SECRETARY OF STATE HUSTED ANNOUNCES IN-PERSON ABSENTEE VOTING HOURS FOR 2014 PRIMARY

COLUMBUS – Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted today announced uniform days and hours for in-person absentee voting for the 2014 Primary. The announcement was made during a speech by Secretary Husted at the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAEO) Winter Conference in Columbus, Ohio, this afternoon.

The days and hours set by Secretary Husted today apply statewide and mirror a proposal put forward by the OAEO, a bipartisan group. In-person absentee voting will begin April 1, 2014, which is 35 days before Election Day, and end at noon the Saturday before the election. The hours are:

- 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, April 1, 2014, through April 4, 2014;
- 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday, April 7, 2014, (last day of voter registration, R.C. 3501.10(B));
- 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, April 8, 2014, through April 11, 2014;
- 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, April 14, 2014, through May 2, 2014; and
- 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Saturday, May 3, 2014.

Secretary Husted noted the plan put forward by the OAEO for uniform in-person absentee voting is the only proposal that has received bipartisan support.

“Today, the OAEO plan is the only voting schedule that has garnered Republican and Democratic support, balancing both access for the voter and the legitimate administrative and cost concerns for large, medium and small counties,” Secretary Husted said. “Most importantly, this plan ensures that voters in each county have the same access to the ballot.”

Secretary Husted has repeatedly urged lawmakers to pass a bipartisan plan that establishes uniform days and hours for in-person absentee voting in each election. In the absence of action by the legislature, the Secretary is setting uniform hours for in-person absentee voting for the Primary to ensure fairness and that all voters are playing by the same rules.

Also during today’s speech, Secretary Husted reiterated his commitment to do a statewide mailing of absentee ballot applications for the 2014 General Election. The Secretary also shared with attendees the importance of every vote, highlighting data recently collected by his office that found that out of 110 recounts in 65 counties, 35 local races and 8 local issues were decided by one vote or by breaking a tie during the 2013 General Election.

Secretary Husted’s comments from today’s event have been included below.

Additional Information

Directive 2014-01: Uniform Days and Hours for 2014 May Primary (PDF)

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF ELECTIONS OFFICIALS WINTER CONFERENCE REMARKS

By Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted

January 15, 2014

Thank you Shawn, Karla and all members of the Ohio Association of Election Officials. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you as we begin another new year and another important election cycle.

Looking back on the three years we have worked together, I am proud of the job you’ve done and what we’ve accomplished. In fact, I was looking back the other day and it has become quite a list – thank you!

One Vote Matters

How many times have you heard someone say “every vote matters” or “your vote can make a difference?” Well, I thought it was time to prove it.

I was reading through some of the post-election coverage. I saw a number of articles on tie votes or races decided by one vote, and began to ask the question: How many races are decided by one vote in a typical election? Nobody could answer it as there was no historical data. But I thought it was an important question that needed an answer.

So I asked my staff to review all the recounts you reported to us following the 2013 General Election. Out of 110 recounts in 65 counties, 35 local races and eight local issues were decided by one vote or by breaking a tie. In fact, the nine of diamonds elected a mayor in Licking County when, by law, the race was decided by “lot.”

Tie votes can be an election official’s worst nightmare! But not when you do it right and focus on the details – which you did. Immediately following an election, your attention is on certifying accurate results and making sure there are no mistakes. However, when you take a step back and really think about it, those figures are pretty amazing!

Just one person could have made the difference in deciding whether a school levy would pass and whether another person would have served in important local offices, like township trustee, city or village council and school board.

This is further evidence to voters that every vote can make a difference and they must take their right and responsibility to vote seriously. Every election matters. Every vote matters.

And for us elections officials, the fact that a single vote can have such a big impact in so many places is why we must focus so heavily on accuracy of the voter rolls and the integrity of the elections process. Details matter!

Close elections reinforce our mission to make it easy to vote and hard to cheat in Ohio and that is exactly what we will continue to do in 2014 and beyond.

What to Expect in 2014

I have confidence that together we will deliver another smooth and fair statewide election in 2014. The spirit of bipartisan cooperation that exists among the vast majority of board members and staff is reassuring to me as we prepare for another election year. However, when it comes to election matters, that spirit does not exist in every bipartisan body in the state!

Despite the good efforts of everyone in this room, we begin another election cycle in Ohio with some uncertainty about what the rules will be for voting. I cannot predict the future when it comes to the General Assembly and the Courts, but as Secretary of State, I will continue to push for clarity. And I will continue to make the case that sooner is better when it comes to election laws and rules so that you can adequately prepare to carry them out, respecting both the law and the voters.

Uniform & Fair Primary Hours

I have asked repeatedly for the General Assembly to set uniform hours statewide for voting during the absentee voting period, which begins in just a few short months.

Our priorities should be to give all voters equal access to their ballots no matter where they live; to provide adequate time to accommodate an increasingly busy electorate and to reduce the
chance of long lines on Election Day.

To that end and given the absence of legislative action, I am today announcing a statewide voting schedule for the Primary Election. I will send you a formal directive this week. The hours will be familiar to all of you because they reflect the bipartisan proposal this organization put forth to help spur the General Assembly to act.

Yes. This schedule for voting is your idea.

For primary voters, your proposal called for regular business hours, which will be uniform -- 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the absentee voting period, as well as hours of 8 a.m. to noon on the last Saturday before the election.

To date, your OAEQ plan is the only voting schedule that has garnered support from Republicans and Democrats, balancing both access for the voter and the legitimate administrative and cost concerns for large, medium and small counties.

Thank you for demonstrating that it is in the realm of the possible for the two parties to come together on setting elections policy.

I continue to hope that the General Assembly will follow your lead and work together to set hours to govern the November general election.

Though it has never been my preference, if the General Assembly does not pass legislation, I will set uniform hours by directive once again. I will be sending a letter to the General Assembly urging them to act and to adopt the voting schedule that was recommended by this organization.

**Statewide Mailing**

To further assist you in your planning for 2014, I also want to confirm that I will be sending absentee ballot request forms to all registered voters for the 2014 General Election.

The mailing in 2012 was a great success. It was fair and uniform for voters across the state. It made it easier for all Ohioans to vote -- they didn’t even have to leave home to cast a ballot -- and contributed to record absentee voting turnout and reduced lines on Election Day, all of which led to a smoother election overall. I believe you would all agree that these are outcomes we’d like to repeat in 2014!

**List Maintenance**

As I told the Presidential Commission when they came to Cincinnati last year, one of the primary reasons Ohio’s election was a success is because of all the work we have done to clean up and enhance our voter rolls.

It is the most important, least glamorous job you do, but accurate voter lists are the backbone of a smooth election. Voters run into fewer problems at the polls and that means shorter lines. It makes it more likely voters vote in the correct precincts and reduces chance of fraud or irregularities.

Thanks to our partnership with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, in three years we went from having complete information on approximately 20 percent of voters to 87 percent and you verified and removed more than 266,000 deceased registrants. In addition, you have been diligent on processing duplicate registrations – down from 340,000 in January 2011 to only four just before the 2013 General Election.

I want to build upon our successes using technology, data-sharing partnerships with other agencies and states, and of course, relying on your continued hard work at the county level to stay current on list maintenance.

New in 2014, under the provisions of Senate Bill 200, you will be required to contact voters who have moved since they last voted urging them to update their voting information and keep their registrations current. Under the requirements of the federal National Voter Registration Act, this has traditionally been conducted every other year in or around May. Mailing voters annually will further enhance the accuracy of our voter lists and help eligible voters to stay on the voter rolls.

Fortunately, our online change of address system makes the process both easier for the voters to update their information, and more streamlined for you as it will not require additional data entry on your parts.

We know the online system is an option voters want to take advantage of based upon the fact that nearly 140,000 people have used the system, including thousands from last year’s National Change of Address mailing who chose to go online vs. sending back the paper forms. Paper had been their only option prior to the launch of online change of address in 2012.

**Full Online Voter Registration Needed**

As the General Assembly asks us to do even more to maintain the accuracy and integrity of Ohio’s voter rolls, we must continue to ask them for the tools we need to best accomplish that task.

Full online voter registration is absolutely critical to our ability to run accurate and fair elections in the 21st Century.

Nineteen other states have or are implementing an online voter registration system and as the most important swing state in the country, we cannot afford to be second best.

The evidence is irrefutable: Online voter registration is more convenient for voters, saves money and will increase both security and accuracy in our elections system.

I ask again for your support and help in expressing that urgent action is needed from your legislators, in hopes that we can get a full online system up and running as soon as possible.

**Update on Non-citizen Voting & Irregularities**

One of the major benefits of online voter registration is that it allows us to instantaneously determine a voter’s eligibility before they are ever registered.

Had the system been in place, we could have prevented approximately 290 non-citizens who are ineligible to vote from getting on Ohio’s voter rolls in the first place. Based upon our review of available data from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, 17 of these non-citizens illegally voted in the 2012 Presidential Election, including one person who had been voting as a non-citizen since 1993.

We have referred them to the Attorney General for further investigation and possible prosecution, and sent letters to the others who didn’t vote, to ask them to remove themselves from the rolls if they have not become citizens.

Just as with the review I asked all of you to undertake following the 2012 election into potential voter fraud and voter suppression, we will continue to be vigilant.

I have said it consistently: Voter fraud is rare in Ohio, but it does exist. And when we discover it, we will hold offenders accountable.

You need only refer back to 43 contests decided by a single vote to understand why this is so important for ensuring the integrity of our elections now and in the future.

**Housekeeping**

I believe “good enough” is never good enough and that is the philosophy under which we operate in the Secretary of State’s office. We should always strive for excellence. It makes us do our jobs better and makes us feel better about our work and ourselves.

I am grateful for your willingness to work with me as we have made the necessary changes to modernize our election system. We have more work to do and I want you to know that my staff and I will continue to support you throughout 2014.

Training and idea-sharing forums like this one are critical to our ability to stay current and at the top of our game so that we consistently get things right from election to election.

In addition to the potential law changes on the horizon, you will all be welcoming new board members and staff.
Details will follow, but we plan to once again to conduct a swearing in ceremony and training sessions for new board members and staff in Columbus in late February.

Then this summer, back by popular demand, we will be coming to a town near you to conduct the summer conference training sessions. This approach allows us to provide day-long classes that are more convenient for you and your staff and less costly for your boards.

In 2012, we found that we could cover the same material in a shorter amount of time and with more board employees by holding five regional sessions. We will be working to set the schedule and locations in the near future so you can plan accordingly.

Important Election Year

Finally, with congressional and statewide races on the ballot (including Secretary of State!), as well as potential statewide issues and local contests to decide, there will be significant voter interest in the 2014 elections.

I think it is important that we take opportunities like these to encourage and support the next generations of voters and to remind them that local and state elections are just as important as the presidential election. Again, every vote matters.

In December, I announced a statewide PSA contest, urging school-age kids to develop get-out-the-vote posters and videos. We are giving them the opportunity to “school their parents” on why voting is an important right and an important responsibility. (Of course given my artistic ability -- this was my idea).

Our plan is to produce and distribute the winning entries so you can display them in your office or polling locations, on your website or via social media.

We have sent contest details to all schools across the state. The deadline is March 14 and between now and then, any help you can provide in spreading the word and encouraging participation would be much appreciated. Get more information at [www.MyOhioVote.com/Contest.htm](http://www.MyOhioVote.com/Contest.htm) or feel free to call my office if you would like more materials to promote the contest.

Closing

Voting is a right and is also a responsibility. It is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution multiple times. As elections officials in Ohio, you know that better than anyone. Thank you for all you do to ensure all Ohioans can exercise that right with ease and to ensure their continued confidence in the results.

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For more information, please contact Matt McClellan at (614) 995-2239.