

Miller plan to modernize voting rolls is a good step

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ISSUE: Identifying voters

OUR VIEW: There's nothing new about asking voters to prove their identities at the polls. Secretary of State Ross Miller's plan to add a digital photo to poll books would modernize the process.

There is nothing new about expecting voters to prove their identities when they go to the polls.

We've been doing it in Nevada for decades.

Voters sign on the dotted line when they register, and they sign again before they vote. Poll workers are tasked with comparing the two signatures and verifying that the voters are who they say they are.

And the system has worked pretty well. Voter impersonation has been rare in Nevada. In the November presidential election, there was just one reported case — a woman tried to “test” the system (she said) by voting a second time; she failed.

Even in the well-publicized case of falsified registration applications submitted to the activist group ACORN in Southern Nevada several years ago, for which ACORN was prosecuted, no one was ever accused of voting illegally. The applications were rejected (and the problems were the result of a few canvassers faking names to collect bounties paid by ACORN, not because of anyone wanting to vote illegally).

So there's no voting crisis in Nevada that needs a quick fix, such as the legislation passed in several states recently requiring voters to show a photo I.D.

But Secretary of State Ross Miller is right that the system can, and should, be updated with modern technology, and there's time to do it right.

Adding an easily obtained and reproduced digital photo to the voter books used at the state's polling places would add a level of security without burdening voters or suppressing the vote. When Miller's proposal is refined to determine exactly what it would cost to implement, the Nevada Legislature should approve it.

Twenty years ago, Miller's proposal would have been nearly impossible to implement, and certainly very expensive.

The dawn of digital photography has changed all that. The Department of Motor Vehicles is already using digital photographs for driver's licenses and photo IDs. Miller estimates that 98 percent of all Nevada voters in Nevada have a digital photo on file at the DMV. (Many residents also start the voter registration process at the DMV, so the agency is already working with election officials.)

For those who don't have a DMV photo available, Miller proposes taking their photograph at the poll when they vote for the first time. How expensive that would be isn't clear (an iPhone for each precinct?), but the estimated cost of Miller's proposals has ranged from \$10 million to \$20 million. Moving ahead with the plan would have to compete with the many other priorities for funding from the Legislature.

The voting process has been slow to adapt to modern technology. It took the “hanging chads” fiasco in the 2000 presidential election in Florida to convince most states of the need to modernize their voting systems, and 12 years later some voters still are wary about today's computerized voting.

Miller has come up with a modest plan that should satisfy both supporters and opponents of the various voter I.D. laws that have made the rounds recently without keeping potential voters away from the polls. Lawmakers should give the secretary of state a green light to refine the proposal.