

Good morning,

My name is Pedro Cortes, Pennsylvania Secretary of State. On behalf of Governor Tom Wolf and my colleagues at the Pennsylvania Department of State, it is my privilege to welcome you to the Department of State's first Election Policy Summit. We are happy and honored to have this summit in Harrisburg, the capital city of Pennsylvania.

I have deep respect for our democracy and the work everyone in attendance does to ensure that citizens of our nation can exercise their most fundamental right – the right to vote. I trust you will find today's program substantive and instructive.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

As we get started, I would like to recognize the Summit's speakers and moderators. We have with us some of the best minds in the field of elections – experts making a positive difference at the national, state and local level.

## Speakers and Moderators

- The Honorable Denise Merrill, Connecticut Secretary of State AND President, National Association of Secretaries of State
- Marian K. Schneider, Pennsylvania's Deputy Secretary for Elections and Administration
- Charles Stewart III, Kenan Sahin Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Wendy Underhill, Program Director of Elections and Redistricting, National Conference of State Legislators
- Ryan Unger, President and CEO, Team Pennsylvania Foundation (**moderator**)
- Ray Murphy, Deputy Director, Pennsylvania Voice
- Tova Wang, Director of Research and Policy, Center for Secure and Modern Elections and Senior Democracy Fellow, at Demos
- Ted Martin, Executive Director of Equality Pennsylvania (**moderator**)

- Ron Bandes, Network Security Analyst, Carnegie Mellon University
- Ryan Macias, Certification Program Specialist, U.S. Election Assistance Commission
- Lawrence Norden, Deputy Director of the Democracy Program, Brennan Center for Justice
- Bob Brooks, Mayor, Murrysville, Pennsylvania  
(**moderator**)
- Susan Carty, President, League of Women Voters Pennsylvania
- Jennifer Clarke, Executive Director, Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia
- Rob Richie, Executive Director, FairVote
- Barry Kauffman, former Executive Director, Common Cause Pennsylvania (**moderator**)
- Marcia Johnson Blanco, Co-Director of Voting Rights Project, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law

- Paul Gronke, Director, Early Voting Information Center of Reed College
- Patrick Christmas, Policy Program Manager, Committee of Seventy
- Doris Carson Williams, President and CEO, African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania **(moderator)**
- Michelle Bishop, Disability Specialist for Voting Rights, National Disability Rights Network
- Tammy Patrick, Fellow, Bipartisan Policy Center
- David Thornburgh, President and CEO, Committee of Seventy **(moderator)**

### **Special Guests**

I would also like to acknowledge legislators and their staff, County Commissioners and their staff, as well as Election Directors and Election Stakeholders. Also, representatives from the Governor's Office and other Commonwealth Agencies.

Special thanks to Department of State Director of Policy Leigh Chapman and other agency staff who dedicated countless hours to organize the Summit. If you have any questions about the Summit or the facilities at the Farm Show, please see Leigh or any other member of our team.

## **REMARKS**

I have had the privilege to serve as Pennsylvania Secretary of State from 2003 to 2010 and again from 2015 until the present. During that time, I have seen and helped implement significant election reforms in the Commonwealth. Still, more can be done. Governor Wolf and I are committed to ensuring that elections in Pennsylvania are free, fair and secure. We are equally committed to seeing that every eligible Pennsylvanian has a meaningful opportunity to register to vote and exercise their franchise.

The focus of our Summit is the future, and what Pennsylvania can do to improve elections for our citizens. But

before we talk about potential practices and policies moving forward, I want to provide some context for the conversation.

Let me start off by saying that in Pennsylvania we run good elections. Not perfect, but good.

As is the case every four years, Pennsylvania was a battleground state in 2016. Everything we did related to elections was under a microscope. The Department's Bureau of Commissions, Elections, and Legislation (BCEL) and Pennsylvania's 67 county election boards worked diligently to bring about the highest levels of efficiency, integrity and uniformity in the electoral process in the Commonwealth. Many of my fellow election administrators are in the audience. I take this opportunity to once again thank each of you for your service and dedication to the voters in Pennsylvania.

The 2016 election season was a massive undertaking. In Pennsylvania, we have over 8.7 million registered voters, of which 6.2 million voted on November 8. We also had over 40,000 poll workers, almost 25,000 voting machines and more

than 9,100 precincts/voting districts. According to the U.S. Elections Project, Pennsylvania had the 19<sup>th</sup> highest turnout rate with 63% of the eligible voting population casting ballots for President of the United States – or 71% of registered voters.

To prepare for the busy presidential election year, Pennsylvania took significant steps to improve access and security.

In August 2015, the Commonwealth launched Online Voter Registration (OVR) to allow Pennsylvanians to easily and conveniently apply for a new registration or update their existing registration. We continued to enhance OVR in 2016 and became the first state in the nation to introduce a digital signature upload feature for applicants who do not have a signature on file with the PA Department of Transportation. With the digital signature upload, all eligible voters can complete their registration application entirely online.

To date, more than 929,000 Pennsylvania residents have used OVR to register or update their voter information. Later

this morning, Deputy Secretary Marian Schneider will talk more about these and other administrative reforms our Department and the counties have put into place.

It can be argued that Pennsylvania lags behind some of our sister states when it comes to election modernization. For that reason, today we will hear from election experts about reforms that have been adopted in other jurisdictions to make voting increasingly secure and convenient. I am most grateful to Secretary of State Denise Merrill for joining us to provide an overview of best practices around the Nation, including her home state of Connecticut.

The objective of this Summit today is to engage in a dialogue about election reforms and policies Pennsylvania may want to consider in the short and long term. We also want to explore specific steps we can take to make those reforms a reality. Thank you again to all the election administrators, policy makers, political and technology scientists, good government representatives and other experts who will be sharing their knowledge today. Since most of us know very well



what the challenges are, the focus of our conversations will be on solutions and the potential way forward.

## **CONCLUSION**

In closing, I reiterate Governor Wolf and the Department of State's commitment to fair, free, accessible and secure elections. I pledge our continued dedication to work with Pennsylvania's 67 counties, the PA General Assembly and all other stakeholders who have a role in safeguarding and promoting our democracy.

Collectively, we will endeavor to protect and promote the right to vote and the right to public participation in the affairs of our government. Please know that we value and welcome your partnership.

## **INTRODUCE SECRETARY MERRILL**

And now it is my privilege to introduce our Keynote Speaker, Connecticut Secretary of State, the Honorable Denise Merrill.

Secretary Merrill was first elected to her current post in 2010. In addition to her role in the Constitution State, Secretary Merrill serves as President of the National Association of Secretaries of State for the 2016-2017 term.

Since taking office, Secretary Merrill has been dedicated to expanding democratic participation, ensuring that the rights and privileges of all citizens are protected, and that every vote is counted accurately. She has worked to expand voter participation through Election Day and online voter registration. She has also improved Connecticut's democratic accountability and integrity with a series of rapid response processes to Election Day problems.

Prior to her election as Secretary of State, the Secretary served as a Connecticut State Representative for 17 years, including time as House Majority Leader.

Please join me in giving a very warm welcome to Connecticut Secretary of State Denise Merrill.