



# Office of the Secretary of State State of Minnesota

180 State Office Bldg.  
St. Paul, MN 55155-1299

**Joan Anderson Growe**  
Secretary of State  
**Elaine Voss**  
Deputy Secretary of State

Election Division: (612)296-2805  
Business Service Information: (612)296-2803  
General Information: (612)296-3266  
UCC and Business Service Fax: (612)297-5844  
Election Division Fax: (612)296-9073

January 15, 1993

**TO:** Members of the Minnesota Legislature  
**FROM:** Joan Anderson Growe  
Secretary of State  
**SUBJECT:** REPORT ON ABSENTEE VOTING, MAIL VOTING AND CHANGE IN  
ELECTION SCHEDULE FOR BLOOMINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

I hereby submit the following reports to you as provided in Laws of Minnesota 1991, Chapter 227, Sections 9, 16 and 22.

1. Absentee Voting Without Qualification

The legislature authorized any county board to approve absentee voting without qualification during the period August 1, 1991 to November 30, 1992. The boards in Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka, Becker and Pope counties approved absentee voting without qualification in 1992.

In each county, there was an increase in the number of persons voting by absentee ballot in the 1992 state general election compared with the 1988 state general election, which was the last time the president was on the ballot, ranging from an increase of 87% in Ramsey County to an increase of 4% in Becker County.

County	Number Voting by Absentee Ballot		% Increase 1988-1992
	1988	1992	
Anoka	4,250	4,650	+ 9%
Becker	896	936	+ 4%
Hennepin	23,310	39,108	+ 68%
Pope	393	472	+ 20%
Ramsey	11,660	21,835	+ 87%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40,509</b>	<b>67,001</b>	<b>+ 65%</b>

"An Equal Opportunity Employer"

Several of the counties took additional steps to facilitate absentee voting. For example, Ramsey County established an "absentee ballot hotline", available twenty-four hours a day, which voters could use to request an absentee ballot. Staff indicated that the availability of the hotline was greatly appreciated by the voters. Several counties established longer hours for absentee voting at the auditor's office, especially on the Saturday before election day.

I would like to commend the effort made by Ramsey County in implementing this absentee voting program. They established a committee to guide their activities in 1992, made excellent suggestions to my staff on ways to simplify the forms used by the voters and provided extensive information to the public on the new program. I think the results clearly indicate the success of their efforts.

Many voters in Hennepin County noted that the opportunity to vote by absentee ballot was a convenient alternative to voting at their polling place on election day. Voters in Pope County expressed their appreciation for not having to stand in long lines on election day. Voters in other counties also commented favorably on the opportunity to vote prior to election day.

The counties reported that the costs of administering the absentee voting program did increase in 1992 due to a larger number of persons requesting absentee ballots. Increases in costs were noted for forms, postage and staff time. Hennepin County estimated that its costs increased by approximately \$63,000 in 1992. Estimated cost increases from Ramsey and Anoka counties were \$36,000 and \$11,000, respectively. Anoka County also noted that their costs likely would have been higher if election day had been after the opening of the main deer hunting season, which will be the case in 1994.

Overall, the county reaction to expanded absentee voting was favorable in that it provided greater opportunities for voting. However, they noted that some changes should be considered by the legislature. First, the forms and the process used for absentee voting, including the witness and identification requirements, should be simplified. Second, the entire absentee ballot process should be automated wherever possible. Third, voters should be encouraged to vote earlier in the process, to more effectively utilize staff resources. Finally, adequate resources need to be made available to the counties to accommodate expected increases in absentee voting in future years if the law is to be made permanent.

Based on our experience in 1992, it is my conclusion that the experiment in absentee voting without qualification was successful and should be made a permanent feature of the Minnesota election law. Accordingly, I recommend that the legislature authorize that all voters in Minnesota be afforded the opportunity to vote by absentee ballot in all elections without qualification.

I also recommend that the legislature consider changes in the absentee voting process to make it easier for the voters and for election administrators and to address the needs of the counties to pay the additional costs likely to be incurred.

Several other states, including Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oklahoma, Texas, West Virginia and Wyoming now permit their voters to cast absentee ballots for any reason. I believe Minnesota voters should have the same opportunity.

## 2. Experimental Mail Elections

The legislature authorized Ramsey and Kittson counties to conduct elections by mail on an experimental basis in 1992. No such elections were authorized by either county, although there was some discussion concerning a possible mail election in Kittson County. Several precincts in Kittson County have been voting by mail in the state primary and state general election since 1988.

Although no action was taken in 1992, I believe the concept of an all-mail election is sound. The track record of the increasing number of mail elections in Minnesota is quite encouraging from the standpoint of increasing voter participation. Accordingly, I recommend that the legislature continue to encourage the counties to utilize mail elections as they deem necessary and to authorize all counties to have the opportunity to do so.

## 3. Election Schedule for Bloomington School District

The legislature authorized the Bloomington School District to move its general election from May to November and to provide for staggered, four-year terms for the members of the school board. No action was taken by the school board to implement the provisions of this statute.

In 1990, the school board did adopt a resolution to move to the November election schedule. However, the board did not have the authority to alter the manner in which its members were to be elected. Under the current law applicable to all school districts, elections are held on an annual basis, with members elected to three-year terms.

Although no action was taken on this matter in 1992, I believe that the logical basis for the statute is sound. It is my view that the public interest is best served by uniform local government election scheduling and procedures. As a result, I recommend that, at a minimum, the legislature continue to provide opportunities for local governing bodies to change to the fall election schedule and to provide for biennial elections.