

VIEWS & VOICES

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No more excuses, Hawaii: Just do it via absentee voting



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On Politics

Hawaii may actually be ahead of the curve.

A new innovation to get folks to exercise their democratic rights and vote is called "permanent absentee balloting."

This is different from the attitude of Hawaii voters who are just permanently absent from elections because they don't register to vote and even if they did register, they didn't actually vote.

Every year Hawaii is either at the bottom or close to the nadir

of voter turnout stats.

We accomplished this in 2004 with the worst turnout among the 50 states, as we did in 2008. In 2006 we were just in the bottom five.

In the last election, while more than 60 percent of Americans registered to vote, only 53 percent of Hawaii's eligible voters even bothered, according to the U.S. Census. Across the nation 49 percent of those 18 to 24 voted; it was Barack Obama's big day, remember? In Hawaii, just 25 percent of the young folks voted for anybody — so much for "Rock the Vote."

Enough of the lectures.

Here's the good news: It may just be that all you have to do is make it easy. We may be a state of voters; we may just want it without the hassle.

This spring, voters in Hawaii's 1st Congressional District win-

ner-take-all race to fill out Neil Abercrombie's term had to vote by mail.

It got a lot of media attention and it also got every voter a special ballot mailed to their homes. More than 170,000 of the 317,000 ballots were returned. That's a 54 percent return rate. The last congressional special election in Hawaii had a 13 percent voter turnout.

Hawaii's regular elections still require you to tramp down to the polls on election day to vote in person. This year, there's a new wrinkle: the permanent absentee voter.

The city is sending registered voters an application to be listed as a permanent absentee voter. Hawaii is one of just four states that have allowed this designation.

What about voter fraud? What about someone snatching your absentee ballot and voting for your most despised candidate? Very difficult to do, reports Glen Takahashi, city elections chief. "We catch all signatures that don't match," says Takahashi.

Every single absentee ballot must include your signature and every ballot signature is compared to the signature on file when you signed up to vote. If the signatures don't match, elections officials send out a query and a request to clear it up.

So send it back and in every election forward, officials will mail you an absentee ballot, you mail it back and that's it. It is vote by mail, just for you.

That's what government is doing for you. What are you doing for democracy?

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