



Our View: Secretary of State election cleanup needed to make elections fair

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By Editorial Board | The Bay City Times

Despite arguments that proposed changes to voting law will disenfranchise voters, Secretary of State Ruth Johnson said her plan will make the system better.

Johnson's proposal, called **Secure and Fair Elections**, aims to cleanup voting by requiring first time absentee voters to show identification or sign an affidavit of identity; get deceased or relocated voters off Michigan voter registration records; and require groups looking to hold voter registration drives to take a 20 minute course to understand voting laws, among other changes.

Her changes are currently in the legislature awaiting approvals.

"We have to look at convenience, which is important, but we also have to look at safety," she said during a meeting with Mlive's The Bay City Times and Saginaw News editorial board this week.

Johnson, a Republican, said she's heard of several issues with current voting laws that can lead to fraud or cheating. She pointed to issues where people would get an absentee ballot without ever showing identification; issues with non-U.S. citizens voting because they did not understand the forms or were never told otherwise; and campaign finance laws that have no teeth to stop wrongdoing.

Johnson has been attacked from voters rights groups and Democrats that her changes will cause some people to not vote or even make it harder for some to vote. She disputes that, saying she's making it safer, but not any more difficult.

"Some say I'm trying to make it hard to vote," she said, about asking voters to check a yes or no box on their U.S. Citizenship when voting. "I don't think I am. And I don't think checking a box is onerous."

It's clear to us that Johnson takes her task of cleaning up voter issues and fraud very seriously. We're heartened to see someone standing up for changes that will make every Michigan residents vote authentic.

Where we do have concerns, however, is with the changes becoming such a partisan issue that voters do not know what is correct.

Reports of disenfranchisement, whether valid or not, can become a clear voice to people in some urban areas that voting is too difficult, or not worth it.

Johnson has launched a media tour to dispel those rumors and we hope it reaches all voters' ears.

During her media tour, Johnson is also talking up the new Express SOS, which launched in October. The site allows residents to do a number of items, such as change of address and renewing a license online without having to wait in line at a Secretary of State branch.

For more on Johnson's initiatives, go to www.michigan.gov/sos