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Changing Dynamics of Election Administration

Of the many changes in election administration I have witnessed during my tenure, one trend that can't be overlooked is the steady increase in voters who choose to cast their ballot through early voting or vote by mail. In many states, including Florida, these nontraditional methods have surpassed the numbers of those who choose to vote in person on election day.

In the Presidential Preference in 2008, the first major election of my appointment in 2007, we mailed 4,000 vote-by-mail ballots in the initial mass mailing. To date, we have nearly 65,000 vote-by-mail ballot requests for the upcoming 2018 election cycle, an increase of 15,000 since 2016. The steady increase can be attributed in part to changes in the law in 2001 which no longer required an excuse for being absent on Election Day, and in 2008 another change in the law allowed vote-by-mail ballot requests to be honored through two Federal General Elections. In 2016, we redesigned our vote-by-mail certificate envelopes to include a check box for voters to indicate if they want to continue voting by mail. Those who checked the box signed up for an additional two election cycles.

That being said, mailing ballots to those who request them is just one step in the process. The real impact comes from the number of ballots that are voted and returned for tabulation. In the traditionally low turnout mid-term elections, will the increase in vote-by-mail ballots be reflected in an increase in turnout? Will the recent rise in voter awareness from a younger, increasingly mobile and electronic generation be enough to engage them in mid-terms? Will candidates or issues this election cycle motivate the electorate which historically foregoes their right to vote in midterms?

These are all great questions as we look forward. The answers could potentially provide a turning point from the traditional turnout of older, more conservative party activists in midterm elections. One thing we know for sure is, the return of each vote-by-mail ballot has the potential to impact every race on the ballot. Whichever way you choose to vote, you can be assured your vote will have an impact on who will lead us in the state of Florida, as well as our congressional and legislative representatives. That is what mid-term elections are for, and with a vote-by-mail ballot, it's as simple as darkening in the circles and mailing it back!

