Turnout," where they have been doing mail-in voting for six years. The article cited a report that found it had no impact on voter turnout but it also cited a drop in cost per voter, the number of uncounted ballots went to almost zero, and folks were much more able to access a ballot than they had been before. There are other benefits besides increased voter turnout to look at when deciding to make a change to the system.

Kachina Walsh-Weaver raised the issue of voter confidence and any obstacles or barriers to addressing this with the new types of election systems. Mr. Chapin said that Charles Stewart of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who has studied voter confidence, found that people whose candidates won tended to be more confident in the system than those whose candidate lost. Mr. Chapin suggested that we look at ways to measure satisfaction rather than confidence—this information would be more valuable than just measuring how confident people are.

Tony Esposito brought up what information is on the ballot. Connecticut has pretty simple ballots but some states' ballots can contain questions that are really difficult to read through and understand. Mr. Chapin commented that wording on ballots needs to be at the eighth grade reading level. You can't overstate the need to make things as simple as possible for the voter.

Secretary Merrill agreed that the importance of voter education cannot be overemphasized. It is a place where maybe we should spend a lot more time and money. Mr. Chapin said that voting education should include things like how the machine works, what registration does, how to change addresses, and what happens at the polls. Secretary Merrill reminded the task force of earlier member comments about the need to reach into communities with traditionally lower voter turnout and educate them to help bring them into the process.

Pua Ford asked about research on overseas military voting. The Pew Center on the States, the Overseas Vote Foundation, and the Federal Voting Assistance Program are good sources of information on this topic. There is a lot of data on this.

Therese Pac asked about research on the difference between voting by mail versus early voting in person. Mr. Chapin referred her to earlyvoting.net for this information.

Secretary Merrill asked about a project she had heard Pew was involved in around accessing national databases as a way to ensure accuracy of voter lists. Mr. Chapin confirmed that Pew is looking at a data exchange between states that would help localities to maintain their lists when people move. Information sharing between states is a promising thing going forward and it can be cost-effective if everyone buys into one system across states.

Secretary Merrill asked if anyone has collected data on costs and cost effectiveness of elections. Mr. Chapin said that we know next to nothing about what it costs to run an election in this country. The only way to get access to that data is to start collecting it. One problem is how to make the various jurisdictional budgets comparable.

Secretary Merrill pointed out that ballot costs became an issue in our state after the November 2010 election. Now we are trying to find ways to be more cost-effective in this area, but it is hard to figure out if it would be more cost-effective to do, for instance, on-demand ballots because of the variance in costs between towns.

In closing, Mr. Chapin said that the Election Performance Task Force really has an opportunity to completely rethink the electoral process and he would be happy to help in any way he can down the line.

The next meeting will take place at 1:00 p.m. on Monday, September 19 in room 1E of the Legislative Office Building. Additional meetings are tentatively scheduled for 10:00 a.m. on Monday, September 26; 10:00 a.m. on Friday, October 7; and 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, October 19.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:28 p.m.