2nd Annual Elections GeoSummit
December 2020

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

elections, state, gis, voter, legislators, Wisconsin, data, address, senator, redistricting, new jersey, voting precinct, statute, legislation, people, gis data, voting, districts, statutory language, legislative

TRANSCRIPT

We're into our last panel. In many states and counties, the work of integrating GIS into elections just happens, the work is done. And how the work it's done is not explicitly stated in statute. We see this changing. Take Virginia for example. In the 2016 election cycle, several House District races were identified where voters were incorrectly assigned to the wrong district. And many of these contests the vote spread was less than 100 votes, and this is an exceptionally close margin. After 2016, Virginia modified sections of state statute to integrate the use of GIS into election data management. Crafting statute to support the use of GIS and election data management and processes is imperative. This may translate into the removal of prescriptive language that is mired in old processes like metes and bounds or with the addition of permissive language allowing for a more modern approach. To moderate this discussion on GIS statute, legislation, and elections, we need someone who can speak all these languages. And this person is Wendy Underhill. I invite Wendy to turn on your video and unmute your audio. Wendy Underhill is the director of the elections and redistricting program at the National Conference of state legislatures, or NCSL. It's my honor to introduce you, Wendy, I'll hand the microphone to you.

01:47
Thank you, Jamie, I was a little surprised we hadn't heard the Virginia story earlier today. So that was well done. I think that's your catchline for the future as you talk about geo-enabled elections.

So I was able to attend your last summit in DC in December (note, the first elections geosummit was in DC in August 2019). And when I was there, I learned that geocoding for next gen 911 (next generation 911) can work for elections too. And now we've heard a little bit about that today. And I learned that there's such a thing as a voter file audit that was brand new for me. And I learned that GIS is definitely better than spreadsheets and spreadsheets are definitely better than markers on a map on the wall. But what I didn't get last year you put in this year, which is the policy piece. So first of all, I want to thank you for that. And I want to say how appreciative I am to be able to be here with you. So what we've got today is a panel of people who've been working behind the scenes on a model statute, and they will share that with us. And they're doing this in a very brave way. And I

say that because they will have two legislators who are listening to what they've got to say about what they think would be a good model statute. So they are willing to, you know, you might say, give it a dry run here. And I believe that that working group would be happy to take feedback from anybody in the audience as well as of course from our two legislators. So I think with that, I will ask that our first panel of Bert, Veronica, Tim, and Tyler to go ahead and turn on their cameras and their audio. And also just take a note that, that we have people from all across the country here today, not just on this panel. But here we have a legislator from Wisconsin, a legislator from New Jersey, and panelists, Bert is from Utah, Veronica's from Pennsylvania, Tim is from North Carolina, Tyler's from Connecticut. I'm from Colorado, it's really quite amazing that you've brought all these many people together. Now, Bert, are you on there? And are you ready to go? I am thank you. All right, take it away.

03:41

So my role here is to introduce sort of the three sections of the statute that we're recommending as our model of guidance. And just before I do that, I'll note that in Utah, somehow, it just blows my mind. Our legislation that covers how voting precincts are submitted up to the state and combined into a GIS layer actually happened before any of the state elections, efforts related to HAVA. It happened in 2002. That's this reporting requirement, which just is stunning, the foresight that was involved. So like, I just happened to reflect on that. And I thought it was 2008 approaching redistricting, but somebody figured this out and got it in earlier. And that was a great asset.

As we consider statutory change, changes to state law, everybody's ears perk up for sure. Refining processes and state code is an exciting way to make an enduring difference. I think everybody gets that. But change can also be uncomfortable and it's easy, it's probably easier than not to assume a defensive posture. So I think it's worth briefly covering the benefit of a statutory approach. I see the benefits as positioning everyone for enhanced ongoing success, better-defining responsibilities, and perhaps eliminating some turf concerns over the long term. It also gives an opportunity to kind of reflect on the overall efficacy of the current process and even consider things like whether there's enough funding in place to support what's needed and maybe looking at one time or short, ongoing appropriations. And then lastly, statutory changes put everybody stakeholders in the public on notice that the change is coming and what to expect.

Especially with elections, every state's current context, the players, the current rules, the process, and even the guiding philosophy for what government should be and how it should work is going to be different. So our goal as the advocacy workgroup, in developing the model statute, is to put forward a starting point that gets the basics right. And getting the basics right means our recommendations, we wanted them to be clear and succinct. We wanted them to include soft coordination language, between offices, between levels of government to kind of grease the wheels of collaboration. And we also wanted, what we're putting forward to be able to stand the test of time. So that it wouldn't necessarily need to be updated every

time there was a change in technology or you know, the organization of the different entities involved.

So that said, what we developed, we fully expect and recommend that this starting point that's going to get shared in a second will be adapted in each state's unique environment. And probably none of these will come out of the process the same way. Veronica, Tim, and Tyler are going to take turns introducing the three specific areas that comprise our statutory recommendations, they mirror three out of the five of the geo-enabled elections best practices. The only two that they don't address are putting together a team of experts across disciplines and agencies and the data validation process. So those are the only two of the best practices that we didn't pick up. I'm sure there, there may be some thoughts about how those might be adapted as well. As these get presented, you'll see that there are some distinct common threads along the way across the three sections. And I see those as enhancing the role that GIS-based resources and tools play in elections management. The second common thread is this idea of rolling up local data from local authorities into a statewide resource, but not diminishing the role that local entities play and their authoritative role. And then the third common element is making everything that is not private protected information as publicly accessible as possible as data resources for others to use. And going back to the opening panel. The advocacy groups that are you know, creative people who can do creative things with the address information in the boundary is information let's let them have access to this and be able to serve their constituencies and missions. Alright, without further ado, I'll pass the baton to Veronica and Tim, and Tyler.

08:53

Okay, thanks for let's start with voting unit boundaries. So creation and maintenance of a voting precinct GIS layer is an essential step. This data is critical for elections administration, precinct data must be current and it must be validated. So collaboration between the county or local legislative body, the state elections officer or body of elections, and the GIS office, at the state level or even at the county level is imperative. And there must be continuous effort and attention given to the partnership to coordinate and share and certainly implement vital framework data layers. So you know also water adhering to pretty rigid election, legislative and municipal schedules and deadlines. Further, it is of the utmost importance to use modern technology in elections. And the state geospatial coordination office can be an advisor, you know, with this respect, recommending tools and applications to advance the use, start with collaboration access availability of the data. For example, recommending web services to share data, rather than just recreating that data. So what we're going to share with you is the start of our workgroups attempt to recommend some statutory language to meet these high-level things that I just described.

So we're suggesting that within, you know, some period of time some number of days after the establishment, division, abolition, or change of a voting precinct, the county or a local governing body for this purpose shall file with the state elections officer or oversight body, a notice describing the action taken and specifying the resulting boundaries of each voting precinct affected by that action. And then the

state elections officer or oversight body shall coordinate with the state geospatial coordinating office to produce an official statewide voting precinct map made available to the public, certainly at no charge in an electronic geographic information system file format.

So that's the recommended statutory language. Now, some states may already have an explicit statutory provision to this respect, or some may require the county to share their voting precinct boundaries with their state election office, or the state elections office may be required to share with their legislative body. This suggested statute is meant to establish that sharing framework that should continue into perpetuity. And the goal is not to have projects or pilots or the need for some type of interagency sharing agreement. It should simply be the law to use GIS technology and share the data needed for elections administration. I'm going to turn it over to the next section.

12:34
Okay, thanks, Veronica. I'll start from here if that's okay, Bert. Addresses are critical to many public sector functions, whether it's emergency response, provision of health services, and of course, elections administration and other purposes. It's really one of the most fundamental data sets as we've heard today from a number of people who spoke already, but it has really not received the attention it deserves.

Address points are gaining recognition through efforts such as the next generation 911 (NG9-1-1) activity across the country, as we've heard today, but also the national address database. As we all know, the year of 2020, has underscored the importance of addresses in our country in our states, and in our local governments as we've dealt with COVID-19 simultaneously with a major election cycle.

We have an opportunity to increase our efforts to create and sustain a complete set of address points going forward. Addresses are critical in locating registered voters, as you all know, and placing them in the correct precincts and within the other jurisdictions, such as congressional, state legislature, and state judicial districts. And ultimately, the goal is to have a complete set of address points that will accomplish the goal of providing the correct ballot to the correct voter.

The state elections office and the local offices in each state have that responsibility for achieving the goal of providing that correct ballot to the correct voter. And there's a role for the state geospatial coordinating office in each state to be an advisor and potentially a data sharing point. And in some cases, this is already happening, but it should happen across the country for us all to achieve our goal. It's important that this collaboration effort and partnership be established to sustain the effort of having a set of address points for the country to support not only elections but other purposes.

So in this case, the statutory information that the group came up with, we can move to the next slide. Our workgroup created model statutory language encompassing the address points data need. It's important to recognize the responsibilities and the value add of each potential partner in a statewide effort.

This starts with a local government addressing authority in each jurisdiction, but also includes public safety officials and/or the 911 board at the state level. Again next-generation 911 is a current catalyst for this activity. The most important aspect is really capturing the need to create and regularly maintain address data and make it broadly available, ass Veronica said about voting boundaries at no charge. Many state and local agencies and functions depend on address data. Having a clear partnership and collaborative effort based on statutory language will help facilitate a process that benefits not only the election administration effort but other public sector purposes as well. The combination of local addressing authorities, the state elections office, and the state geospatial coordinating office can efficiently and effectively assemble a statewide set of address points and not only make the data and web services available but also create a clear path for sustaining it and sharing it in multiple ways. Now, I will turn it over to Tyler.

16:08
Thanks, Tim. So, one of the threads that is common throughout today's afternoon, is the effort in corralling all these various, sort of, jurisdictional boundaries that exist in states. We heard it during the keynote on the mosquito management districts and noxious weed districts, and we've kind of heard it throughout. And so really the intent here is to ensure that when changes are made to those boundaries that they are, you know, that it is done in a coordinated way. They are reported up into some type of state-level, body and that there's some coordination with the GIS office to make those changes to whatever boundaries that there may be, but also to make sure that that data is accessible. So I don't know that I need to underscore the importance of that any more than it's already been done. But also, just to emphasize, a key sort of component of this is that these are also data sets that are used when the census delineates various geographic units like census blocks and Block Groups and tracks that are then used to support redistricting, as well. So it really serves a dual purpose. So the statutory language for this, in the next slide is relatively similar to the voting unit language previously, but essentially, within some period of time after a change or, you know, an annexation or whatever it may be, to one of these areas has been made, they should file with some state-level body. And then that activity needs to be coordinated with the state geospatial office.

In addition, there's this responsibility, then that there is some degree of maintenance of that and an accurate map representation, again, that meets the needs of the US Census Bureau, and that there at least once a year, that data is made publicly available, again, at no charge. I think, reinforcing what we've heard from others about the value of making this type of information easily accessible for for others to use. So, I think we've heard a lot about how important and critical this information is, and this was actually an issue that came up that I don't think was initially on our radar, but was actually suggested by some of the individuals who had been working on this. So with that, I'm going to go ahead and turn it back over to Wendy.

18:52
Thank you very much. And Bert, before I take over, do you have anything you want to say to wrap that up? I'm also happy to make a quick summary if you like that

better. No, go right ahead. Okay, so what I learned out of this, and I gotta tell everybody, I had read this stuff, but hearing it described to me really helped. What you're asking for is that voting boundaries be made public, you're asking for addresses to be made public, and you're asking for the boundaries for all of the districts, including the ones we've mentioned earlier, and fire districts to be made public at the state level. That is where you're headed. Right?

Okay. Well, I appreciate all of the work that you and your team have done, especially that connection to the census because there's another whole census process that goes on mostly on that third part, the Civic boundaries part and actually the first part too, so connecting that in with what states are already doing is great.

Now let's bring in Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker from New Jersey and also Senator Kathy Bernier from Wisconsin. If you could turn your mics on and turn your cameras on too. I am really happy that both of these folks have chosen to be with us today. And I'm going to turn to Assemblyman Zwicker first. You know, I think that you got invited because of the bill that you've done in New Jersey. And I hope you'll tell us about that. And then I want you to tell us do you have to be a physicist or some other kind of science-oriented person to be able to do the kind of work that we're talking about here today?

20:21

Thank you, Wendy, for having me. And thank you, everybody, who's participating? The answer to that one is absolutely not, you do not have to be though, part of the reason why I'm here is a little bit tied to my physics background. So I do have, it's not just a bill anymore, was signed by New Jersey's Governor Phil Murphy into law, January of 2020.

Very quickly, I'll give you a summary of it. And we came at this from a slightly different place, but again, using GIS data. So some of you may even know professor Sam Wong of Princeton University, who's the head of the Princeton Election Consortium. He's a molecular biologist, who also is using his science background to study things like the redistricting and drawing of maps and gerrymandering and predictive models of election outcomes. He and I have been talking about this point, but two years ago, about the very topic that is in front of us today. And the difficulty really coming down to getting GIS data in any standardized form, and also getting in New Jersey, and I can't speak to other states, getting precinct-level data available in machine-readable form. Which really translates down to can we have, you know, comma-delimited, or somehow delimited data. And so, he and I worked together to write the Voter Precinct Transparency Act of New Jersey. And it did just these two things, and some of what you heard in the model legislation, down to the fire district, shapefiles are now publicly are in the process, New Jersey's Office of Information Technology is working hard on this, but shapefiles will be very soon available to all members of the public free of charge. Along with that, after a New Jersey election is certified with the election outcomes, the results will be in machine-readable, delimited form. So it can be used for redistricting, we did not approach this from the address GIS

perspective that is driving some of this. And the legislation is quite simple. So actually, I was getting nervous as you were talking about the model legislation, knowing full well that I've already written it, it's already been signed into law, thinking to myself, uh-oh, I wonder where I messed up. And I will say, it'll come out maybe more in the discussion, we didn't put in quite as prescriptive of some of the language that you're discussing right now in terms of coordination, which isn't to say the coordination isn't unbelievably important. But we did sort of just say, you've got to provide this data to the public free of charge to the state, New Jersey, election officials and let that happen organically. And that's where we are.

So the last thing I will say is New Jersey has odd-year state-level elections. So the governor, and the entire legislature is up for election next year. So we have elections every single year. So census data, shapefiles, machine-readable data, and redistricting are very much front and center in New Jersey, because of the fact that we are now at a point where it's time to look at redistricting. So thank you. I'm, of course, happy to answer your questions as we go into this, but I'm very, very pleased to be here and join the conversation.

*23:53 <**here**>*
Well, and I really appreciate what you had to say. And, Jamie, I think you should take note that Assemblyman Zwicker's bill can be your second example that you use as you go forward.

Senator Bernier, I want to turn to you now, if I may. You and I have known each other for some years. And it crossed my mind that when I first came to Madison to testify before your committee, I was shaking in my boots, and you made me feel so comfortable. So this is quite a few years late with my thank you, but I do want to thank you for being kind to me as a newcomer to this field. Now, we know that you have had a career with elections that goes way back before you were an elected official. Could you start with that and then tell us a little bit about Wisconsin and GIS?

Well, my career goes back to the 90s when I was a chief inspector for the little town of Ansan. Back in those days, Wisconsin was way behind all of you. We didn't even have voter registration at all in most of our municipalities. Municipalities with 5000 or more had voter registration, but none of it was monitored. by anyone from the state level, as far as I understand it anyway. So we have come a long way, baby. And so when I listened to much of what you're talking about, I'm thinking, Oh my gosh, when we did statewide voter registration, we use GIS. And, and I, as the county clerk at that point in 2005, I was entering in address data because I was one of those counties. We couldn't transfer the voter registration information directly. The county clerks entered in all of that data from all of those municipalities, those addresses that didn't actually have voter registration that could be imported. So, you know, the, what then was the Government Accountability Board, had a tough time with our new statewide voter registration system, much of what we had to write ourselves, but the basis of it all was the GIS system. And I would be running up and down the steps in the Capitol, down to the land records department to ask for assistance. The same occurred, as you know,

when you use your GIS for your redistricting process, and the census blocks are the little baby blocks that you use to build all the information that you need to overlay so all of the different districts so to speak, Wisconsin is very odd-shaped, as many of you may realize, and also our municipalities and our counties are all an odd shape. There is nothing symmetrical about the state of Wisconsin in any way, shape, or form, especially with our lakes and rivers and all of that. So we managed to get that the GIS is the building block each elector living at a particular address has a pin number, and it is right on your poll book. And you will know exactly what ballot to give that voter when they walk into the polling place. And so that was our goal. Who would have known, you know, 15 years later, after living through the transition, that I would actually be talking about it as a state senator, but it can be done, folks. And once you get it all done, you will sit back, be very proud of yourselves, and know that, boy, there's just no better way.

27:48
That's fascinating that it took place, some 15 years ago. We heard earlier that Utah in 2002 enacted something that allows them to use GIS now. So I'm coming at this as if this is a new and exciting thing. But it's been around for a while, and some folks have adopted it, maybe without the fanfare. So that's pretty cool.

So for both you, Senator, and also for Assemblymember Zwicker, I want to ask what you heard from the panel on the things they're asking for? What are some things that you liked about that? What could be exciting, as you think about how your legislative colleagues across the nation might view it? And do you see any stumbling blocks? Do you got any advice for them?

And since I've got you, Senator, let's go ahead and start with you. Can you rephrase it? I am not sure I understood. Sure. So we heard from the panel that they would like to have all states adopt the statewide voting precinct map so that the locals would have to give it forward and to publish the address data for the whole state and to publish the district boundaries, including the city in the little districts, they'd like all of those things to be published at the state level. And that would mean a state law. So when you hear that there's an idea about that, what advice have you got for them on how to bring it forward to a legislature or anything that either sounded really like a good selling point or something that might be a drawback?

29:14
Um, well, you know, I don't think anything is extraordinarily prescriptive here in the state of Wisconsin. I looked at the couple of different statutes that we refer to the legislative technology service Bureau, which is the bureau that we call. We call them if we have cell phone problems. And we also call them if we need a copy of the maps and they make the legislative maps available on the internet. They do just about everything. And so that was naturally the organization that we relied on to be there, for lack of a better term, the clearinghouse so to speak. And so the county clerks are required twice a year or as often as needed when there's an annexation incorporation or other legal boundary change. I mean, we have sanitary districts that all have elected officials in them. So I don't know if any of you can relate to

that. But that is the deal. And so that information goes to the legislative Technology Services Bureau. And then they keep everything up to date. And then that information, what is needed by the Wisconsin Election Commission goes there. And of course, you know, we have our emergency services also, that work with the addressing coordinators in each county. And so, you know, I personally don't know exactly how it all works. But you know, I think, have faith be optimistic if you want to utilize Wisconsin, as a good argument as to how well it can work, you know, I'm more than happy to encourage you to do so. But I think I don't recall it being a huge problem, because most of these agencies are funded. You have to have emergency GIS service systems. Unless you are somebody, out there, a state starting from square one. If we can be consistent as states to facilitate national elections, such as 2020 - the better off we will all be. I think consistency is beneficial to the voters. And this is, to me, it's a no-brainer, I don't know what else, you know how to tell you how to put in a sell for it, but it makes sense to me.

31:55
I think what they're going to do now is that they're going to call you and ask if you'd be willing to testify in another state as to how well it's worked and why you think it's a good idea. Okay. And I do want to pick up on the part where you said that the entity in Wisconsin that does this, is housed within the legislature. And I think that's true in a few other places as well. So that could be a selling point for taking a plan like this, would they like to hold that responsibility inside the legislature.

Assemblyman Zwicker. What are your thoughts about what you've heard anything that you'd recommend to the working group on how to either push it or something that they should adjust?

32:32
Yeah, I was thinking about that. Listening to Senator Bernier, a couple of things, you know, all kidding aside now, I do think as model legislation, the fact that you are more prescriptive than the New Jersey legislation is really important. Because, of course, each state now has an option to say that this fits whether it's verbatim or close to verbatim for their particular state, or adjusted depending upon the nuances of another state. I think you are correct to take that approach, even though as I said, I had my legislation was much less prescriptive, just mandated what the final outcome needed to be. I think, and we, I saw it in the chat, and it's come up a couple of times, and the senator alluded to it, you know, we are still in the middle of one of the most contentious elections in our history, for a variety of different reasons that are not relevant to today's discussion. But the ability to have the public get access to data is critically critically important. And so I think this, what you're working on is really a part of this movement towards whether it's GIS data, election data, whatever it might be. But the more public data is, the better our democracy is served. I don't think that's a cliche. I think that's just a straight-up fact. And I think, personally, thinking about this. I mentioned New Jersey has elections coming up. So if I have to run next year, can't tell you how many times I've had the voter list on a clipboard, or running minivan on my phone and the address isn't even close. And then you just sort of stand around and try to figure

out what you know where to find the house that you're trying to have a voter contact with. So I think from a practical on a campaign side, thank you to really clean elections, nonpartisan, clean elections is really key here. You know, I think the after that is what you're doing right now and working with other states in terms of finding advocates, legislators, like ourselves, other advocates, who already understand the importance of GIS data to elections, you know, who's your entry point into the various states - I think this will be really key here. Those are sort of the top of my head. I think your basic top-level approach is spot on. And, you know, whether it's Virginia or New Jersey or Wisconsin, showing success stories is a key part of this narrative in terms of getting engagement in other states.

35:26
And I'm liking that idea that maybe you were not prescriptive. And maybe this proposal is a little bit more prescriptive, but it can be varied. It can. You can go either way, depending on what the sponsor might be interested in. So flexibility is probably the keyword there.

So now I'd like to ask the panel if they have questions for the legislators. I mean, this is your opportunity to try out potential legislators, you know, try your pitch on them or receive what they're interested in Bert, do you want to start out. It really doesn't matter which of you begins.

35:59
I just threw a question in the chat. I'll just try it out. So in terms of how to connect these ideas with legislative ongoings, right. What do you think about this as an approach, if folks were to pass along the best practices for GIS-based election management, that's a document that NSGIC has put together through this project, and also the model guidance, seek out the legislative staff that serve the relevant committees and pass it along as just sort of an FYI. Here's a resource, you know, just in case you need something, you know, put this in a folder might come in handy, kind of an approach.

36:47
Don't be so coy about it. I think it's much more a direct ask. I think this is really good legislation. And you know, whether it's your chair of the committee or a member of the legislature that you think might be particularly engaged, I think you want to be much more direct because we get swamped with stuff. And if you approach it with an FYI, yeah, maybe I'll read it one day. But you know, maybe a staff member will. Come right at them. You want to make their life easier because you have model legislation. It's been tried in different places, different forms, and other states, and you want to do the work for them.

37:36
Senator Bernier, I think you were on that same page. Don't bother taking it to the staff. Go right to the legislator. Right. Yeah. Pretty much. Yeah.

37:46

Yeah. And my staff is are really good. You know? Can you have Senator Bernier get back to me on this? And they will. So yeah.

37:59

I'm remembering back some years ago when somebody was only talking to legislative staff. And what he was saying is we want you as legislative staff to lobby your members for this great idea we've got and everyone in the audience just shut right down. Their goal is to serve not make suggestions until the relationship changes. Okay. Well, we covered that one. Anything else from the panel that you'd like to ask about how to get something like this going in your legislature? I've got a couple of questions in the chat, but others from the panel.

38:34

Sure. I'm I, to me, it seems like the timing for something like this. Like now's the time to do this if you want to do it in your state because of the spotlight, right, that's on this issue, now. Is that a pretty fair thing? Like if people want to do this, they should really jump on it now and not wait like two years?

38:57

Yes.

38:59

Yeah. strike, strike while the iron is hot. I don't know where that term came from. But that's when to do it. So go after it. I don't know what you have in your state in regard to your legislative technology service bureau. That's what we call it our LTSB or whatever. Maybe you've already had conversations with them. I have a Ryan Squires who I go to; he is the GIS guru. But if you can bring them on, and they will help you persuade. Because you know if the tech, the technology people, the people who know what this system can do for you, that will help you also persuade your colleagues on how beneficial it would be.

39:54

I will also add as a follow-up and I'm just looking in the chat, Ben Williams wrote that I forgot to mention that the New Jersey legislation passed unanimously there's nothing partisan about this whatsoever. So yes, strike while the iron is hot. I also would be remiss if I didn't mention that Ben Williams hasn't put into the chat, that he was responsible in no small part for writing and making sure all the technical details were right in the legislation. And part of why it's so successful is the work of Ben and his colleagues.

40:33

Well, now I have to jump in and say that we were very fortunate to get Ben to come work at NCSL. So he is now on our team. And we are one of the reasons we wanted to be part of this whole conversation is that we're building our GIS and elections, chops at NCSL, and should be able to help out. So one thing you all could do when you do go if you want to call us first and talk to us, we're happy to share

what we can. Sometimes we know legislators personally, sometimes we don't. But we're available to all of you, too. And we earlier had a question about what nonprofit and non government organizations can do to advocate for this? Or are there things that they should definitely not be doing or saying? Any thoughts about that? The legislators?

I'll start. You know, I think it depends on what you mean by nonprofit. But I will say that as we speak, obviously, again, from New Jersey's perspective, but the role of a variety of different organizations who are nonpartisan, nonprofit, believe in creating clean, totally secure elections that, you know, remove all the politics have been critical to not just the bill that I've been talking about, but a variety of different bills that have been either signed into law already in New Jersey or working their way through the legislative process. I think it's, there's no downside. There's no what you shouldn't be doing. I think if you are an organization, where this is part of your mission, you know, there's just an interest. This is critically, critically important. I go right back to what the senator said, strike while the iron is hot. This is the time to push things through state legislatures is right now.

Senator, I'm going to come to you in just a moment. But Karen Rogers from Wyoming wrote I wonder if people feel the political climate is right to have a broad national conversation about increasing confidence among the electorate. Clearly, federal support is needed. So there are two things out of that, but you had said to me separately, that there's going to be a national conversation about elections. So is this something that we think the federal government would ever want to have a role in or could have a role in? And then the part about whether having this kind of clarity about where does that person actually live? And therefore, where should they vote? Does that help with the voter confidence conversation that's going on in the nation right now? Let's get partisan. I actually thought that she'd say, let's see what she says. Senator?

Yeah. Okay. Um, yeah, I think voter confidence is extraordinarily important. I have a hearing that's going to be an all-day hearing tomorrow about some issues that we had with the electoral process in Milwaukee. You know, naturally, that has mostly to do with absentee voting. That, you know, in Wisconsin, we've had two statewide recounts in the last couple of years, and the voter getting the wrong ballot has not been a problem, because we use the GIS system. And so I don't think I heard any complaints or concerns about, you know, they didn't give me the right ballot. It can happen, though. I know, I've heard it, you know, anecdotally, with one or two people may be at a particular polling place. It was an error on the poll workers' part usually just handing the person the wrong ballot, not actually looking. So that still human error is still there. And it can happen. So we haven't had you know, getting the wrong ballot or anything like that isn't a problem for us right now. This GIS system, this voter registration system, in issuing ballots, that's going to help with voter confidence in regard to getting the correct ballot, and especially right after redistricting now. That is going to come up, you know, people are going to be

moving, or you're they're going to be in a different district. And this, so aids in making sure that people get the right ballot. But I think the conversation is going to be how we can be most consistent state by state, through the entire electoral process, from issuing the ballots to getting the absentees out and counting the ballots. And we learned that from Florida 2000, that the inconsistency from county to county was the problem, the punch card was a problem. You know, we learned every time we have a statewide election, or nationwide election that we know, we learned some things to make the electoral system better. And, and so we will, it should always be a part of the conversation, kind of continually and constantly, is how we can better our electoral process. We should not ever wait, sit back and become complacent, and wait for problems to occur, and then say, Oh, well, now we have to start discussing how we can do better. I've been Chair of the Campaign Elections Committee, either in the assembly or the Senate. Now this will be my sixth term. And, and I assure all of the people who are sending me emails and calling my office, about the electoral process, I have always evaluated and re-evaluated the electoral process. And we'll continue to do so. And I think that's just the way we all need to look at it nowadays.

46:59
I think continuous improvement is the way anybody would run a business, you've never got it perfect. So there's always room. Assemblymember Zwicker. I think you might get the last word because we've only got a couple of minutes more here.

47:12
I guess I would say two things. One is there must be, and there will be a national conversation. And we all know that voter confidence is at an all-time low at this very moment. And while that is at one level very discouraging, I think it also means it's very much an opportunity to put into place reforms that react to what's going on right now that whether it is around GIS data, whether it is about voter registration, early voting, mailing voting, the chance to correct or fix your ballot, when there's some sort of simple mistake, lots of different things. This is the opportunity right now. And I also think there is nothing, partisan whatsoever. States have to be the key place here. You know, the cliche, of course, is states are the laboratory, you know, for things to move upward. But so much of what happens with our elections, because of how it's been set up is all happening at the state level, we know this at the county level at the municipal level down to the fire district. So understanding that you know, my perspective is as a state legislator. But at the same time, it seems to me that the states can move faster. States have been doing this, as the senator talked about. So I think it is really key that we work together throughout all the states to get this done. I mean that this is so much the time to create a voting system where people are confident, party doesn't matter, you know, your vote counts, right. And that's in the end what we're talking about, really, when it comes down to it. And so I just want to say if I have the last word, thank you for including me, but thank you because you're doing the hard work. You know, we are the legislators who may be up in front, but it's people like you who are doing all the work behind the scenes to get this done. So thank you very much.

So I said that you got the last word, but that was a lie. I get the last word. Election legislation is often at its best when administrators work with the policymakers and they make sure that they get their voice heard and most legislators who are paying close attention or reaching out but if they're not reaching out then that it needs to go both ways. So I'm very excited that we got to sort of demonstrate that the administrative side and the legislative side can be friends that's there's not a chasm between the two. It's a friendly relationship. And that's how it should be. So with that, I thank the Senator, I thank the Assemblyman, and all of you on the panel and all the work that you did, I wish you well. And then Jamie, thanks to you for putting this whole meeting together and I will sign off with that. Thank you.

RESOURCES

Building Statutory Language to Advance GIS in Elections
- https://elections.nsgic.org/model-statutory-language-released-to-help-states-advance-gis-in-elections/

What is Next Generation 9-1-1
- https://www.911.gov/issue_nextgeneration911.html

What is the National Address Database (NAD)
- https://www.nsgic.org/NAD
- https://www.transportation.gov/gis/national-address-database/national-address-database-0

2020 Elections GeoSummit (full recording)
- https://elections.nsgic.org/data-transparency-model-statute-in-focus-at-elections-geosummit/

For more information contact info@nsgic.org