

U.S. House of Representatives
Select Subcommittee on Coronavirus Crisis

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(via WebEx)

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Thank you Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise and distinguished members of this subcommittee for the opportunity to virtually join you here today for this important discussion regarding Coronavirus and its effect on the November 2020 General Election. I would also like to thank Congressman Blaine Luetkemeyer who is my representative in the U.S. House.

My name is Jay Ashcroft, and it is my privilege and honor to serve as Missouri's 40th Secretary of State. As Secretary of State, I am the state's chief election officer.

In 2020, Missouri election officials have already held three elections since the COVID-19 pandemic became a concern – the Presidential Preference Primary in March, local municipal elections that were postponed from April to June, and the August primary election.

Missouri's elections are administered by our 116 local election authorities, who are elected or appointed, and make all logistical decisions for their particular election jurisdictions. This includes the number of polling places needed, the number of poll workers, how many face shields, tables, chairs, or bottles of sanitizer are needed. My office assists whenever possible. In fact, during two weeks in May, I drove more than 5,000 miles and visited every one of Missouri's election officials to distribute more than 17,000 face masks, 17,000 face shields, 40,000 distancing strips, and more than 500 gallons of sanitizer.

By all accounts, our local officials have done a wonderful job sanitizing polling places and voting areas, promoting physical distancing and looking for creative solutions to improve the flow of traffic through polling places.

Other states may have had difficulties with having adequate polling places, but that has not been a problem in Missouri. Some election officials have actually increased the number of polling

places and others have moved to larger facilities to provide for a better flow of foot traffic and provide adequate space for physical distancing. Missouri election authorities have promoted curbside voting and some have even tested the logistics of drive-through voting. I have been impressed with their forethought and their commitment to ensuring the health of voters and poll workers alike.

Voting in person is safe. I've paid particular attention to stories related to the Wisconsin presidential primary held on April 7, during which Milwaukee election officials reduced the number of polling places from 180 down to 5. One study appearing in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases and Epidemiology* examined the rate of COVID transmission in the days following that election. In fact, the data showed a **decrease** in COVID infections in the two weeks following the election.

In addition to delivering health and safety equipment directly to election officials across the state, in 2018 I proposed amending state law to reduce the reliance of Missouri voters on the U.S. Postal Service. I asked lawmakers to allow voters to e-mail an absentee ballot request to their election office and I asked them to move the deadline to request an absentee ballot by one week to reduce the likelihood that postal service issues would affect a person's right to vote.

Thankfully, those changes were passed and signed into law.

That said, I have very sincere concerns about promoting the use of mail-in ballots. It is not a perfect system. What we see in Missouri is that, in every election, about 2 to 3 percent of ballots received by mail are rejected. Perhaps the voter completed the ballot envelope incorrectly or the voter's signature didn't match. Maybe the ballot scanner didn't properly read the ballot. For every 50 mail-in ballots cast by voters, at least one of them doesn't count. For every 50 of those voters, at least one is disenfranchised.

I will continue to encourage people to vote in person – it is safe and it guarantees that your vote will count.

Elections matter. Votes matter. Each one that is cast should be counted. In nearly every election, there is an instance in which a candidate won by only a few votes. We have seen this in Missouri, notably in Kansas City in 2010 in a race for state legislature. We've seen blatant absentee ballot fraud in St. Louis in 2016 – so much so that a judge ordered a second election, which changed the outcome of the election.

I can't speak for any state other than my own, but in Missouri we have proven three times in 2020 that with precautions in place and cooperation from voters, we can have successful, safe, in-person voting on Election Day. I encourage voters in Missouri and elsewhere to protect the integrity of America's elections and make their voices heard on Election Day.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.