

Support expressed for voter ID reforms

by **Justin D. Anderson**
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The four candidates for Secretary of State all say that voters should have to prove their identity before voting at the polls.

Currently, West Virginia law forbids requiring voters to show identification at the polls.

The only exception is when a voter comes to the precinct for the first time and has registered to vote by mail without including a photocopy of a picture ID.

Secretary of State Betty Ireland recently criticized Ohio County election officials when she learned the county has been asking for ID at the polls for years.

Ireland said she doesn't support that because a lot of older or poor residents don't have driver's licenses and people who forget their ID likely wouldn't come back to a polling place if turned away.

Ireland is not seeking re-election, but those running to succeed her said in a meeting with the Daily Mail editorial board that voter fraud is a problem and something has to be done.

Charles Minimah, a Charleston businessman and the sole Republican in the race, said he'd continue efforts started by Ireland, like purging invalid registrants from voter lists. But he supports taking it a step further.

"Having a legitimate photo ID with a signature will eliminate some of the problems that we're dealing with now," said Minimah, 50.

He added, "Voter fraud and election fraud is a serious issue and the Secretary of State should stay on top of that."

Minimah also suggested the state might look into fingerprint scanning at the polls for voters.

Delegate Joe DeLong, current House Majority Leader and an employee at Mountaineer Racetrack Resort and Casino in Hancock County, said he supports voter identification at the polls, but doesn't want to turn voters away who don't have it.

"We should give them a provisional ballot, then give them the opportunity to prove (their identity) later on," said DeLong, 35, a former offensive lineman at WVU.

DeLong had the same fear as Ireland: that many voters sent home from the polls to retrieve identification probably wouldn't return.

Natalie Tennant, a consultant and former television reporter, said voters have to show identification at the county clerk's office when they register.

Tennant, 40, who once was the Mountaineer mascot at WVU, suggested that a photo could easily be added to voter registration cards, which could be a form of identification for those without driver's licenses or state IDs.

She also said that Ohio County's snafu shows the need for more outreach by the Secretary of State to avoid these situations.

Sen. Billy Wayne Bailey, majority whip in the state Senate and deputy director of the Wyoming County Council on Aging, believed that voters should have to identify themselves at the polls, but he said there are other options.

He pointed to the electronic books voters already have to sign at the polls.

"That technology, I think, it can be programmed to compare the signature that you sign to the signature that you sign at the county clerk's office to register," said Bailey, 56. "That's a step, too, you can take to safeguard" elections.