

TRANSCRIPT OF "PADILLA" AUDIO FILE

7-30-18

>> HI. I'M RUSSELL RAWLINGS, AND I'M WITH DISABILITY VOTE CALIFORNIA. I'M HERE TODAY WITH SECRETARY OF STATE ALEX PADILLA, AND WE ARE GOING TO BE HAVING A SHORT DISCUSSION ABOUT VOTING AND VOTING ACCESS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

I REALLY APPRECIATE THE TIME YOU HAVE TAKEN TODAY.

>> ABSOLUTELY. ABSOLUTELY.

>> FOR MANY CALIFORNIANS WITH DISABILITIES, NOVEMBER WILL BE THEIR FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO CAST A VOTE. WHAT – SO LET'S START WITH THE BASICS. HOW CAN PEOPLE REGISTER TO VOTE, AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER THEY REGISTER?

>> YOU KNOW, REGISTERING TO VOTE IS STEP ONE TO VOTING IN CALIFORNIA, AND WE ARE ADDING MORE OPTIONS AND MORE WAYS TO BECOME A REGISTERED VOTER. FIRSTS, THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS. TO VOTE IN CALIFORNIA, YOU HAVE TO BE A CITIZEN, YOU HAVE TO BE 18 YEARS OR OLDER.

AND ONCE UPON A TIME IT MEANT HAVING TO FIND A FORM AT A GOVERNMENT OFFICE, A POST OFFICE, A LIBRARY, SOMETHING LIKE THAT , FILLING IT OUT AND SENDING IT IN. BUT WE HAVE ALSO CREATED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION, AN ACCESSIBLE WEBSITE AT REGISTERTOVOTE.CA.GOV. OR YOU CAN JUST GO TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S WEBSITE AND CLICK "ELECTIONS" AND FIND THE INFORMATION EASILY.

AND WE HAVE NOW ALSO INCORPORATED AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION FOR PEOPLE CONDUCTING TRANSACTIONS AT DMV. IF YOU ARE GETTING YOUR I.D., FOR EXAMPLE, CHANGING YOUR ADDRESS, YOU ARE AFFORDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO REGISTER TO VOTE AUTOMATICALLY AT DMV AS WELL.

>> ALL RIGHT. GREAT.

CALIFORNIA'S DISABILITY COMMUNITY IS DIVERSE AND WIDESPREAD. JUST LIKE OUR DISABILITIES, WE COME FROM MANY DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, SPEAK MANY DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, AND LIVE IN EVERY PART OF THE STATE – RURAL, URBAN, AND EVERYWHERE IN BETWEEN.

WHAT IS YOUR OFFICE GOING TO DO TO ENSURE THAT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE ARE ABLE TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE?

>> ABSOLUTELY. SO VOTING IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT. THAT APPLIES TO EVERYBODY, REGARDLESS OF ABILITY. AND SO WE MAKE SURE THAT WE HAVE ACCESSIBILITY INCORPORATED INTO EVERY STEP OF THE WAY, WHETHER IT'S OUR VOTER REGISTRATION OPPORTUNITIES ONLINE, WHETHER IT'S HOW PEOPLE GET THEIR INFORMATION, RIGHT?

EVERY YEAR BEFORE THE ELECTION, EVERY HOUSEHOLD WITH A REGISTERED VOTER RECEIVES A VOTER INFORMATION GUIDE. THAT IS NOT JUST MAILED, YOU KNOW, ON PAPER, BUT WE HAVE ONLINE VERSIONS AND ACCESSIBLE VERSIONS, AUDIO VERSIONS, LARGE PRINT VERSIONS, ET CETERA, AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST OR ONLINE AS WELL.

WE TAKE A LOT OF INPUT FROM LEADERS AS YOURSELF AND FROM THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY, HELPING INFORM US ON POLICY WORK. WE HAVE A VOTING ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE AT THE

SECRETARY OF STATE'S OFFICE TO HELP US ADVOCATE FOR CHANGES TO THE LAW THAT MAKES REGISTERING AND VOTING MORE ACCESSIBLE AND AVAILABLE TO EVERYBODY.

WE HAVE THINGS LIKE GRANTS TO COUNTIES TO MAKE SURE POLLING LOCATIONS ARE TRULY ACCESSIBLE FOR VOTERS WHEN THEY WANT TO GO VOTE IN PERSON. AND WE HAVE ALSO RECENTLY CERTIFIED ACCESSIBLE REMOTE VOTING SYSTEMS, SO PEOPLE WHO WANT TO VOTE IN THE COMFORT OF THEIR OWN HOME ARE ABLE TO DO SO INDEPENDENTLY AND PRIVATELY.

>> PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAVE EXTREME VARIED ACCESS NEEDS AROUND VOTING. CAN YOU TELL US WHAT ACCESSIBLE OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES.

>> I CAN. AS I MENTIONED, THERE IS – VOTERS DESERVE OPTIONS OF WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW TO VOTE. FOR PEOPLE WHO CHOOSE TO VOTE AT HOME, YOU KNOW, TECHNOLOGY WAS A LITTLE BIT OF A BARRIER UP UNTIL RECENTLY. WE RECENTLY CERTIFIED THE FIRST REMOTE ACCESSIBLE VOTING SYSTEM FOR USE IN CALIFORNIA. AND INCREASINGLY, COUNTIES ARE GOING TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTING THOSE OPPORTUNITIES.

FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO PREFER TO VOTE IN PERSON, WE ARE NOT JUST MAKING SURE THAT POLLING LOCATIONS AND VOTING EQUIPMENT IS ACCESSIBLE, WE ARE ALSO AFFORDING PEOPLE MORE FLEXIBILITY OF LOCATIONS OF WHERE TO VOTE. FIVE COUNTIES THIS YEAR ADOPTED WHAT IS KNOWN AS THE "VOTERS' CHOICE ACT." SO IN THE COUNTIES OF MADERA, SAN MATEO, NAPA, NEVADA, AND SACRAMENTO, VOTERS ACTUALLY HAVE THE OPTION OF GOING TO ANY LOCATION IN THEIR COUNTY THAT IS CONVENIENT TO THEM TO VOTE. ALL OF THEM HAVE TO BE ACCESSIBLE, AND STARTING IN 2020, WE WILL SEE MORE AND MORE COUNTIES MIGRATING TO THAT MODEL AS WELL.

YOU KNOW, I SHOULD NOTE THESE VOTING SYSTEMS YOU GO TO IT IN PERSON ARE ACCESSIBLE BY LAW. AND WE TAKE THE INPUT OF, AGAIN, ADVOCATES SUCH AS YOURSELF WHEN GOING THROUGH THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS FOR THIS EQUIPMENT.

>> YEAH, I'D JUST LIKE TO NOTE THAT MANY COUNTIES HAVE VOTER ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMISSIONS AS WELL.

>> EXACTLY.

>> AND SO I THINK THAT'S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO GET ENGAGED TALK ABOUT THAT.

THERE HAVE BEEN RECENT CHANGES TO THE VOTING LAWS IN OUR STATE. AND THESE LAWS ARE A BIT OF A GAME CHANGER FOR OUR COMMUNITY. CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW WE CAN TAKE FULL ADVANTAGES OF THESE CHANGES.

>> SURE.

>> FOR EXAMPLE, MAYBE LIKE THE ABILITY FOR OTHERS TO RETURN BALLOTS FOR FOLKS. THERE HAS BEEN SOME DISCUSSION ABOUT GROUP – GROUPS GETTING TOGETHER AND EXERCISING THEIR RIGHT COLLECTIVELY.

>> IT'S A GREAT QUESTION, BECAUSE I THINK WHAT WE ARE SEEING ACROSS THE COUNTRY FAR TOO OFTEN ARE OTHER STATES MAKING IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR ELIGIBLE VOTERS TO REGISTER TO VOTE TO BEGIN WITH. THEY ARE MAKING MORE DIFFICULT, PUTTING OBSTACLES FOR REGISTERED VOTERS TO BE ABLE TO CAST THEIR BALLOT.

YOU KNOW, IN CALIFORNIA WE ARE TRYING TO SHOW A BETTER WAY, IN THAT IT'S VERY MUCH PRO-VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL. SO NOT JUST AFFORDING MORE OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE TO BE REGISTERED TO VOTE AND FOR PEOPLE TO CAST THEIR BALLOT.

YOU KNOW, YOUR VOTE-BY-MAIL EXAMPLE I THINK IS A GREAT ONE. IT USED TO BE THE CASE THAT UNLESS YOUR BALLOT ARRIVED BY EIGHT O' CLOCK ON ELECTION NIGHT THAT YOUR VOTE WOULDN'T BE COUNTED. YOU KNOW, IF YOU MAIL YOUR BALLOT ON ELECTION DAY OR THE DAY BEFORE BUT IT DIDN'T ARRIVE TO THE COUNTY UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION, IT WASN'T ADDED TO THE TALLY. WE NOW MAKE SURE WE PROCESS THOSE AND ADD IT TO THE TALLY, SO YOUR VOTE INDEED COUNTS.

CALIFORNIA LAW WAS ALSO VERY RESTRICTIVE ON, IF YOU ARE VOTING FROM HOME, WHO COULD RETURN YOUR BALLOT FOR YOU.

>> RIGHT.

>> AND SO WE WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT – LIKE IF YOU HAVE A NEIGHBOR YOU TRUST, IF YOU HAVE A FRIEND YOU TRUSTED – ANYBODY BUT YOUR EMPLOYER OR YOUR UNION REPRESENTATIVE CAN NOW RETURN YOUR BALLOT FOR YOU. JUST SIGN APPROPRIATELY ON THE ENVELOPE. AGAIN, TO MAKE SURE WE ARE FACILITATING VOTING AND THAT YOUR VOTE INDEED COUNT, IS REALLY FUNDAMENTAL.

I COME FROM THE BELIEF THAT OUR DEMOCRACY IS STRONGEST WHEN AS MANY ELIGIBLE VOTERS PARTICIPATE. AND SO THAT HAS GUIDED OUR POLICY WORK, TO MAKE SURE WE ARE PUTTING MORE OPTIONS, MORE CONVENIENCE, MORE ACCESS FOR VOTERS IN CALIFORNIA.

>> SOMETIMES THINGS DO NOT GO ACCORDING TO PLAN, OF COURSE. WHEN CALIFORNIANS WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE BARRIERS WHEN VOTING, WHAT CAN WE DO? WHO CAN WE GO TO AND ENSURE THAT WE ARE ABLE TO EXERCISE OUR RIGHT TO VOTE?

>> SO, ABSOLUTELY. AFTER ALL, WE LIVE IN THE REAL WORLD. THINGS HAPPEN. WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT WE GO THROUGH EVERY EFFORT WE CAN TO ENSURE PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO CAST THEIR BALLOT ON ELECTION DAY.

SO IF IT'S A NON-URGENT ISSUE – YOU KNOW, WELL AHEAD OF THE ELECTION – YOU CAN CALL OUR OFFICE. YOU CAN EVEN GIVE IDEAS TO THE VOTING ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE AT THE STATE LEVEL OR THE COUNTY LEVEL, TO CONSIDER CERTAIN ISSUES.

BUT WHEN WE ARE UP ON AN ELECTION, WHETHER IT'S THE LAST FEW DAYS OR ON ELECTION DAY ITSELF, WE DO SET UP A VOTER HOTLINE AT THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S OFFICE. IT'S A 1-800 NUMBER, 345-VOTE. AND WE ARE ABLE TO QUICKLY RESPOND TO ANY ISSUES THAT HAPPEN AT A POLLING PLACE, WORK WITH COUNTIES TO MAYBE SEND SOMEBODY TO A VOTER'S HOME IF THERE'S AN ISSUE WITH A BALLOT OR RETURNING THE BALLOT APPROPRIATELY. WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT BY THE TIME THE POLLS CLOSE ON ELECTION DAY, THAT EVERY VOTER WHO WANTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CAST THEIR BALLOT IS ABLE TO DO SO.

>> GREAT. THAT'S A REAL COMMITMENT TO ENSURING THERE IS ASSURANCE THAT EVERYONE IS ABLE TO CAST A VOTE. THAT'S GREAT.

DISABILITY VOTE CALIFORNIA IS CURRENTLY LOOKING FOR PEOPLE TO VOLUNTEER TO HELP REGIONAL TEAMS ENGAGE VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO CALIFORNIANS WHO ARE CONSIDERING SIGNING UP AS TEAM MEMBERS?

>> WE NEED YOUR HELP, RIGHT? JUST AS I MENTIONED, OUR DEMOCRACY IS STRONGEST WHEN AS MANY PEOPLE PARTICIPATE. YOU CAN ALSO THINK OF SOME OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS. ABRAHAM LINCOLN. ABRAHAM LINCOLN, RIGHT? GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE. WE CAN'T EXPECT GOVERNMENT TO BE FOR THE PEOPLE IF IT ISN'T OF THE PEOPLE, WHICH MEANS WE ALL NEED TO ENGAGE – NOT JUST AS POTENTIAL VOTERS AND REGISTERED VOTERS AND ACTIVE VOTERS, BUT WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP INFORM AND EMPOWER ALL OF OUR FRIENDS, ALL OF OUR FAMILY MEMBERS, OUR NEIGHBORS, OUR CO-WORKERS, EVERY SINGLE AMERICAN, TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR DEMOCRACY.

>> ALL RIGHT. I JUST WANT TO THANK YOU VERY MUCH, SECRETARY PADILLA.

FOR THOSE OF YOU WATCHING WHO WOULD LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR COALITION AND OUR WORK, PLEASE VISIT US ON THE WEB AT DISABILITYVOTECA.ORG.