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Testimony before the U.S. Election Assistance Commission on the subject of Oregon's Centralized Voter Registration (OCVR) Database presented by Dave Franks, HAVA & OCVR Manager.

Madame Chair and members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.

Let me give you a few numbers before I delve into the specifics of Oregon's Centralized Voter Registration Database or what we creatively call OCVR.

Oregon has a population of more than 3.7 million. The number of residents eligible to vote in Oregon elections is just less than 2.8 million. Of those more than 2.1 million, or 77%, are recorded as active registrants in OCVR. In the November election over 1.8 million votes were cast for a participation rate of 85.7% of registered voters. Our participation rate among UOCAVA voters was 75%.

Oregon began exploring the concept of a centralized registration system as early as 1999. The OCVR project began in earnest in December of 2002 with the hiring of Julie Pearson as the Project Manager. A detailed Request for Proposal (RFP) procurement process was started at that time. The RFP was released in May, 2003 and a contract was awarded to the Saber Corporation in August of that year. At that time Saber was a locally owned Oregon company. They recently were purchased by EDS, which itself has been purchased by Hewlett Packard.

A pilot system involving several Oregon counties was launched in March of 2005. All thirty-six counties went into production in January of 2006. Final acceptance of the system was granted to the contractor after successful use of the system for the May, 2006 primary election.

OCVR is a "top-down" system as defined by your Voluntary Guidance on Implementation of Statewide Voter Registration Lists publication. It also incorporates several election management functions, such as election set-up, ballot creation, ballot processing, petition processing and election results.

OCVR can electronically receive data from other voter registration agencies, such as the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA).

OCVR incorporates several features to facilitate list maintenance. Various duplicate checking functions are incorporated and National Change of Address (NCOA) information is cross-checked. In addition our office works with the local elections officials to perform additional duplicate checking examinations and other list maintenance activities.

OCVR maintains detailed registration and voting history information. Digital images of full voter registration cards are incorporated into the system. An important requirement of Oregon's Vote by Mail system is the ability to verify a voter's signature image in the OCVR system with the voter's signature on a ballot return envelope. In Oregon, every signature on every ballot return envelope is reviewed and verified using OCVR.

OCVR incorporates a number of security features and protocols to ensure the safety and integrity of the system. One of the many features includes the validation of the machine address of the personal computer used to access the system. Transactional audit logging is also incorporated.

OCVR is housed on three redundant sites in different geographical areas of the state. All three systems are mirrored and are replicated production sites.

I was asked to comment on the systems utilization in relationship to Vote by Mail. Oregon has been an all vote-by-mail state since 1998. OCVR was designed and implemented with vote by mail in mind, even though it also incorporates polling place and poll book functionality. County election officials were involved as key partners throughout the design and implementation process. This partnership continues as we work to enhance and maintain OCVR.

As I indicated earlier, an important aspect of the system is the image capture of the voter's registration card, which includes the signature. As a ballot envelope is returned a bar code is scanned and the voter's information, including the signature image, is presented on the screen for verification. Local elections officials in Oregon are trained in signature verification and detailed procedures that articulate the state's match-no match standard are in place regarding signature verification.

Vote by mail elevates the need and incentive to keep our database current and accurate. Local elections officials work diligently to keep the voter's address and other registration information up to date. We often find that our information is more up to date than NCOA or DMV data. Election materials returned by the Post Office provide the opportunity to perform list maintenance by instigating further research.

A challenge that presents itself with vote by mail is related to same day or late date registrations. Oregon has a new registration cut-off twenty-one days prior to an election. Ballots for resident voters are mailed fourteen to eighteen days prior to election day. Voters may change their existing registration information through election day (except for party changes before a primary). This can, and has, resulted in more than one ballot being provided to individual voters. OCVR is configured to track these ballots and does inform the local election official if incorrect or multiple ballots have been returned by an individual voter.

I was also asked to discuss our pilot project comparison of Oregon and Washington Voter Registration files done in August through November of 2008. Our Elections Director, John Lindback, initiated this project as part of your voter registration database study currently underway at the National Academy of Sciences. We received full cooperation and support from the Washington Elections Department.

We also included participants from the National Academies Committee on State Voter Registration Databases. They are Michael Alvarez and Jeff Jonas, Alvarez is a Professor of Political Science at the California Institute of Technology. Jonas is an IBM Distinguished Engineer. These gentlemen were very helpful in determining matching criteria and in providing feedback throughout the process.

After some initial state-wide matching, the scope of the project was limited to Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington Counties in Oregon, and Clark County in Washington. These four counties comprise the bulk of the population in the Portland metropolitan area.

A list of 1,312 individuals was produced based on matching first name, middle initial, last name and date of birth. A procedure was developed for contacting individuals on the matched list. Each state developed a contact letter. In each letter, the individual was asked if they wished to cancel their registration in the other state and a postage paid return envelope was included.

Oregon mailed to 686 individuals from the list; 650 of those mailings were delivered (95%). Of those Oregon letters that were delivered, 391 generated a response from the individual, a response rate of 60%. Of the 391 responses, 379 responses were forwarded to the appropriate county election official and resulted in cancelled Oregon voter registration records. Twelve of the responses were unresolved as they did not provide enough information.

The response data from Washington is quite similar. 626 mailings were sent to individuals by Washington, and of those 599 were delivered (96%). Of those delivered, 362 generated a response from the individual, a 60% response rate. 352 of the responses resulted in a cancellation of the individual's registration record in Clark County, Washington. Eight responses did not have enough information for resolution, and two of the responses received by Washington were forwarded to Oregon for processing. No voter was inactivated or canceled in either list without written permission.

We found that there is some latency in our state to state communication of voter movement but we were happy to find that there was little or no indication of voters purposely voting in both states. We plan to continue our work with Washington in this area and possibly expand the project.

In closing I'd like to refer to the National Academy of Sciences 2008 document: State Voter Registration Databases: Immediate Actions and Future Improvements, Interim Report.

The committee that drafted the report listed several short and long term actions for improvement that the Oregon system already conforms with. Those items include:

- Resubmission of match queries if the response from motor vehicles or Social Security Administration (AAMVA) is a non-match.
- Human review of all computer indicated removal recommendations.
- Allow selected individuals to suppress address information from public disclosure.
- Provide public access portal for online checking of voter registration status.
- Provide voter registration receipts.
- Improve the design of voter registration cards.

In addition we are in the process of implementing two additional recommendations

- Use on-line registration forms
- Allow voters to register and to update information online if a signature is already on file with a state agency.

With that I will conclude my comments and am happy to address any questions you may have.