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SPECIAL EDITIONS

News is developing as fast as the speed of the spread of the virus. For the next few weeks - hopefully not months -- we'll publish more frequently as needed to get the most current information to our members. If you have information you think should be shared on this newsletter, please send suggested content to jstavney@nwccog.org.

From the Director's Desk: Next Looming Crisis: Preserving Voting Rights in an Extended Public Health Crisis

April 8, 2020

COVID-19 is exposing the obvious and the despicable.

First, the obvious. Let all Americans vote by mail. Congress needs to act soon to secure this election's integrity and do it the Colorado way, otherwise millions of voters will likely be disenfranchised.

Today, Wisconsin is showing how NOT to do it. Voters are choosing between the right to vote and their health & welfare. Today may not matter much in the delegate count for the Democratic presidential primary, but if we don't address this situation nationally before the eleventh hour, and if there lingers or returns any kind of public health directive for COVID as November approaches, the election results will instantly be questioned as being politically manipulated, and where public health orders occur will call into question the November vote.



Next the despicable. As [CNN reports](#), the Supreme Court's refusal to extend the deadline for absentee voting in Wisconsin once again pulls the veil from the question of whether the Roberts court is partisan in refusing to enforce the Voting Right Act. We

may re-live Bush v Gore, which was the last presidential election decided by the U.S. Supreme Court when it ended the recount in Florida and declared Bush the winner. The table is set for a viable threat to democracy happening amid an extended public health crisis. Cynically, there are some who would be just fine with how that might tip the scales while undermining trust in our democratic institutions.

Voting is mentioned five times in the Constitution, yet other rights mentioned only once-free speech, free assembly, freedom of religion, the right to "keep and bear arms"-are much more rigorously (even fanatically) protected notes Garrett Epps. "And yet the Court has brushed it aside as a privilege that states may observe at their convenience" he says in [The Atlantic](#) in an article written not long after the Shelby County v Holder case.

More of the despicable. The 2000 election was gracefully conceded. The 2020 election is occurring with a commander in chief during a crisis, a leader who has refused to take steps to prevent foreign governments from interfering in the election, who denies Russians interfered in 2016 election in his favor. That was after he encouraged Russia to interfere in that election. His administration later gaslighted the findings of the Muller Report after refusing to allow officials to testify before Congress. Before winning the 2016 Presidential election, Donald Trump repeatedly declared that he would question the integrity of the vote **if he lost**.

Our democracy does not have to be trampled upon in this manner. This November election must be conducted in a manner in which there is the widest possible participation, without possible claims of suppression because of the extended (or reoccurrence of) a public health crisis, and the most robust effort to quash interference that would call into question the integrity of the outcome.

That is the backdrop as Senators Amy Klobuchar and Ron Wyden urge their colleagues in Congress to act to institute universal vote-by-mail and expand early voting to preserve this constitutional right and the integrity of the 2020 Election which just 8 months away. They do so in this [Washington Post OpEd](#). The bill is called Natural Disaster and Emergency Ballot Act of 2020.

Bloomberg Businessweek published [a map](#) of states that permit some elections to be conducted by mail (16), five that conduct all elections by mail (WA,OR,UT,CO,HI) and the majority of states that do neither. It is a stunning graphic.

More on what should be obvious. Colorado is a shining light in election security, access to the ballot and procedures for performing a mail in ballot. In a Town Hall call on April 2, Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold confirmed that Colorado, which has held Mail in Ballot elections for many years has been recognized for having the most secure elections in the country. She is a Democrat, but recognition occurred during her predecessor's tenure. He was a hard-core Republican. This should not be a partisan matter and it isn't in Colorado. Griswold's office has been helping craft that federal legislation while fielding calls from many of her colleagues in other states about how to prepare for a mail ballot. But this should not be a patchwork of fairness.

The stakes are high, but Griswold points out that elections were held through Civil War, other wars, the Great Depression and other national crises. At the town hall call she said, "no presidential election has ever been cancelled in US. Our constitutional rights do not stop because of a health care crisis." Griswold can break down the tactical steps necessary to ensure a secure election-if leaders elsewhere care to implement them. Or we can respond to this impending threat the way the Trump administration prepared the country for COVID-19 through the first three months of 2020.

For Coloradoans this may just seem like not a big deal.

It may seem like no big deal unless you are watching Wisconsin right now or unless you read articles popping up covering the numerous primaries being delayed like this headline from VOX, "[Can Trump Cancel the November election? No.](#)" Sounds like Lawyers, Guns and Money? Politico reports, "[Trump campaign declares war on Dems over voting rules for November](#)" suggesting, for instance, that they are OK with sending mail ballots only to those "over 65." Similar headline from The Washington Post, April 4th, "[Trump, GOP challenge efforts to make voting easier amid coronavirus pandemic.](#)"

All that may sound peculiar or alarmist unless you study the many state legislatures that rushed to create inventive ways to separate citizens from their right to vote after [Shelby County v Holder](#) in 2013. This legislation will remind them of when the federal government acted to enforce Civil Rights half a century ago. The Roberts Court would like to forget why the Voting Rights Act was needed in the first place - to counteract active and rampant racial voter suppression. That is a barn door that needs to be shut through this legislation. If you want to get informed about this... and, perhaps outraged, read Carol Anderson's [One Person No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying our Democracy](#) and then read up on [The New Jim Crow](#) by Michelle Alexander. In painstaking detail those books outline what must be overcome.

Colorado shows that with the will, doing so is relatively simple. Even obvious. It just requires Congress to act decisively to do the right thing. As little faith as we have in Congress, for good reason, this is not a time the country can rely on the Executive Branch or the Judicial Branch to act with integrity when push comes to shove on this matter. In spite of the despicable possibilities, the Legislative Branch must act.

It is not too dramatic to say that History is watching.

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Additional Election Resources:

[Jena Griswold - CO Secretary of State - Notes from 4.4.2020 Webinar](#)

As pandemic imperils elections, a clash over voting intensifies
Republicans, led by President Trump, are resisting broader voting access measures pushed by Democrats, which they see as threats to their election prospects.
[New York Times](#)

["Whenever We See Injustice, It Shakes All of Us"](#)

[More on Wisconsin Election](#)

[Bogus claims of voter fraud](#)

Working together to meet the nutrition

needs of older adults

The Alpine Area Agency on Aging has been busy collaborating with many community providers ensure the older adults in our region are getting meals and food during the pandemic. As older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more severe complications from COVID-19, we are doing all we can to help them stay safe and healthy at home while preventing spread of the disease.

The Alpine AAA is currently:

- working with and paying for several school districts to provide breakfast and lunches to older adults
- purchasing non-perishable food items that are delivered by volunteers and staff to homebound older adults
- paying for local chefs and caterers to assist with the preparation of hot and frozen meals
- working with local restaurants to purchase gift cards that older adults can use to order grab and go meals
- working with local restaurants for a meal that can be delivered hot to their door or a grab and go option
- paying for more "drop shipment" of frozen meals that are delivered via a parcel delivery service to their front door
- working with our transportation providers for grocery, food bank, and prescription delivery
- working with our providers for "reassurance calls" to check in with our older adults to both assess needs and help combat social isolation and loneliness



We absolutely couldn't offer these services without our unbelievably dedicated and determined providers and their volunteers. The ingenuity and creativity that we've seen to provide services in novel and safe ways has been encouraging and exciting in this dark time. We've forged new partnerships and delivery models that we hope continue long after the pandemic has faded.

The Alpine AAA would like to thank everyone on the frontlines helping during this time. If you're looking for encouragement, we recommend this 1-minute Fred Rogers video to lift your spirits: ["Look for the Helpers..."](#)

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