



## THE INTERVIEW



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# He's rocking the vote

**Ray Murphy's** mission is getting 2 million voting-age Pennsylvanians out to the polls. Here's how he'd do it.

» BRAD BUMSTED

**R**ay Murphy is state coordinator of Keystone Votes, an election reform group, and deputy director of Pennsylvania Voice. He coordinates 35 organizations dedicated to making Pennsylvania elections more accessible. An estimated 2 million Pennsylvanians of voting age are not registered, he says.

The coalition is seeking changes in Pennsylvania election law, which dates to 1937. Murphy is 40 and lives in Philadelphia. He has two children, ages 6 and 1. A native Philadelphian, he crossed the state to attend college at the University of Pittsburgh, from where he graduated with a degree in social work.

Here are eight things to know about Murphy:

**1.** He is focused on civic engagement and education, on "increasing the number of people who see civic engagement as a civic duty." That includes "helping people to register to vote and making sure they get out to the polls to vote."

**2.** His work is nonpartisan, though he described it as a "progressive organization ideologically. We're not allowed to be partisan." None of the partners coordinating through the coalition may run any type of "partisan message endorsing a candidate or a party."

**3.** He said his proudest accomplishment is helping to push through online voter registration.

**4.** His coalition has three primary goals: increase election security, expand voter convenience and make sure options are available to everyone. Specifically, it would accomplish this through optional voting by mail, youth voter pre-registration, in-person early voting and same-day voter registration. Same-day registration would eliminate the requirement for changes being made more than 30 days before an election. "No-excuse absentee voting" and early voting have been made available in 30 states. Voting by mail is used in some western states.

**5.** He's a fan of Sen. Mike Folmer. Murphy described the Lebanon County Republican as a lawmaker who has taken on a leadership role to push through "no-excuse absentee voting." Any registered voter could request an absentee ballot without having to state why they will be out of the county on election day. It's a close cousin to voting by mail, except voters would not need an absentee ballot. Sen. Daylin Leach, D-Montgomery County, is promoting an idea to replace in-person voting with mail-in voting, similar to those in Oregon, Colorado and Washington. Every registered voter would re-

ceive a postage-paid ballot before every primary and general election. Completed ballots could be mailed or dropped off at the local county clerk's office or in designated drop-boxes around the state under Leach's plan.

**6.** Online voting? Pennsylvania may not be ready for it now, but there's little doubt it's coming down the road. One of the reasons: think about the "millions in online banking," he says. If people feel secure putting their bank accounts and securities online, voting will follow, Murphy says.

**7.** Voting machines will get the money. Murphy has confidence Gov. Tom Wolf will issue state bonds to cover county costs for voting machine replacements and updates. GOP lawmakers have threatened a lawsuit if he does.

**8.** Murphy wasn't doing so well at Pitt and he was worried about flunking a sociology class. He kept missing classes because he worked on student government campaigns. The professor had a sit down with him and told him he could get credit for external work in related fields. So he began working for an anti-hunger group in Allegheny County. The professor became his academic adviser. "I actually managed to graduate in four years. So my parents were pretty excited when that actually happened," he said.