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MONTANA ATTORNEY GENERAL

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Candidate for Attorney General Raph Graybill Releases Plan to Implement Automatic Voter Registration in Montana

MONTANA - Raph Graybill today released a detailed plan to implement automatic voter registration in Montana if elected Attorney General in 2020.

“It should be easy to register to vote in Montana. And when Montanans move inside our state, it should also be easy to update their voter registration. But it isn’t right now,” said Graybill. **“As a result, too many Montanans aren’t registered, or have to wait in long lines to prove their status even if they are registered.”**

“The Attorney General has the power to fix these problems now, and if I am elected I will.”

The Problem: Every year, thousands of new Montanans become eligible to vote but are not registered. Likewise, registered voters who change their address had to wait in long lines during the 2018 general election in Bozeman, Great Falls, Missoula, Butte, and Helena just to confirm what the state already knows: they’re Montana voters entitled to participate in elections.

The Attorney General has the power to fix these problems without legislative intervention.

The Plan: The Attorney General should automatically register every eligible Montanan to vote when they receive a driver’s license or Montana ID card. The Attorney General should also provide updated registration information for existing voters when they get a driver’s license or ID card.

Thousands of Montanans go to the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) every year to obtain or update licenses and ID cards. The Attorney General oversees MVD. The process for getting a

license or ID card is far more rigorous than registering to vote. Though Montanans have an *option* of registering now, it's not automatic. As a result, thousands of Montanans miss out on registration or on providing updated information that will save them time at the polls.

Automatic Voter Registration means that all eligible voters who receive services from MVD are registered by default--requiring no additional action on their part--unless they opt-out. Research nationwide shows that shifting to an "opt-out" system increases registration significantly, and could result in thousands of new voters in Montana. It would also reduce the serious problem of lines in the 2018 election.

The Details: Under the authority of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) and Title 61 of the Montana Code, the Attorney General would integrate an "opt-out" voter registration and voter update process to apply to all Title 61 driver's licenses and state ID cards. The MVD would automatically populate voter registration forms as it does now and transmit them to County Clerks for registration, as well as to the Secretary of State.

In addition, the Attorney General should also work with the Secretary of State to automate registration on the government side as well. There should be a process by which the complete registrations collected by MVD can securely and automatically be entered into the state's voter registration system, without requiring any manual input by County Clerks. The Attorney General can clarify that the legal authority for this type of secure registration exists under current law.

The plan would not eliminate other forms of registration available now. Rather, it would shift a portion of existing registration activity to the MVD by creating an easy, automated and secure process that's proven to work now--and expand that process to a larger group of Montanans by providing for an "opt-out" system.

Advantages:

- Thousands more Montanans are eligible to vote
- Montanans who move have their information automatically updated and avoid lines
- Provides for secure registration and proof of identity by registering at the MVD
- Reduces burdens on local governments who manually enter registrations now

Q&A:

- *What will it cost?* The Department of Justice estimated that a similar proposal would cost \$7000 in computer programming.
- *Is it just a plan to register more Democrats?* No. Montana has more independent voters than any party. Making voter registration easier boosts participation across the board, and requires political parties to win elections on the merits--not by rigging the rules and reducing access to voting.
- *What about the Secretary of State?* The Secretary of State doesn't oversee MVD and can't stop MVD from improving voter registration. But a Secretary of State committed to expanding voting access could improve the program even more by reducing the burden on local governments. Unfortunately, the current Secretary of State opposed a similar proposal during the 2019 session, highlighting the need for change.

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About Graybill: Raph Graybill is a fifth-generation Montanan from Great Falls and an accomplished public attorney who has been at the forefront of some of the most important legal actions in the state in recent years. As Governor Bullock's Chief Counsel, he has helped the Governor fight to eliminate dark money in politics and protect public lands. Raph is running a grassroots, reform-minded campaign focused on holding the federal government accountable, defending consumer rights, taking on out of control drug companies, and protecting the right to privacy.

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