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Time NH joined the 21st century

Telegraph Editorial

The Pew Research Center reported this summer that only 15 percent of American adults don't use the Internet. That figure is about the same as it was three years ago, but it's much lower than it was 15 years ago, when Pew found that nearly half of Americans were not plugged in.

All that connectivity has changed our culture.

The IRS reports that more than 90 percent of people who filed their income taxes last year did so online. There's even talk that the IRS may ultimately require online filing and do away with paper filing altogether.

According to the National Retail Foundation, more people shopped online than in brick-and-mortar stores on Black Friday.

We not only use the Internet to pay taxes and shop - it's how many of us keep track of family and friends, find companionship, do our jobs and pay bills, among other things.

In Nashua, residents can go online to pay for motor vehicle renewals, parking fines and wastewater charges.

The state of New Hampshire allows residents to renew their driver's license or purchase a hunting and fishing license online.

Young people have become accustomed to the convenience of it all. In fact, Pew found that the younger, wealthier and better educated a person is, the more likely they are to manage their daily lives via the Internet.

"I register for school, pay my taxes, cellphone bill and credit cards all online," said Craig Cavanaugh, a Plymouth State University student who participated in a recent conference call arranged by the New Hampshire Campaign for Voting Rights. "I just think it makes sense that the state would find a way to update the voter rolls year-round, so that when I graduate and update my mailing address, I can also go online and update my voter registration."

The Campaign for Voting Rights is pushing a series of bills it believes will make it easier for people to vote. Online registration is the centerpiece of that effort.

According to the National Conference of State Legislators, 26 states and the District of Columbia allow people to go online and register to vote, and another three have passed laws to bring online registration into being in the near future.

New Hampshire isn't one of them, but it should be.

Allowing online voter registration is a relatively simple thing the state could do to encourage younger people to vote.

Money is no excuse, because online registration is not that expensive to implement.

According to the Brennan Center at the New York University School of Law, it only cost the state of Washington about \$280,000 to implement electronic voter registration through the state's motor vehicle registration system. The secretary of state's office saved almost half of that in the first year, according to the Brennan Center.

In Arizona, it cost less than \$100,000 to put online voter registration in place, and connecting it to the motor vehicle system cost less than \$30,000, the Brennan Center found.

Studies have also shown that states that have embraced online registration have also, not surprisingly, seen an increase in registrations.

Yet, New Hampshire is still requiring people to put pen to paper and fill out a form.

As young people today might say: That's so last century.

It's like the rest of the world is driving around in cars and New Hampshire is clinging to the horse and buggy.