

## Election integrity law survives Legislature's last days

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SALT LAKE CITY – One of the far-reaching proposals to survive the final hectic days at the Utah Legislature was House Bill 70, sponsored by Rep. Dan Johnson, R-District 4.

Entitled “Ballot Tracking Amendments,” that measure will allow Utah voters to digitally track their mail-in ballots throughout the election process and to correct any problems that might arise in the counting of their ballots.

HB 70 was co-sponsored by Sen. Scott Sandall, R- District 17, on the other side of the Capitol. It was one of the less than half of proposed laws actually passed by the Legislature.

The annual general session of the Legislature ended Mar. 5. During the previous 45 days, Utah’s 104 lawmakers (29 senators and 75 members of the Utah House of Representatives) requested and/or introduced more than 1,200 bills and resolutions. Of that number, around 500 finally earned approval from lawmakers in the House and Senate.

Only a relative handful of new laws have been signed by Gov. Spencer Cox so far. HB 70 is one of the majority of proposed laws still awaiting administrative processing prior to being sent to the governor’s desk for approval. After sailing through the House and Senate during the Legislative session, political observers seem certain that Cox will have no qualms about signing HB 70. The election integrity proposal passed the House by a 72-to-3 vote on Feb. 2 and cleared the Senate on Mar. 3 by a 25-to-4 vote.

The provisions of the new law will allow voters, starting in the 2022 federal mid-term election, to choose to receive either text messages or e-mail notifications regarding the status of their ballots.

To facilitate that, the office of Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson will create an online system that “tracks all ballots that are mailed or deposited in drop-boxes” and maintain a website that allows voters to check the status of their ballots and make technical or conforming changes as necessary.

The state of Utah used a combination of widespread mail-in ballots and in-person voting to achieve record voter turnout during the 2020 general election. Turnout in Cache County, for example, was an unprecedented 92 percent.

But questionable mail-in balloting rules in some battleground states were the focus of former President Donald J. Trump’s allegations of voter fraud in that election. That perceived concern was heightened by the recent passage of the controversial H.R. 1 election overhaul in the U.S. House of Representatives. If enacted, that law which would promote early and mail-in voting procedures nationwide while loosening voter identification controls.

During previous online legislative updates sponsored by the Cache County GOP, Johnson freely shared credit for the inspiration behind HB 70 with Cache County Clerk Jess Bradfield.

Bradfield emphasized that the ability for a voter to track his or her ballot throughout the election process – from the time that a ballot leaves the printer, is completed by the voter, then received by the county clerk and finally counted — will help to address concerns about the integrity of mail-in balloting.

Johnson’s bill faced minimal opposition during the general session of the Legislature because it was supported by the office of Utah’s lieutenant governor, the Utah (County) Clerks Association and Utah branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).