

Memorandum

TO: Election Day Contingency Work Group
FROM: Donald Palmer, Secretary of the State Board of Elections
DATE: May 2, 2013
SUBJECT: Election Action Plan

Attached is the final action plan in preparation for the 2012 Presidential Election and beyond. The action plan delineates the factors for continuity of government operations, particularly election administration, in the event of significant events, natural or otherwise. The goal of the plan is to ensure the electoral process is unimpeded across the Commonwealth despite the challenges of natural or non-natural disasters. It contains the plan for establishing the Commonwealth's Election Contingency Working Group which is to be co-chaired by the Secretary of Administration and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security. It also contains our recommendations for ensuring a smooth and safe election for the registered voters of the Commonwealth.

SBE will also utilize and reference its existing Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), if necessary, in the event that an emergency or natural disaster occurs near or on Election Day.

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, Virginia was an election battleground state for and in the national spotlight for the first time in many years. The 2012 Presidential election appears to place Virginia as a battleground state once again. While all elections are important and require precise planning, Presidential elections bring the highest voter turnout and the national and international exposure to these elections create an atmosphere that requires precise planning and coordination across many areas of government to ensure the safety of voters and that those voters have access to the information necessary so they may cast their vote without trouble.

2008 taught the State Board and its staff many lessons. These lessons were documented into an “After Election Action Report” presented to the Governor from the Election Contingency Work Group in February 2009. Many of our recommendations were borrowed from the group’s findings and they are presented below.

ELECTION CONTINGENCY WORK GROUP

The Election Contingency Work Group held its first meeting on August 26, 2012. A second meeting was convened on September 25, 2012. A third meeting was held on October 16, 2012.

The members of the Work Group contained staff and executives from the following state agencies and private industry:

Office of the Attorney General
Capitol Police
Office of the Governor
Secretary of Administration
Department of Emergency Management
Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy
Department of Transportation
Secretary of Public Safety
State Board of Elections
Department of Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security
Democratic Party of Virginia
Republican Party of Virginia
Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA)
Virginia State Police
Quest (Voter Registration Database Vendor)
Voter Registrars’ Association of Virginia (VRAV)
Virginia Fusion Center
Virginia Electoral Board Association (VEBA)
Virginia Sheriffs’ Association
Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police

All of these offices will play a critical role in ensuring our successful election. Many of their roles will become evident after reviewing our Action Plan.

COMMAND CENTER

A command center will need to be established on Election Day with representatives from key agencies on hand to quickly address problems and, if needed, request state resources. The following entities are recommended to be represented in the Command Center throughout Election Day:

Attorney General's Office
Capitol Police
Counselor to the Governor
Department of Emergency Management
Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy
Department of Motor Vehicles
Department of Transportation
State Board of Elections
Secretary of Administration
Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security
Virginia Democratic and Republican Parties (and any other parties on the Presidential Ballot)
Virginia Fusion Center
Virginia Information Technology Agency
Virginia State Police

The Command Center will be located in the basement of the Washington Building (1100 Bank Street) in the State Board of Elections' Board Room (B-37).

ELECTION READY CAMPAIGN

Per the Governor's Executive Order, the State Board of Elections has prepared a public information campaign entitled, "Are You Election Ready?".

SBE will work with a public relations firm on two major messages involving election preparedness and voter ID education. The voter outreach will also include messaging on election officer recruitment and overseas military voting preparedness. SBE's retention of a public relations firm will ensure that SBE can communicate any emergency election information to the public quickly and effectively.

As in 2008, SBE will coordinate with the Governor's office in offering state employees administrative leave time if they volunteer to work as an officer of election in the polls or to

assist in answering voter calls in the weeks leading up to and on Election Day. SBE estimates needing between 100-150 volunteers on Election Day.

SBE also intends to contact large corporations, non-profit organizations (e.g. Virginia Bar Association, religious entities), high schools, colleges and universities throughout the state to encourage Election Officer recruitment.

VOTER REGISTRATION DATABASE

SBE will coordinate with Quest and have a direct line contact on Election Day to resolve any issues that may arise. Prior to Election Day, SBE will meet with the vendor to develop contingency plans in the event of a database malfunction.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

In 2008, the State Board of Elections' phone system became inoperable and call center operations had to be moved to the Department of Taxation.

To avoid repeating this issue, SBE is already in discussions with our call center service provider (Carousel) to schedule a stress test on the call center to ensure the system can adequately handle the call volume anticipated.

On Election Day, SBE will have a representative from VITA, Northrop Grumman and Verizon available in case there is a breakdown in telecommunications. The representative must have authority to make decisions and give instructions to their staff.

A representative from Carousel will be on site to assist in case of any issues with the telecommunications system. The representative will have personnel, tools, and equipment on hand to handle any problems that may arise with the telephone system.

The system has been equipped with a two hour power battery and one backup. SBE should be able maintain phone operations for four hours in case of total power failure.

SBE has met with the Department of Taxation and will be using their facilities to augment our call center. Currently, SBE can only handle up to 58 phone lines in our office.

LOSS OF POWER AND SUSTAINABILITY

Voting equipment such as DRE's and optical scanners have built in batteries that should suffice until power is restored or a generator is hooked up. The battery life of voting equipment is approximately 6 hours. Electronic pollbooks (EPBs) have a back up battery life of approximately 6 hours, depending on the condition of the battery, the age of the battery and the battery charge prior to the power outage.

Local electoral boards will need to coordinate a backup plan with fire departments or other emergency operations, to supply generators at the polling place if needed. Polling places should be listed as critical for the restoration of power.

The State Board of Election is implementing a reimbursement program to replace old electronic pollbooks and voting equipment that have less ability to sustain self-contained power for voting check-in or voting tabulation procedures in the event of power outages in the polling place. Local electoral boards may purchase a small battery typically referred to as a "brick" that can provide power to EPBs or voting equipment for approximately 6 additional hours. "Bricks" such as those made by Eaton (model number 3105) are available at a cost of about \$70.00 each.

SBE has determined the electric utility provider to each polling place in the Commonwealth and will coordinate with the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy in contacting the appropriate utility to restore power to any polling place which may have lost power.

SBE is working closely with each locality to ensure adequate backup power for each facility in the event of power outage.

ALTERNATIVE POLLING PLACES IN EVENT OF DISASTER (i.e. Hurricane, Earthquake, or other Natural Disaster)

SBE will study alternative polling places in the event of disaster. Prior to the initial meeting, SBE will request emergency plans on file with identified localities to determine best practices in the event of a disaster. SBE has experience in approving multiple localities' requesting emergency changes to polling place from the earthquake during the 2011 Primary Election which required emergency polling place relocations in some localities.

SBE is working closely with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management to coordinate response to any disaster.

SECURITY

As in 2008, SBE will coordinate with the Virginia State Police, Capitol Police, Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, Virginia Sheriffs Association and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management to review all security measures to ensure a safe election.

The Virginia Fusion Center will be updating SBE of any threats leading up to Election Day. They will also staff analysts at the Command Center to make SBE aware of any possible threats on Election Day.

TRANSPORTATION

SBE will coordinate with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), local VDOT residencies and the Virginia Emergency Operations Center to identify any impact to voters easily accessing polling places on Election Day. Each Voter Registration office will be contacted to identify potential issues and work to delay or cease transportation projects which may negatively impact voters from reaching the polls. SBE will appoint a liaison to communicate with the Virginia Emergency Operations Center should any emergency situations arise.

ABSENTEE SATURDAYS/ELECTION DAY COMMUNICATION

Each entity participating in the work group will assign a public information officer (PIO) to be on call during the two Saturdays prior to Election Day (which is when the heaviest in-person absentee voting typically occurs) and on Election Day while the polls are open. Should a situation arise it is imperative that the PIO's of each affected agency communicate prior to releasing any information to ensure that a single message is being sent to the public.

GENERAL REGISTRARS

Two weeks prior to the election, SBE will communicate with local general registrars and electoral board members the following information to ensure that their offices are prepared for any contingencies that may occur:

- Ensure backup communication plans for contacting other general registrars, electoral board members, and polling locations. This might include e-mail to smart phones or cell phone communication in the event that land lines are not available. SBE will provide localities with contact information for key staff and will dedicate two employees as a point of contact for general registrars and electoral board members in case of emergency. Remember also that in emergency situations, cell phone towers can become overloaded and not be available. Consider a plan with your local emergency staff for on-site relay of critical information.
- Assign a media contact person who will be responsible for communicating information so that mixed messages are not sent from multiple sources.
- Contact local VDOT office to see if any road maintenance is scheduled on Election Day that might interfere with voter accessibility to polling sites. Also, utilize the VDOT 511 website to monitor weather and traffic events on Election Day, <http://www.511virginia.org>.
- Have contact information available for utility services that supply your polling sites. SBE has collected utility service providers for each polling place and has provided that information to the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy so that we can quickly coordinate with the utilities in case of widespread service interruption.
- Assign alternate polling sites, if needed.

- Be sure to have emergency backup Officers of Election trained and available.
- Work with your local emergency services (fire and rescue, sheriff) to see if tents, emergency generators, or electronic road message boards are available to you, if needed.
- Work with your local law enforcement to coordinate emergency responses to polling sites. Many can help with emergency delivery of supplies or equipment or transport of machine technicians.
- Coordinate with your local County Administrator or City Manager to make sure required building services are available to you during the Saturday absentee voting period.