



Victor Hugo once said, **“Nothing is stronger than an idea whose time has come.”**

Twenty years after “Vote at Home” initially passed in Oregon, it appears to be that time - across the country.

In the 2018 election, a record 42+ million ballots were mailed out to voters in all 50 states. In three states (CO, OR, WA), every active registered voter was *automatically* mailed a ballot, as were 100% of voters in nearly 70 counties in California, Nebraska, North Dakota and Utah. The result? A [PEW Research survey confirmed our estimates](#) that those voters using mailed-out ballots in the midterms hit an all-time high (for any election) of **27% of the total votes cast in the US.**

It was just a year ago that our newly-formed National Vote at Home Institute (NVAHI) launched its web site, www.voteathome.org. Citizens, journalists, election officials, advocates and policy makers, for the first time have a resource they can visit to obtain timely and relevant research and data about how Vote at Home (VAH) election systems and the growing use of VAH ballots are positively impacting election security, cost and voter engagement. Prior to this, there was no place that collected and curated the growing media coverage of the vote at home model, or tracked its accelerating use across the country. Legislators, elections officials and activists had nowhere to go for technical assistance and “best practices” for implementing VAH election systems in their states and localities. **Now, they do.**

Which means it’s a good time to review some of the highlights of the work and impact that’s been accomplished in the first full year that the National Vote at Home Institute, a 501(c)(3) [status pending], and its companion organization, the NVAH Coalition, a 501(c)(4), have been in existence.

New research shows how Vote at Home increases voter engagement and turnout.

NVAHI directed two statistically-scrubbed reports from Pantheon Analytics, a Washington, D.C. analytics firm. The first, released in January 2018, involved [research into Colorado’s switch in 2014 to 100% vote at home](#). The second study, released in May 2018, focused on [Utah’s transition in 2016](#) to VAH election systems on a county by county basis. Both studies demonstrated a far larger impact for VAH than had been previously documented. In the case of Colorado, the research showed **10% “low propensity” voters voting at triple their expected rate.** In Utah in 2016, **those counties using a VAH approach showed 5%-7% points higher overall turnout, with a 10% uplift among younger 25-34 year-old voters.**

[Data from the 2018 primaries](#) cemented the assertion that **mailed-out ballot jurisdictions have higher turnout, with a median turnout of 37.5% of registered voters among states where between 50%-100% of all voters used mailed-out ballots, compared to a median rate of just 22% among all other states, a 15% point difference.**

Data from the general election showed similar trends. Had the three 100% VAH states’ turnout of 60.9% of voting eligible population had been mirrored in the remaining US states (instead of their 49.5% rate), **that 11% point difference would have resulted in 25 million more people voting.** [Here’s the map showing the turnout.](#) And that PEW study linked above showed remarkable regional differences in voting methodology, with **69% of voters in the West using ballots voters received by mail, versus just 8% in the Northeast.** If you compare the 2018 turnout map to the map of mail ballot access, [using our](#)



[five step delineation from “excuse required for everyone” to “full Vote at Home”](#) you’ll note the strong correlation between high mail-ballot accessibility and high voter engagement.

In July, PRRI released research showing the top six obstacles people face, especially people of color, in casting their ballot. ([See: Figure 3 in this report](#)) **Five of those six are directly mitigated by mailed-out ballots** (voters who said they couldn’t get off work; were unable to find correct polling place; were told their name was not on the list even though registered; were told they had incorrect identification; were harassed or bothered while trying to vote).

We are also proud of another original NVAHI research project we believe will be a “go to” resource for those wanting to understand the many different approaches taken across the US when it comes to mailed-out ballots. This [extensive 50 state research report](#) was released in September, outlining all the details of voting by mailed-out ballot, from who can request one, and how, to filling it out, returning it, and having it validated.

Vote at Home provides more secure elections.

The [Washington Post’s ranking of Colorado as the safest state](#) in which to cast a ballot put **the high security of VAH** on the map. Secretary of State Kim Wyman (R - Washington) added some [strong perspective in a Ripon Society piece](#). From the [Senate Intelligence Committee](#) to [UPI](#), there was a clear call for paper ballots to restore election security after the electronic hacking attempts in 2016. Those calls were echoed in the media from the [New York Times](#), to [Governing Magazine](#), to the [Kokomo \(IN\) Tribune](#), to [Delaware Online](#).

Vote at Home saves taxpayers’ money.

[PEW Trust research from 2016](#), while not new, finally received the visibility it deserved showing how **vote at home saved Colorado \$6 per voter of taxpayer dollars**. Another [PEW study noted the problems with attracting poll workers](#) that VAH helps alleviate.

Vote at Home is being recognized as a core element of positive election reform.

[Northern Illinois University’s extensive research](#), covering 33 variables, ranked the “cost” to citizens of exercising their voting franchise, with **100% VAH states, OR and CO, finishing 1st and 2nd, respectively, while Washington showed the most improvement, rising from 46th to 11th**. Trusted third parties such as the Center for American Progress (CAP) and Common Cause, both for the first time, featured VAH as one of a handful of key election reforms. [The CAP report](#) noted how powerful VAH is when coupled with automatic voter registration (AVR), while Common Cause focused on the positive lessons from Colorado (report to be issued shortly). The State Innovation Exchange (SIX) listed [Vote at Home as one of its “best practices.”](#)

And the national media took notice, with a **bipartisan Op Ed** featuring NVAHI chair Phil Keisling in the [New York Times](#), along with [two columns from David Leonhardt](#), a [NBC Nightly News broadcast](#) on the **bipartisan support for VAH**, an [interview on NPR with VAH executive director Amber McReynolds](#), a piece in the [Washington Post](#), [David Roberts’ article](#) in Vox, [Janelle Bouie’s coverage](#) in Slate, [Morton](#)

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[Kondracke's piece](#) in Real Clear Politics, and David Atkins in a [Washington Monthly article](#), among many others.

Then there were the Editorial Boards of papers across the country weighing in on the benefits of going to VAH in their states. Those ranged from papers such as the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#), to the [Wyoming Tribune Eagle](#), the [Omaha World Herald](#), the [Albany Times Union](#), the [San Diego Union-Tribune](#), the [Cape Coral \(FL\) Daily Breeze](#), and the [Honolulu Civil Beat](#). Additional articles appeared in the [LA Times](#), [Chicago Tribune](#), [Chippewa \(WI\) Herald](#), [New York Magazine](#), [The Commons](#), [Topeka \(KS\) Capital-Journal](#), the [American Prospect](#) and others.

There are tangible signs of VAH progress all across the country.

We reported that [Utah](#), which was flying under the radar of most observers, showed up with **27 of its 29 counties (covering 98% of its voters) using the 100% mailed-ballot model**. We revealed that North Dakota uses a modified system of [state-encouraged absentee in 31 of its 53 counties](#), and in their 2018 primary and then midterm, **those 31 counties handily beat the other 22 in turnout**.

California SB 450, which passed in 2016, saw its initial implementation in 2018 with five counties voting 100% from mailed-out ballots in their June 2018 primary (Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, San Mateo). Those counties, if a state (and together they are larger than many states), had the highest turnout in the primaries except for Oklahoma, which had medical marijuana in the ballot to boost its efforts. In the 2018 general election, those [same five counties \(again\) significantly exceeded the statewide average](#) turnout of California's non-VAH counties. Based on their initial success, the state is forecasting 10-15 counties will step up to 100% mailed-out ballot voting in 2020.

Anchorage, AK held its first municipal election in April using 100% mailed-out ballots [and smashed turnout records](#). Las Cruces, NM did the same thing in August, [with the same result](#). Initially, Garden County, Nebraska got permission to run its May primary by mailed-out ballot, [and swamped the other Nebraska counties](#), with 58% turnout versus 24% statewide. So, for the November midterms, [four NE counties did so](#), and repeated the positive results on a larger scale. Now [eight NE counties are already approved for 2020](#).

There were not very many states considering Vote at Home friendly legislation as the year began. Still, [Hawaii passed HB 1401](#) that has Kauai County running a 100% VAH pilot in 2020. New Jersey passed "no excuse" absentee, followed shortly after by allowing voters [to choose "permanent absentee" status](#). Michigan voters passed a ["no excuse law" \(Measure 3\)](#) in November by 2:1. And both Indiana and New York passed "no excuse" legislation in one chamber, but not the other, expecting to try again in 2019. VAH pilot legislation [was proposed in Virginia](#) and draft "no excuse" bills are ready in both chambers this session. A survey of [New Hampshire voters has them favoring a move to "no excuse" absentee](#) by more than 2:1. The Alabama Secretary of State is proposing [a move to a no excuse absentee policy](#). Missouri now has a "no excuse" absentee bill in draft form.

Also coming up, [Rockville, MD is running a pilot in 2019](#), Wyoming has drafted legislation for 2019 [calling for a county option for 100% mail-ballot elections](#), and a bill to institute VAH in Alaska is being drafted - with NVAHI suggestions included. Outgoing Connecticut Governor Malloy issued an [Executive Order \(64\)](#) calling for a report on the potential of moving to "Vote by Mail." The National Vote at Home Institute



was honored to be asked to assist in the effort to draft that report, the final version of which we expect will be made public shortly. [Governor Cuomo put “no-excuse” absentee high on his list of voting reforms](#) needed in New York state.

NVAHI became the “go to” source on the subject of mailed ballot elections.

In the midterms, NVAHI Executive Director, Amber McReynolds, weighed in on the mailed-ballot issues in Georgia and Florida, [submitting “friend of the court” testimony](#) in Georgia that helped win a lawsuit there. She also spoke to numerous reporters to explain that the much-publicized problems in Florida (and Georgia) with respect to absentee ballots could be primarily traced to poor procedures and signature validation processes, that could be easily remedied as has been done in many other states. We took similar action to explain that the election fraud problems in North Carolina (NC-09) were due to poor implementation, not an issue with the mailed-ballot model itself.

Last, and very far from least, in August we were delighted to welcome Amber as our first full-time Executive Director, joining us from her position as Director of Elections for Denver. In early December, she was awarded a [Public Official of the Year recognition](#) by Governing Magazine for her work in Colorado – followed by a [very interesting Comcast Newsmakers interview](#). By year end, besides crisscrossing the country speaking to elections officials and legislators, she had put in place a stunning Advisory Committee (to be announced shortly), and is on the agenda (see links) to speak at both the [National Association of Secretaries of State](#) (NASS) and [National Association of State Elections Directors](#) (NASED) meetings in February 2019. Her 2018 yearend interview/Q&A with [Colorado Politics is a must read](#). We think we chose wisely!

Whew! That was quite a year for a new organization.

With more states now considering VAH friendly legislation in their upcoming sessions, and many activists gearing up to push to remove barriers to ballot access prior to 2020, we look forward to what 2019 will bring.