

Right to Vote and the Coronavirus

I love to work the polls and have done so for many years. When I was teaching, if I did not have a Tuesday class, I would take the day off to work the polls, usually as a clerk, checking people in. I worked my own rural precinct where I enjoyed seeing three generations of a family come in together to vote, where women in their 90's said that they had voted every election they could, and where first time voters came in to exercise this important right.

When the coronavirus first made its appearance, I became concerned about how safe voting would be in Indiana so I called our county election board. This was before Republican Governor Eric Holcomb had issued his "stay-at-home" order that went into effect on March 23, 2020. I was told that they were taking no special precautions for voting at the polls, but that I could bring in my own hand sanitizer if I wanted to. I told them politely that I would not be working the polls then since it would not be safe for me to do so, being 74 years old with several underlying conditions. I further said that I imagined that other poll workers (who are mainly retired people) would probably not be working as well and that we should make vote-by-mail more accessible to people. That same day I called both the Secretary of State and the Governor's office to tell them of my concerns.

I like to think that I played a small part in Governor Holcomb's announcement on March 20 that made vote-by-mail available to anyone requesting a ballot (not just certain categories of people) as he postponed the primary to June 2. My experience points out the importance of advocacy in the midst of this pandemic. Advocacy for funding a national vote-by-mail initiative is critical for insuring the right to vote for all citizens. We should not have to choose between our right to vote and our health. So I will continue to email my two Senators, my Representative, and the President in Washington, DC to urge funding for this important initiative, pointing out that there is no evidence of widespread fraud and abuse in the states that already use vote-by-mail. I will continue to urge my friends and others to do the same, through emails, calls, and social media. All our individual efforts (that we can make safely from our own homes) do have an impact and can make a difference. Making sure that everyone has the opportunity to vote is so important in every election, particularly this one.