

# Demos Democracy Dispatches

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OCTOBER 12, 2004



## Shelley Remains Embattled

Support Mounts for More Stringent ID Provisions

Few Latinos Registering in Vista



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**ISSUE NUMBER 50**  
October 12, 2004

**EDITOR**  
Sarah Tobias

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**  
Kinga Bernath  
Ludovic Blain  
Dina Liebowitz  
Lucy Mayo  
Jonas Oransky  
Rebecca Ruiz  
Sarah Tobias  
Ari Weisbard  
Nick Williams

**GUEST WRITERS**  
Natalia Kennedy,  
*Brennan Center for Justice*

Kristina Wilfore,  
*Ballot Initiative Strategy Center*

Courtenay Strickland,  
*ACLU of Florida*

Ariel Neuman,  
*Just Democracy*

**DESIGN AND LAYOUT**  
Kinga Bernath

**ABOUT DEMOCRACY DISPATCHES**  
*Democracy Dispatches* is a regular *Demos* publication that tracks and analyzes democracy issues through continual contact with a growing network of people committed to improving American democracy.

We welcome submissions of short articles, op-eds, and letters to the editor. For more information, please contact the editor, Sarah Tobias, at [stobias@demos-usa.org](mailto:stobias@demos-usa.org).

Comments and suggestions may be sent to [DemocracyDispatches@demos-usa.org](mailto:DemocracyDispatches@demos-usa.org).

**ABOUT DEMOS**  
*Demos'* purpose is to help build a society where America can achieve its highest ideals. We believe that requires a democracy that is robust and inclusive, with high levels of electoral participation and civic engagement, and an economy where prosperity and opportunity are broadly shared and disparity is reduced. Founded in 1999, *Demos'* work combines research with advocacy – melding the commitment to ideas of a think tank with the organizing strategies of an advocacy group.

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# State News



Voters register in California

## CALIFORNIA

### Shelley Remains Embattled; Support Mounts for More Stringent ID Provisions; Few Latinos Registering in Vista

In late September, Secretary of State Kevin Shelley announced new measures intended to improve the management of HAVA funds. The changes are a response to increasing criticism that funds have been used to promote partisan election and voter education activity. Shelley will increase oversight of field officers, regional directors, and reporting procedures, among other reforms. He admitted to problems with implementing the 2002 legislation and promised to take immediate action, saying, "The buck stops here."

In other California news, San Diego County Supervisors recently added their names to a growing list of public officials who support more stringent voter identification requirements at the polls. On September 21, the Board unanimously approved Supervisor Bill Horn's proposal requiring all voters to provide proof of citizenship and identification when casting a ballot.

Horn's proposal is similar to legislation proposed in June by U.S. Rep. Henry J. Hyde (R-IL). The Federal Election Integrity Act of 2004 would amend the National Voter Registration Act by requiring proof of citizenship from voters. Two

of the bill's twenty-three co-sponsors are from California. The legislation has been referred to the Committee on House Administration.

Horn, Hyde and other supporters of stringent voter identification requirements believe they will combat voter fraud in California and elections nationwide. Critics claim that the standards do not effectively address the problem of voter fraud and discourage a disproportionately high number of racial and economic minorities from voting.

Meanwhile, Vista, a city of 95,000 people just north of San Diego, has begun to address a chronic lack of Latino participation in local politics – with little success. In August, the city spent \$10,000 to hire Leslie Padilla-Williams as a consultant to carry out a pre-approved plan for awareness and education among potential Latino voters. The plan, implemented over nine-and-a-half weeks, is designed to "spark dialogue and start talking about voting." So far, Padilla-Williams estimates that the program has registered 150 people, not all of them Latinos. She hopes that voter registration events, a K-5 kids/parent civics quiz, and visits with employees at their places of work will encourage more Latinos to get involved.

Latinos comprise 40 percent of Vista's population, but no Latino has ever been elected to city council and less than one-seventh of Vista's registered voters have Spanish surnames.

*San Diego Union-Tribune 9/20/04; NCTimes.com 9/24/04.*

## CONNECTICUT

### EDR Suit Filed in Federal Court

On September 28, 2004, several advocacy groups, including Connecticut Citizens Action Group, ACORN, Connecticut Common Cause, and Connecticut Public Interest Research Group filed a federal lawsuit claiming that Connecticut's 14-day voter registration deadline is unconstitutional. The plaintiffs want the state to rectify the situation by enabling Election Day Registration (EDR) on November 2. The Connecticut legislature last year passed an EDR bill, but former Governor John Rowland vetoed the legislation, claiming that it would make the system vulnerable to fraud. More than 7,400 potential voters registered in the 13-day period before municipal elections in 2003, and more than 3,700 registered after the voter registration cut-off in the 2002 state and federal races. All these citizens were disenfranchised on Election Day. "The 14-day registration deadline is an example of bureaucracy triumphing over basic civil rights," said Joyce Hamilton, who directs the advocacy organization Democracy Works. "It's time to move on, whether through action by the state legislature and the new governor, or through a successful lawsuit."

*Associated Press 9/29/04. For more information see Demos' EDR resource page at <http://www.demos-usa.org/page18.cfm>.*

## FLORIDA

### Struggles to Secure the Vote Continue

In late September, former President Jimmy Carter announced the need "to focus maximum public scrutiny on the suspicious [electoral] process in Florida." The state remains a battleground in the struggle for free and fair elections. In a letter faxed to Florida Secretary of State Glenda E. Hood on October 5, 2004, the Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Florida threatened to sue elections officials for failing to accept voter registration forms that didn't include a checked citizenship box, even though applicants also swore under oath that they were U.S. citizens. The Florida ACLU argues that federal law prohibits the state from denying the right to vote because of an immaterial "error or omission," and now awaits a response from the state.

Florida voters won a victory on August 27, 2004 when a state administrative judge issued a final order striking down as invalid an administrative rule that prohibits manual recounts on computerized voting machines. The decision, which may pave the way for the use of voter-verified paper trails on touch-screen voting systems, affects the 15 Florida counties currently using Direct Recording Equipment (DRE) voting machines. The state decided not to appeal the deci-

sion and is expected to re-write the rule prior to November 2. Additionally, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit ruled that Congressman Robert Wexler's touch-screen voting case should be heard by the lower court on its merits. Wexler argues that touch-screen voting machines are an unconstitutional violation of state and federal law since it is impossible to conduct a legally required manual recount when there is literally nothing to recount.

On September 17, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights heard testimony about vote suppression in Florida because of the state's felony disenfranchisement laws, its provisional balloting rules, and faulty implementation of its voter identification statute. A coalition of organizations has also brought suit challenging the state's requirement that provisional ballots must be cast in the correct precinct in order to count. The Florida Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case on October 13.

Meanwhile, various non-partisan organizations affiliated with the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition and the national Right to Vote Campaign are gearing up to collect signatures outside the polls on November 2 for petitions that would place a state constitutional amendment on the ballot in 2006 providing for automatic restoration of the right to vote after a person completes her sentence.

*Article contributed by Courtenay Strickland, ACLU of Florida.*

## IOWA

### NVRA Implementation Success

In many counties since mid-August, every single person visiting an Iowa DHS office who said they wished to register to vote has done so. Iowa's actions reflect the leadership of Governor Tom Vilsack, who directed the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) to make voter registration a top priority. Iowa DHS knew that tracking registration results on a county-by-county basis would be critical. So the department set up a new, straightforward website to get the job done. The site enables each county to enter its voter registration results on a weekly basis. And it makes it possible for managers in DHS and the Governor's office to track the efforts of county offices and quickly address any problems that arise. The best tracking system in the world means little unless there is discipline in execution and people use it to improve their performance – which is just what Iowa caseworkers have done.

Iowa's performance is the best in the country, and clearly shows that it takes three main ingredients to turn around voter registration trends at state public assistance offices: a clear game plan, smart systems for tracking results, and discipline in execution. The Demos-Project Vote NVRA Project is working to ensure that other states follow Iowa's lead.

*For further information on the NVRA implementation project*

## LOUISIANA

### Questions Over Missing Voting Machines

The NAACP and ACORN have asked the Justice Department to investigate the disenfranchisement of 58,000 voters -- many of whom were African-American -- in Louisiana's September 18 elections. In New Orleans, where almost 70 percent of the electorate is African-American, at least 59 precincts were without voting machines when the polls opened at 6 a.m., and some precincts were still without machines at 3 p.m. "Our concerns are that we have been closed out of the election process for so long and we don't want anything else to thwart it any further than it already has been," said the president of the Louisiana chapter of ACORN. "We, particularly in the African-American community, do not want any obstruction in the ability for all to vote." Voters cast ballots on a proposed constitutional ban on gay marriage as well as for several local offices. The NAACP and ACORN have asked the Justice Department to monitor the November 2 presidential election in the city.

*AP 2/24/04; AP 9/19/04*

## MINNESOTA

### Voter Registration Forms Run Short; Statewide Database Problems

Minnesota Secretary of State Mary Kiffmeyer's office signaled on September 28 that it had nearly drained its supply of voter registration cards. The Secretary of State said that more forms were already being made, and stressed that no one would be prevented from registering to vote. Groups working to register Minnesota residents before the October 12 pre-election day registration deadline complained that the shortage was seriously undermining their efforts, and expressed concern that Kiffmeyer was rationing registration cards in order to suppress voter turnout. In denying the allegations, Kiffmeyer noted that her office had ordered 1.5 million voter registration forms this year, compared with 400,000 in 2000. Registration applications are streaming in at a rate of more than a thousand a day. A backlog of forms has already clogged the ongoing effort to process them.

Meanwhile, the state's new voter registration database remains riddled with problems. A survey of 27 auditors by a county officers' association found that almost all of them described the system as "slow, and, at times for some, very slow." Dorothy McClung, Ramsey County's chief elections officer was more emphatic in her criticism -- "The system's performance is failing," she said as she described staff being thrown off the system in peak hours and being forced to re-

enter lost data during overtime. Kiffmeyer says that not all of the problems should be blamed on the state; many counties use outdated technology and so have problems with data transmission.

*AP 9/29/04; Saint Paul Pioneer Press 9/29/04*

## NEW JERSEY

### Issues Confusing Voter Registration Forms

Two weeks before the October 4 voter registration, New Jersey issued incorrect and confusing new voter registration forms. The hard-to-read forms fail to inform new registrants that they can provide proof of identity at any time prior to the election -- not just when registering to vote or casting a ballot. They also leave no room for registrants to indicate that they lack a social security number and drivers' license number. Advocates fear that shoddy design will potentially mislead registrants into believing that a driver's license is mandatory for registration.

*New Jersey Citizens' Coalition For the Implementation of HAVA Press Release 9/28/04*

## NEW MEXICO

### Supreme Court Rules on Voter ID

On September 28, 2004, the New Mexico Supreme Court ruled 4-1 that only first time voters who register by mail must show identification at the polls. The Court's decision is a victory for Secretary of State Rebecca Virgil-Giron, who had asked the state's high court to intervene and quickly resolve contradictory rulings by lower court judges.

At the end of August, several plaintiffs, including Republican State Rep. Larry Larranaga, filed a lawsuit asking that all first time voters who do not register at county clerk's offices, including all those who sign up at registration drives, be required to show ID at the polls. The New Mexico Secretary of State's office has consistently maintained that HAVA's new identification provisions apply only to first time voters who register by mail. On September 7, 2004, State District Judge Robert Thompson affirmed this reading of the law, ruling that about 100,000 first-time voters who signed up to vote in registration drives around the state will not be forced to show identification at the polls. Three days later, State District Judge Charles Currier issued a contradictory ruling, ordering all Chaves County residents who signed up to vote during a voter registration drive to show ID at the polls.

In her appeal, the New Mexico Secretary of State had argued that Currier's ruling inappropriately undercuts her authority "as chief election officer and subjects different voters around the state to the whims and erroneous interpretations of local county clerks." She argued that, "county clerks have a non-discretionary, ministerial duty to follow the law and the instructions of the secretary of state concerning who shall be required to show identification in order to vote."

*AP 9/7/04; AP 9/11/04; AP 9/14/04; AP 9/28/04*

## NEW YORK

### Assemblymember Scott Stringer Announces Landmark Proposal for Albany Reform

Assemblymember Scott Stringer (D-Manhattan) introduced a binding resolution to change the rules of the State Assembly in a way that aims to increase transparency, participation and effectiveness in the operations of the chamber. Assemblymember Sam Hoyt (D-Buffalo) and fifteen other majority members of the Assembly co-sponsored what is the most significant legislative reform measure to enjoy serious support in Albany. The resolution is based on the recommendations of the Brennan Center for Justice in its landmark report, *The New York State Legislative Process: An Evaluation and Blueprint for Reform*. According to Assemblymember Hoyt, this reform process "will give real power to individual legislators, not just the leadership."

*Article submitted by Natalia Kennedy, Brennan Center for Justice. [http://brennancenter.org/presscenter/releases\\_2004/pressrelease\\_2004\\_0928.html](http://brennancenter.org/presscenter/releases_2004/pressrelease_2004_0928.html)*

## SOUTH DAKOTA

### Legislature Must Reverse Redistricting, Dissolve Supermajority

On September 15, 2004, a federal judge ruled that a 2001 redistricting plan had illegally packed Native American voters into a single district and subjected them to "unequal electoral opportunity," in violation of the federal Voting Rights Act. Although the Native American community makes up 9 percent of South Dakota's population and nearly 7 percent of the state's eligible electorate, the 2001 redistricting plan created a "supermajority" district which was 90 percent Indian. The court ruling gives the legislature 45 days to redraw the boundary between Districts 27 – the contested district – and the adjacent District 26. The ruling is "a milestone in correct-

ing a system that has alienated my people from the political process for decades," said Alfred Bone Shirt, a plaintiff in the case.

*ACLU Press Release 9/15/04; Argus Leader 9/16/04*

## WYOMING

### Secretary of State Sued for Preventing Voter Registration Drives

On October 4, Chief U.S. District Judge William Downes refused to order a preliminary injunction against Secretary of State Joe Meyer, who stood accused of unconstitutionally blocking people from conducting voter registration drives.

In February, Secretary of State Meyer directed local election officials to refrain from handing out multiple voter registration forms to any individual. On September 23, 2004, three Wyoming residents who wanted to conduct voter registration drives filed suit against the Secretary of State and three county clerks, claiming that their rights under the First and Fourteenth amendments of the US Constitution, the state constitution, and federal civil rights law had been violated.

"What we were trying to do was get out people to register to vote," said Vickie Goodwin, one of the lead plaintiffs in the case. "Most especially, people who can't easily get out and go to the courthouse or to the polls for one reason or another."

Over 40 other people joined the plaintiffs in their suit -- many wanted to cast absentee ballots in the general election because of "age, physical disability, personal [and] economic circumstances." Nearly 12 percent of rural Wyoming's residents are 65 and older and nearly 17 percent of the population are people with disabilities.

According to the state's Attorney General, Judge Downes refused to issue an injunction because he thought the plaintiffs had not shown that "irreparable harm" would otherwise occur. "Based on everything that's occurred to date, not one person has been denied the right to vote," the Attorney General said.

*AP 9/23/04; AP 10/01/04; Wyoming Tribune-Eagle 10/05/04*

# Roundups



Voters line up at the Cornerstone Baptist Church in North Lakeland, Florida

## PROVISIONAL BALLOT ROUNDUP

### Placebo Ballots

Demos has released a new report finding that most states have subverted the Help America Vote Act's "fail safe" voting provision in one of three ways. Provisional ballots were supposed to ensure that no registered voter would be turned away from the polls because her name was erroneously omitted from the voter lists or because she was unable to show mandated identification. But like patients sent home with a placebo, provisional voters in more than 30 states may think they are being given the vote, but in fact many are receiving a false promise.

Idaho and Minnesota will not offer provisional ballots to first time, newly registered voters who can not show identification. Eleven other states will provide provisional voters with effectively meaningless ballots. They will not allow these individuals an opportunity to substantiate their identity after Election Day or verify their eligibility through other means. These provisional ballots will instead be automatically discounted.

In a second action that undermines the provisional ballot, thirty-two states will invalidate provisional votes cast in the wrong precinct – even when voters are selecting candidates

for statewide offices like governor or U.S. Senator, where the polling place error is immaterial. These states collectively represent 127 million eligible voters, or 63 percent of the 2000 electorate. Only twelve states will count a provisional ballot's choices for all races for which she was eligible to vote, even if cast in the wrong polling place.

Last, Demos found that Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Nevada, Vermont and Missouri -- will include only federal or federal and statewide offices on provisional ballots. Oklahoma will offer full provisional ballots, but only during federal elections.

These findings were the result of a survey of the 50 states and the District of Columbia undertaken over four months this summer.

Voter experiences in several recent primary elections provide ample cause for alarm. In Illinois' March 2004 primaries, more than 9,000 -- or approximately 88% -- of the 10,287 provisional ballots cast statewide were tossed out. Provisional ballots in Chicago were disqualified at an even higher rate (93%), in most cases because they were cast in the wrong precinct or because the affidavits were incomplete. If heading to the wrong precinct disenfranchises the same proportion of provisional voters this November as lost their vote in Chicago, more than 100,000 ballots could be lost due to this rule alone.

The Tampa Tribune has reported similar provisional ballot problems in three Florida elections since 2002. 1,226 provisional votes were invalidated in Broward County alone. Forty-four percent of the rejected ballots examined by the Tribune were attributed to poll worker error.

Court cases challenging these restrictive rules on provisional ballots have thus far been filed in Michigan, Missouri, Colorado, Ohio and Florida.

*Also, Natalia Kennedy from the Brennan Center for Justice writes the following:*

Brennan Center and Other Groups File Lawsuits in Michigan and Ohio Challenging Provisional Ballot Restrictions  
The Brennan Center for Justice and other groups filed lawsuits on behalf of Michigan and Ohio voters concerning the handling of provisional ballots in the upcoming November 2 election. The suits ask the courts to declare that Michigan and Ohio's rules on provisional ballots violate the Help America Vote Act. Both states' provisional ballot rules currently disenfranchise large classes of voters, especially first time voters who face special new ID requirements on Election Day and citizens who vote in the wrong polling place. The lawsuits also seek to instruct Michigan and Ohio's election officials about how to satisfy the federal safeguards outlined in the Help America Vote Act, which gives voters the right to cast a provisional ballot if they are unable to meet ID requirements or if they have gone to the wrong voting precinct.

[http://brennancenter.org/presscenter/releases\\_2004/pressrelease\\_2004\\_1005.html](http://brennancenter.org/presscenter/releases_2004/pressrelease_2004_1005.html)

## FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT ROUNDUP

### Georgia

The Sentencing Project, a partner with Demos in the national Right to Vote Campaign, released *The Vanishing Black Electorate* - a report that examines the wide gap in registration rates between African American males and other demographic groups. The study found that African American males register at a rate that is 11 percent lower than all other groups. Over two-thirds of this gap is due to the high rate of disenfranchisement among African American males. Without disenfranchisement, the registration gap would drop to under 4 percent.

The Sentencing Project offered a number of recommendations for resolving these problems. They include eliminating laws denying the vote to former prisoners and reviewing the

effect of drug policy on voting. One-third of disenfranchised African American males in Georgia lose the vote because of drug offenses.

### Idaho

The ACLU of Idaho has produced and is distributing a flyer, *Restoring Your Right to Vote in Idaho*. In Idaho, the right to vote is automatically restored to people with felony convictions when they have satisfactorily completed prison time, probation and parole.

### Louisiana

Activists with VOTE-Voice of The Ex-Offender have been conducting voter registration in jails in Orleans and Rapides Parishes. They have registered more than 700 people in the Orleans Parish Prison alone. Louisiana state law allows people to register once they have completed their full sentence.

### Maryland

Delegate Salima Siler Marriott has pre-filed legislation for the 2005 Session that would automatically restore voting rights to people with felony convictions upon their release from incarceration. The legislation would put Maryland in line with the District of Columbia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and 11 other states that allow citizens to vote as long as they are not incarcerated and do not disenfranchise people on probation and parole.

Maryland's current law mandates a three-year waiting period after all sentences, including probation and parole, have been served before allowing people convicted of felonies to vote again. Given that some individuals are sentenced to lifetime parole, Maryland's restrictions can amount to lifetime disenfranchisement.

### Minnesota

The Council on Crime and Justice has launched an informational campaign to let ex-offenders know they can vote again. It includes the distribution of fact sheets and Q and A flyers to agencies that deal with people with felony convictions statewide. A recent statewide study conducted by the University of Minnesota found that approximately 9.43 percent of the African-American voting age population was restricted from voting because of active felony convictions, compared to 1.05 percent of the non-black population.

Last year, legislation that extended voting rights to people on probation passed the state House by voice vote, but was

not picked up by the Senate. A bill requiring notification of state voting rights provisions upon entry into the criminal justice system was also introduced.

## New Jersey

The New Jersey ACLU is conducting a voter registration and education drive targeting people with felony convictions. They are concerned that many people don't know that once they finished probation or parole, they are eligible to register and vote in the state. Their efforts include distributing Get Your Vote flyers. They aim to register 1,000 people with felony convictions before the registration deadline. The New Jersey Division of Elections has also recently created a web-based resource page on felon voting rights.

## Ohio

"This is not a playground, this is a jail.... The next thing you know, people will want to sell candy bars here," said Sheriff Phil Stammitti to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, as he prevented Oberlin Votes! from conducting voter registration in the Lorain County jail that he runs. Ohio permits pre-trial detainees to vote from jail by absentee ballot. Officials later relented after the Racial Fairness Project/Ohio Free the Vote Campaign and ACLU of Ohio complained, and agreed to put up posters and distribute voting materials.

Prison Reform Advocacy Center (PRAC) and voting rights advocates won a victory in federal court in Akron on September 27, 2004, when Judge John R Adams ordered the Summit County Board of Elections to send notices to approximately 3,600 people with felony convictions advising them of their right to vote. The Board had previously written to the individuals advising them that their voter registrations were cancelled because of the convictions, but not that they were free to re-register once they had served their sentences.

However, advocates say Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell has caused his state's Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to back away from an agreement to notify people on parole when they come to the office for monthly or weekly meetings with parole officers. Transcripts show that the Department's attorney agreed to the notifications so that PRAC would settle its lawsuit with Blackwell and local election boards. The lawsuit was based on PRAC's August report which found that 21 out of 88 Ohio county Boards of Election misinformed callers inquiring about the right to vote, mistakenly telling them that ex-felons could not vote while on probation or parole.

In light of the confusing and misleading signals from election officials, voting rights advocacy groups in Ohio are distributing information cards to help ex-felons to determine whether or not they have the right to vote under state

law. The African American Ministers Leadership Council (AAMLC) and People For the American Way Foundation (PFAWF) are distributing 5,000 cards in Ohio communities through the church community and neighborhood groups.

## Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Secretary of State Pedro Cortes recently distributed a brochure in English and Spanish detailing voting rights for convicted felons, as well as for those convicted of misdemeanors and pretrial detainees. Cortes, and the Pennsylvania Secretary of Corrections also sent a letter to all county wardens and election directors requesting that they distribute the brochure to people under their supervision. The Department of Corrections is actively sharing voter related information with inmates anticipating release, while the Board of Probation and Parole is sharing the brochure with parolees under their supervision.

## Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Family Life Center recently released a new report, Political Punishment, an examination of the impact of Rhode Island's felony disenfranchisement law on the state's eligible voting population. Rhode Island is the only state in New England that bans voting by prisoners serving time for felony convictions, probationers and parolees. The report found that Rhode Island disenfranchises more of its residents than any other state in New England -- more than 15,000 Rhode Islanders cannot vote due to a felony conviction. 86 percent of those disenfranchised are currently not in prison. One fifth of African-American men are barred from voting statewide, and 1 in 11 Latino men are similarly disenfranchised. The rate of disenfranchisement in urban areas is 3.5 times that in the rest of the state.

## South Carolina

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (LCCRUL) and MEE (Motivational Educational Entertainment) has created materials, radio spots, focus groups and a toll-free hot line (1-800-294-5229) to educate people with felony convictions about how they can vote. Local activists, including Brett Bursey of the South Carolina Progressive Network, are concerned that corrections and elections officials don't do enough to make sure that South Carolinians with felony convictions know that they are automatically eligible to register to vote once they've completed parole or probation. Similar campaigns are also underway in Illinois and Louisiana.

## Virginia

Governor Warner (D) restored voting rights to 1,885 people with felony convictions in 2004. People with non-violent felonies have a three-year waiting period before they can apply, whereas those convicted of violent felonies must wait five years.

By way of comparison, former Gov. Jim Gilmore, a Republican, restored rights to 241 people between 1998 and 2002. U.S. Sen. George Allen, a Republican who was governor from 1994 to 1998, restored rights to 476 felons. L. Douglas Wilder, a Democrat who served as governor from 1990 to 1994, restored rights to 427 felons.

*The Virginia clemency resource page is here.*

*Atlanta Journal-Constitution 9/23/04; Providence Journal 9/23/04; AP 9/24/04; Daily Town Talk, 9/24/04; AP, 9/27/04; Cleveland Plain Dealer 9/30/04; Cleveland Plain Dealer 10/1/04; Delegate Salima Siler Marriott release, 10/1/04; Pioneer Press, 10/1/04; The State, 10/1/04; ACLU Idaho release; Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law release, People For the American Way Foundation release; Right to Vote release; Rhode Island Family Life Center release.*

*For more information see Demos' Felony Disenfranchisement resource page.*

## BALLOT INITIATIVE ROUNDUP

### Frustration with Electoral Systems Results in State Action

As the result of growing frustration with electoral systems, ballot measures to change voting procedures have cropped up in several states this year.

Amendment 36 in Colorado - known as the "Make Your Vote Count" initiative - would end the state's winner-take-all presidential electoral system by allocating electoral votes based on the statewide popular votes. For example, a candidate who wins 60 percent at the polls could receive five of the state's nine electoral votes, leaving the remaining four to a candidate who wins 40 percent on Election Day. If approved on November 2, the constitutional amendment would affect this year's choice for president by immediately permitting the division of Colorado's electoral votes, marking the most ambitious Electoral College reform yet in the nation. Two states -- Maine and Nebraska -- have passed measures giving only two electoral votes to the overall winner of the state; the rest are awarded individually based on the winner of the popular vote in each of those states' congressional districts. Colorado is considered a battleground state in this year's presidential election, and the fate of Amendment 36 could have a signifi-

cant impact on the outcome of the presidential election.

In Alaska, Question 4 -- the so-called "Trust the People" initiative -- would require special elections be called to fill unexpired vacancies in the U.S. Senate. In 2002 when Frank Murkowski won a hotly contested governor's race with 55% of the vote, he stepped down from his Senate seat to be sworn in as governor and, in a wildly unpopular move, appointed his daughter to fill his seat. Prior to the 2002 election, the Republican-dominated legislature changed Alaska's election laws so that outgoing Gov. Tony Knowles, a Democrat, would not be able to fill a Senate vacancy. The Alaska Senate race between Lisa Murkowski and Knowles is one of the most competitive statewide races in the nation. The issue of Murkowski's appointment, self-admitted nepotism, is one of the biggest obstacles Sen. Murkowski must overcome if she is going to be elected to a full term. Her own polling shows that close to 90% of Alaska are troubled by the way in which she was appointed.

Ballot measures have qualified in California and Washington to change the way primary votes are handled. The "People's Choice" -- Initiative 872 in Washington -- would continue the current practice of permitting voters to vote for any candidate for any office in primary and general elections, without limitation based on the voters' party of affiliation. However, the two "top" candidates with the most votes in the primary, regardless of party, would advance to the general election.

In California Proposition 62 would establish the same "top-two" primary system. A similar measure passed in 1996 and was in effect for the next two election cycles but was recently thrown out by the state Supreme Court. Redistricting in 2001 made most legislative and congressional seats "safe" for one major party or the other. In these districts, the overwhelming majority of races are decided in the primary, and the general election winner is a foregone conclusion. Proponents of the measure claim that this system has led to the disenfranchisement of voters, and point to the low turnout of the 2002 election as evidence of this.

Opposing the measure are members of the California legislature who are sponsoring Proposition 60, which guarantees that any political party that participates in the primary election can place candidates on the general election ballot. It is being supported by many third party members who may otherwise be blocked from the ballot if Proposition 62 were to pass. Proposition 62 is being backed by large corporations, such as Countrywide Home Loans and Wesco Financial, and by several wealthy individuals.

Opponents believe that the motivation for the "top two" initiative is that business interests have been irritated by the California legislature and that this kind of reform would bring about the defeat of "extreme" legislators. Some Democrats appear to support the initiative because of its potential to weaken the power of third parties such as the Green Party.

In recognition that term limits can cause turnover that dif-

fuses leadership, constitutional amendments to loosen term limits in place for legislators in Arkansas and Montana have been referred to the 2004 ballot.

In Ferndale, Michigan, a local measure will be voted in to allow instant-run off voting (IRV). IRV is a system that ensures a winning candidate will receive an absolute majority of votes rather than a simple plurality. IRV eliminates the need for runoff elections by allowing voters to rank their candidates in order of preference.

Initiatives will appear on the ballot in three states this year to restrict the process by which citizens can place measures on the ballot. Hands Off Florida, a diverse coalition that spans the political spectrum, has mobilized to defeat a measure referred to the ballot by the state legislature to move up the deadline for filing an initiative petition from August to February. Opponents of Amendment 2 have attacked it as a power play by wealthy special interests to curb the ability of grassroots activists to use the ballot initiative process. Amendment 2 has received the support of the Florida Chamber of Commerce.

Voters in Arizona will be asked to decide the fate of two separate measures relating to ballot initiatives. Proposition 101 would require that all voter-approved measures that expend state money include a new specified funding source other than the state's general fund. Proposition 104, supported by many of the same interests that back Proposition 101 would require initiative petitions to be filed seven months before the General Election. While proponents claim that it would ease the workload of the County Records and give them more time to verify signatures, opponents worry that like the similar measure in Florida, it will curb the ability of low-budget grassroots groups to qualify ballot measures.

A measure to restrict the initiative process will also go before voters in Alaska. If approved it would change the geographic distribution signature requirements for initiative petitions from two-thirds to three-fourths of house districts in the state. It would also require that the number of signatures in each of those house districts must be equal to at least seven percent of those who voted in the last election in that district. Such changes would likely make it much more difficult for citizen groups to qualify ballot measures.

*Article contributed by Kristina Wilfore, Ballot Initiative Strategy Center*

## YOUTH VOTING ROUNDUP

### Official Confirms that Out-of-State Students Can Vote in Arizona

Pima County Recorder F. Ann Rodriguez issued a statement on September 17 confirming that out-of-state students can register and vote in Arizona, so long as they turn 18 on or before Election Day and have lived in the county for at least 29 days. "One's intention to remain a resident is not defined by a specific length of time," Rodriguez said. In a September 9 television broadcast on Fox 11 News, Pima County Registrar of Voters Chris Roads had warned that out-of-state students registering to vote in Arizona without intending to make the state their permanent home are committing a felony.

### Report Details Student Disenfranchisement

On September 22, 2004, the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund's (LCVEF) Project Democracy released a report on barriers to students' electoral participation. The report finds that youth are disenfranchised by restrictive residency requirements, racial prejudice, intimidation (by both parties), gerrymandering, and lack of convenient polling locations. "We were shocked to find such startling cases of blatant student disenfranchisement, cases that appear to violate the spirit of the law," said LCVEF President Deb Callahan. The release of the report was followed on September 23 by a day of action on campuses, sponsored by groups such as Rock the Vote, the New Voters Project, 2020 Vision, Feminist Majority, Project Democracy, and the Student Voting Rights Campaign.

### hting for the Youth Vote in Wisconsin

The New Voters Project announced that it had registered 114,000 18-24-year-olds in the swing state of Wisconsin this year, almost as many as in Iowa, Colorado, Oregon, New Mexico, and Nevada combined. The Project took its efforts beyond college campuses since two thirds of this demographic do not attend institutions of higher education.

### New York Makes It Easier for Students

The New York Public Interest Research Group and Rock the Vote recently began a drive to register students throughout the State University of New York's 64 campuses and have registered almost 5,000 voters. Poll workers throughout

the state will accept college photo IDs at the polls from those students who did not provide identification when they registered, said New York Board of Elections spokesman Lee Daghlian.

## Hip-Hop Summit Action in New Jersey; GOTV Tour Begins

On September 28, 2004, 800,000 students in New Jersey high schools, colleges and universities watched the Hip-Hop Summit via live web streaming. Sponsored in part by the state's HAVA funds, the 26th Hip-Hop Summit featured hip-hop artists and government officials, from Attorney General Peter C. Harvey to Trenton Mayor Douglas Palmer. Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN) Chairman Russell Simmons said "to reach that large number of young people while they are in school in the classroom shows the power of hip-hop in encouraging youth voter turnout." The Hip-Hop Summits that are taking place across the nation provide forums for youth to learn the importance of voting and discuss issues of importance to their generation.

HSAN has also partnered with America Coming Together to get out the youth vote on a 10-state bus trip, Hip-Hop Team Vote GOTV Tour. Launched on October 1, the tour will include stops for rallies, training sessions, canvassing and special events. Voices For Working Families, Citizen Change, Voice Your Choice, Rock The Vote and NAACP branches are among the supporters of the bus tour.

*Press Release by F. Ann Rodriguez 9/17/04; News Release by Project Democracy 9/22/04; St. Louis Post-Dispatch 9/23/04; Business Wire 09/24/04; The Associated Press State and Local Wire 9/27/04; Business Wire 09/28/04; Democracy Dispatches # 49.*

## ELECTRONIC VOTING ROUNDUP

In mid-September, Rep. Bob Ney (R-OH) issued a statement reiterating why he, and the other sponsors of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) oppose adding paper trails to touch-screen voting machines. "The manipulation of paper ballots," he emphasized "has been at the root of virtually every case of election fraud in American history.... Paper systems have a long history of problems that electronic systems are designed to prevent." Ney noted that almost all groups representing people with disabilities have expressed opposition to Rep. Rush Holt's bill to add paper trails to ATM-like machines, claiming that the Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act of 2003 "eviscerates the accessibility provisions of HAVA."

Also in mid-September, the Century Foundation released a new issue brief, African Americans, Voting Machines and

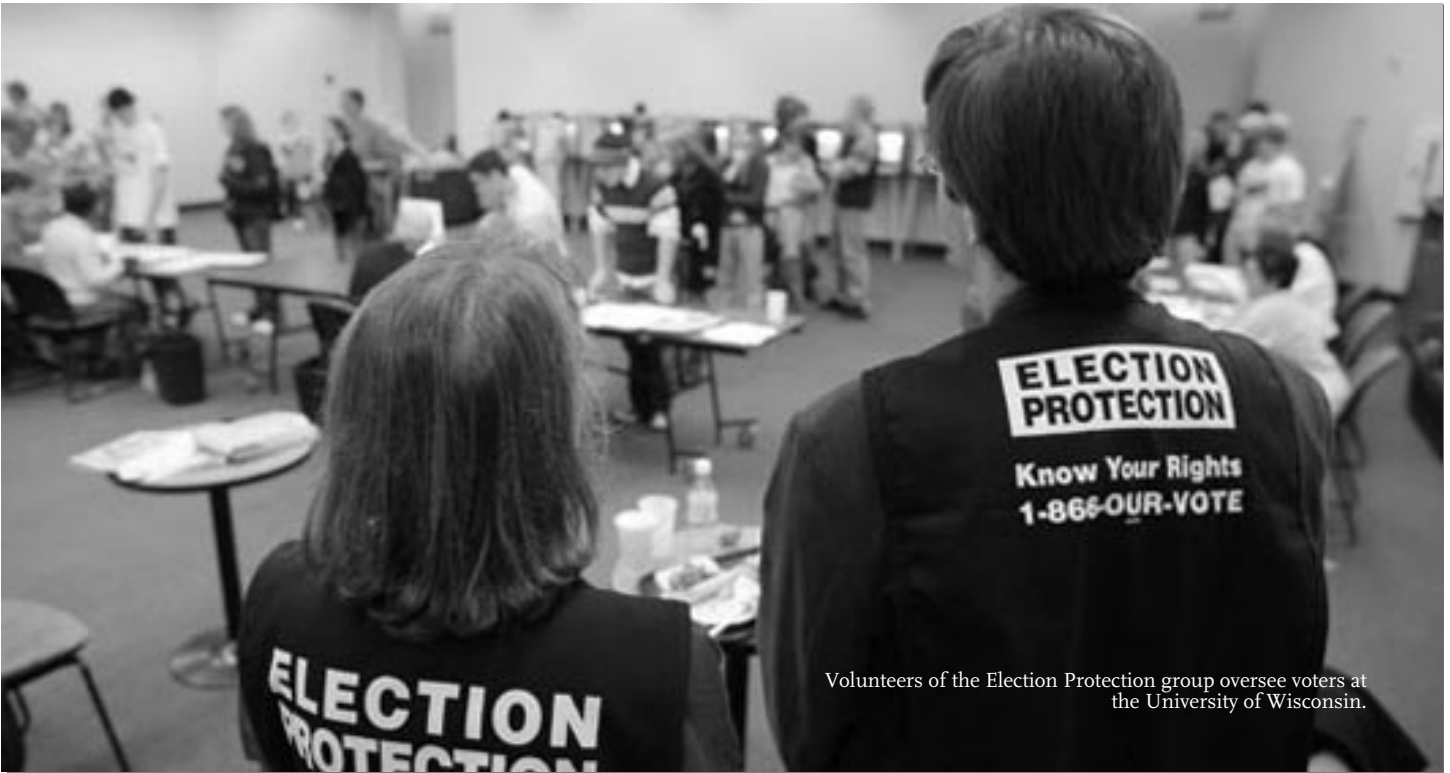
Spoiled Ballots: A Challenge to Election Reform. The report argues that votes by African-Americans are disproportionately uncounted when they are cast on punch-card systems and on many "central count" optical scan machines. The racial disparity almost disappears with touch-screen systems and with optical scan systems where votes are counted in the polling place. The Century Foundation warns that, "The continued use of punch-card ballot systems threatens to undercut the reliability of the 2004 election."

Meanwhile, paper trail activists and computer programmers demonstrated possible security flaws with touch-screen voting systems at a mid-September press conference. Bev Harris, author of "Black Box Voting: Ballot Tampering in the 21st Century," showed a film of a chimpanzee erasing vote tallies calculated by tabulation software. Harris pointed to the ease with which hackers could manipulate Diebold systems. "It's astonishingly easy to get in," she said. "There's no security whatsoever." Computer programmer Jeremiah Akin demonstrated additional flaws in Sequoia systems.

In electronic voting news at the state level, a federal judge recently ordered Duval County, Florida, to have touch-screen machines available in all precincts for people with disabilities by the November election. Duval County, however, said that it did not have enough time to acquire the machines and test them before the election; a federal appeals court blocked the original judge's order on October 5. The only accessible voting machines available in Duval County on November 2 will be at the main election offices. Across the country in California, Governor Schwarzenegger signed a bill on September 28 mandating paper trails for all touch-screen voting machines in the state by 2006.

*Roll Call 9/13/04; Century Foundation Press Release 9/15/04; AP 9/22/04; CNET News 9/28/04; AP 10/2/04; AP 10/5/04*

# National News



Volunteers of the Election Protection group oversee voters at the University of Wisconsin.

## Advocates for the Disabled Press Congress to Release HAVA Funds

In an effort spearheaded by United Cerebral Palsy (UCP), advocates for people with disabilities have initiated a campaign to press Congress to spend \$650 million in HAVA funds allocated for FY 2005. Most of this money was originally intended to upgrade voting machines and increase polling place accessibility so that people with disabilities could get equal access to the polls. But so far this year, President Bush has only asked for \$65 million of these funds. Congress has yet to consider his request.

Leaders of the “Don’t Block My Vote” campaign concede that Congress is unlikely to take any meaningful action before this election, but note the importance of holding lawmakers accountable on this issue. “Clearly we are taking advantage of this election season to get some attention on this issue,” said UCP president Stephen Bennett. “We’re spending all this money for the elections in Iraq, and yet we won’t even spend money on stuff that we need to do here in the United States.”

According to UCP, barriers to the polling place kept 20 million people with disabilities from voting in the last presidential election. This year, 75% of counties nationwide will still use the same voting machines as in 2000, while many polling places remain inaccessible to voters with disabilities.

“This is a key issue, and the fact that we haven’t taken care of this [issue] this year is a public embarrassment to democracy around the world,” said Bennett.

Meanwhile, advocates for voters with mental disabilities in Pennsylvania have also begun to organize. The majority of people with cognitive and mental disabilities hold full-time jobs, pay taxes and are entirely capable of making their own decisions and voting. But Janet Cambria an adviser to the Pennsylvania chapter of Speaking for Ourselves, an activist group for people with disabilities, noted that many people with cognitive disabilities do not vote because they lack information and are anxious about how they will be received at polling precincts. Efforts to register voters with mental disabilities are typically lacking, too. A recent survey by the Pittsburgh-based Disabilities Law Project found that only 58 percent of the service providers mandated to offer voter registration through the NVRA complied with the law during the 2000 election season.

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 9/27/04; *AP* 9/29/04

## Mounting Voter Registration Forms Threaten to Exclude Thousands from Rolls

Massive voter registration efforts in key swing states are proving unwieldy for local election officials who must process completed forms soon after registration deadlines pass. The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) mandates that voter registration forms must be processed within 30 days, but it is unclear whether election officials have had the manpower or time to meet this provision.

Reports from Pennsylvania, Colorado Ohio and Florida indicate sizeable voter registration backlogs. Alleghany County, Pennsylvania is reportedly weeks behind in processing voter registration forms and Philadelphia County, which has seen its biggest surge of new voters in nearly 20 years, is about six days behind. Montgomery County, Pennsylvania has added 12 computers, 15 phone lines and 12 workers from other departments to meet the increased demand. Philadelphia election workers have reported working nights and weekends to process the forms. Local election agencies attribute part of the backlog to problems surrounding implementation of the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors (SURE), Pennsylvania's voter registration system. They say that SURE is slow and prone to freezing when processing voter registration forms.

Election officials in Colorado are also inundated with registration forms. In Jefferson County more than 15,000 voter registration forms were still waiting to be processed while Denver County, which has hired 18 temporary workers and added overtime shifts, is still backed up by more than 6,000 forms.

Voter registration in Ohio has also boomed this year. In some heavily Democratic counties like Cayuga County, voter registration has increased by 150 percent from 2000. At the end of September, election officials reported that nearly 20,000 cards in Cayuga County still needed to be processed. Franklin County added about 200,000 newly registered voters. Groups like Project Vote say they have registered more than 300,000 new voters in Ohio since January.

In a series of confusing, often contradictory statements, Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell has made voter registration more difficult for election officials to process. Originally Blackwell said he would only accept forms indicating that prospective voters were US citizens, but later he reversed this decision because of pressure from registration groups and began accepting forms without this information. Then in early September, Blackwell told election officials that county boards should only accept registration forms submitted on 80-lb stock paper. He later rescinded this decision, too, and said that county boards should accept all registration forms, regardless of the weight of paper they were printed on.

The Ohio Secretary of State is not the only election official to narrow the criteria for processing voter registration forms. Florida's secretary of state Glenda E. Hood has told county

boards of elections only to accept voter registration forms if registrants have checked a box indicating that they are US citizens – even though voters attest to this fact when they sign an affidavit on the registration application. Elections officials in four counties have now kept more than 17,000 people from the voter rolls. America Families United has filed suit against the Duval Board of Elections insisting that all voter registration applications should be processed, and that those with incomplete forms should be given adequate time to complete them. The restrictions occur as registration by African Americans is reportedly up nearly 150 percent from 2000, and registration in Miami Dade County alone is up 65 percent.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 bars states from denying any individual the right to vote in any election because of an error or omission that is not material to determining whether the individual is qualified to vote. Elections rights groups worry that these backlogs will make it impossible for people who have submitted incomplete forms to fill in the correct information prior to the states' registration deadlines and therefore that hundreds of thousands will be disenfranchised.

*AP 09/26/2004; AP 09/28/2004; NY Times 09/28/2004; Akron Beacon 09/29/2004; The Columbus Dispatch 09/29/2004; Morning Call 09/29/2004; Wall Street Journal 10/01/2004; NY Times 10/02/2004; NY Times 10/04/2004;*

## Just Democracy: Student Leaders Protect the Vote

Just Democracy (JD), the national, non-partisan voting rights project that will be sending 2000 law students to monitor polls around the country on election day, held its first ever JD Leadership Conference on October 2 and 3 at Harvard Law School. Student leaders from JD chapters across the nation traveled to Boston to discuss their plans, learn the basics of election law, and chart a course for JD's future after the 2004 election. The conference attendees will now spend the month of October recruiting and training volunteer law students to work as monitors in their local voting precincts. JD currently has 47 chapters at law schools in 29 states and the District of Columbia. The group is dedicated to ensuring that every eligible voter is able to have their vote counted on Election Day. JD chapters are coordinating with their local election officials to ensure that JD volunteers are able to correct mistakes effectively at the polls before eligible voters are disenfranchised, and address problems as they arise throughout Election Day 2004.

*Article contributed by Ariel Neuman, Just Democracy. For more information, email [info@justdemocracy.org](mailto:info@justdemocracy.org).*

# Federal News



Senator John Kerry's immediate family reacts as he concedes he does not have enough votes to win the election.

## Government Aims to Make Elections Safer by Stepping Up Immigration Surveillance and Enforcement

The federal government has started implementing its "October Plan," a government-wide Interagency Security Plan to strengthen national security around the November elections and the 2005 Presidential Inauguration.

CBS News reported that the Federal Bureau of Investigation will visit mosques to conduct surveillance, and may detain people suspected of being terrorist sympathizers. For its part, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the largest branch of the Department of Homeland Security, will step up surveillance of immigrants and enforcement of immigration laws. Contrary statements from the ICE notwithstanding, advocates for immigrant communities accuse the federal government of selective enforcement of immigration laws and profiling on the basis of national origin. They also fear that these actions will intimidate US citizens related to those targeted under the October plan, particularly those who have recently registered to vote.

"I'd like to say that this will not affect the Arab American vote on November 2, but in reality anything that impacts the community and raises anxiety in the community, impacts its participation in the civic space," said Monica Tarazi, President of the New York chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Free and confidential legal advice and representation is available from the lawyers at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF). They can be reached at 800-966-5946 (emergencies after 7pm 917-533-0903).

*CBSNews.com 9/17/04, www.adc.org; AALDEF Media Advisory 9/22/04; Statement by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 9/30/04*

## EAC Funds Poll Worker Training

On October 1, 2004, the United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC) announced that it would distribute \$627,000 in grants to colleges and universities that have innovative programs to engage students in the political process. Grantees of the Help America Vote College Poll Worker Program will be expected to encourage students to become poll workers on Election Day. "By encouraging college students to participate, we will see the benefits of this program for years to come," said EAC Chair DeForest Soaries.

Election officials are often hard-pressed to find enough people to work at the polls on Election Day. The average poll worker is 70 years old, and may not be as comfortable and experienced with new election technology -- and especially with touch-screen voting machines -- as younger, more tech-savvy people.

*Newsday 9/14/04; Press Release 10/1/04*

## LCCR Sues over Access to Election Fraud Documents

With reports coming in of possible vote suppression from voter registration groups on the ground in Florida, South Dakota, Arizona, and New Mexico, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) has filed suit against Attorney General John Ashcroft and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The lawsuit, filed under the Freedom of Information Act, asks the DOJ to release all agency records about so-called "voting integrity" efforts, particularly those that could intimidate lawful voters and suppress voter turnout.

Attorney General Ashcroft launched the Voting Access and Integrity Initiative in 2002. Civil rights groups contend that the Initiative has focused on voter integrity rather than voter access, as evidenced by the assignment of federal prosecutors to watch for election crimes in each judicial district.

*U.S. Department of Justice Fact Sheet, "Voting Access and Integrity Initiative," November 2002; Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Coalition Press Release, "Civil Rights Coalition Sues Ashcroft over Access to Election Fraud Policy Documents" 09/28/04*

# International News



Steve Da vee of Portland Oregon, watches the results as they trickle in.

## OSCE Issues Pessimistic Pre-Election Report

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has expressed dire predictions about the upcoming U.S. presidential election. In a September 28 report, the OSCE criticizes the slow pace of HAVA implementation -- both at the state and federal level -- and anticipates lawsuits stemming from problems with voter registration lists, provisional and absentee ballot rules, and complaints about intimidation by minority voters. The report also predicts litigation over election results calculated by new touch screen machines that lack paper trails and the capacity for a manual recount.

A five-member delegation from the European organization visited the United States in early September, at the invitation of the Bush administration. Observers will return to the United States to monitor the election in November.

AP 9/29/04; [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org)

## The Overseas Vote

Thousands of overseas voters may be unable to vote in this year's presidential election because they did not receive their absentee ballots in time. Eight swing states sent out absentee ballots to overseas voters after the 45-day cut-off required for election officials to process the forms in a timely fashion. Most swing states will not count ballots that arrive after Election Day.

Citizens who want to vote from abroad encounter other problems, as well. Pentagon computers and fax machines have been clogged, and access to a voter assistance website has been denied.

In an effort to counter these problems, federal officials have made absentee ballots available for overseas military personnel on a restricted website and have authorized 32 states to fax blank ballots to military personnel abroad. The Defense Department is also conducting voter awareness drives for active-duty troops and prioritizing mail from military addresses outside of the U.S.

Although these actions may protect voting rights for military members, they do nothing to guarantee that other overseas civilians can cast ballots in the presidential race. Democratic Party officials are urging managers of the Federal Voting Assistance Program to compensate for late absentee ballots by posting federal write-in ballots on the Internet for civilians abroad. Meanwhile, a group called Republicans Abroad intends to place advertisements in international newspapers, encouraging American civilians overseas to immediately cast write-in-ballots in order to secure their vote. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission also recently released a new report detailing best practices for overseas voting. Among other recommendations, it calls for the dissemination of State Write-In Absentee Ballots for overseas voters.

There are about 4.4 million potential overseas voters. Among those in uniform, approximately 123,836 reside in Florida, 52,860 in Pennsylvania, 46,334 in Ohio, and 25,490 in Missouri.

*Times-Picayune 9/26/04; New York Times 9/29/04 and 10/2/04*

# Opinion Editorial

## States Fail to Uphold Voting Rights of the Poor, Disabled and Elderly

What percentage of registered voters actually votes on Election Day? Forty-five percent? Fifty? Sixty?

None of the above. In the Presidential election of 2000, more than 80% of those who registered went to the polls. In contrast, virtually no unregistered citizens voted -- not surprising, since most states bar people from voting unless they register weeks before Election Day.

Given that voter registration is key to voting, you might think that states would be giving a lot of attention to it right now. But you would be wrong. In fact, for several years now, the majority of states have virtually ignored some of their core responsibilities under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA).

The NVRA, also known as the Motor Voter Law, made it easier for Americans to register to vote whenever they applied for a driver's license or vehicle registration. Congress recognized, however, that facilitating voter registration at DMV's alone would discriminate against the millions of citizens who do not have driver's licenses -- a group that happens to be disproportionately poor, elderly, disabled, and female.

To remedy this potential inequality, Congress also required states to offer voter registration at agencies administering Medicaid, Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and programs for the disabled, and to offer the same assistance with voter registration materials as they do with agency forms.

Unfortunately, more than ten years after Congress enacted these requirements, states are failing to implement them adequately. As a result, registration rates among low-income Americans have not improved. In fact, only 48% of citizens in households earning \$15,000 or less per year are registered -- versus 78% in households earning over \$75,000.

The data on states' declining efforts to register public assistance applicants to vote is alarming. From 1995-1996 to 2001-2002, the number of voters registered at public assistance offices dropped 56%. The number of voters who registered by all other means dropped just 6.5% over the same period -- less than one-eighth as much. States as diverse as Oklahoma, Delaware, Ohio, Missouri, Nebraska, and Hawaii have seen declines of more than 75% in voter registration at welfare offices. Clearly, states can -- and must -- do better.

Some might respond that registering people to vote is difficult in this age of cynicism. The experience of a state like Nevada suggests otherwise. In Nevada, some 39,000 people registered to vote at welfare offices in 2001-2002, while 79,000 applied for Food Stamps. Admittedly, Food Stamp

applicants are only a proxy for all welfare clients. Still, the fact that voters registered at Nevada's welfare offices equal nearly half of all state Food Stamp applicants places Nevada in a league of its own. The comparable figure nationally is less than 6%. Viewed another way, in Nevada 19.3% of all voter registration applications came from welfare offices -- compared with just 2.6% in other states.

How can states improve? Let's put it this way: States seeking Nevada's secret don't need to contact the nuclear scientists at Yucca Mountain. They just need to do some basic things that a few states already do well.

Recognize that voter registration is part of human services departments' mission to help the poor and disabled achieve self-sufficiency and community involvement. Appoint NVRA coordinators at each welfare office, and ensure that caseworkers have sufficient voter registration materials. Encourage clients to complete registration forms in the office. Offer voter registration in waiting rooms and at the outset of client interviews. Monitor results for indications of trouble. Finally, use nonpartisan posters, buttons, and videos to promote registration among all who visit welfare offices.

State voter registration deadlines for the fall election range from early to mid-October, so there is still time to make a difference in protecting the rights of tens of thousands of citizens.

The last Presidential election forcibly demonstrated that every vote matters. And we know that the single greatest impediment to voting is the registration process. Most states, however, are failing to protect the right to register to vote among some of America's most vulnerable citizens. Governors and human services leaders must act quickly to address this failure. If they do not, they will be complicit in this breakdown of democracy.

*Miles Rapoport is the president of Demos: A Network for Ideas & Action, and former Secretary of the State of Connecticut. [www.demos-usa.org](http://www.demos-usa.org)*

*Maxine Nelson is the president of Project Vote, a national non-partisan voter registration and education organization. [www.projectvote.org](http://www.projectvote.org)*

# Announcements

The Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project has released a report *Seven Steps to Make Sure Your Vote is Counted: A Guide for American Voters*. The report's recommendations include checking registration status and obtaining sample ballots before Election Day, and double-checking ballots before casting them. English and Spanish versions of the report can be found at [www.vote.caltech.edu](http://www.vote.caltech.edu).

Arcmass' voter information site at [www.arcmass.org/vote.html](http://www.arcmass.org/vote.html) includes general voter registration information, specific information about the rights of disabled voters, Massachusetts-specific information about people under guardianship, and responses by John Kerry and George W. Bush to a candidate questionnaire conducted by American Association of People with Disabilities.

The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund is operating a national, toll-free bilingual voter information and protection hotline at 1-888-Ve-Y-Vota (1-888-839-8682) throughout the remainder of the campaign season. The hotline will answer questions on all electoral issues, and will also document and monitor all voter protection complaints.

As part of its "Election Protection: Racial Justice at the Ballot Box" initiative, MassVOTE is currently seeking volunteers to help monitor polls in eleven Massachusetts cities with large minority populations. Teamed with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, the group hopes to train 1,000 to 1,200 volunteers and anticipates placing one worker inside and one interviewer outside each polling place. Volunteers with multiple languages are particularly in demand. For more information, visit [www.massvote.org](http://www.massvote.org).

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund and Working Assets Long Distance are developing voter empowerment and election integrity action alerts for use by the online community. The latest alerts, which include a campaign to press Congress to release HAVA funds, and a campaign to force the resignation of Florida's chief election official, can be viewed at [www.civilrights.org](http://www.civilrights.org).

The Ballot Initiative Strategy Center has released a *Ballot Initiative and Referendum 2004 Election Preview*, which breaks down all ballot initiative measures by state and provides a comprehensive analysis of major issues and trends across the country. Download the report at [www.ballot.org/spotlight/I&R\\_2004\\_Election\\_Preview.pdf](http://www.ballot.org/spotlight/I&R_2004_Election_Preview.pdf)

The Community Service Society Associates (CSS), an independent organization that combats poverty through research, advocacy, and direct services, will hold an issue forum on October 20 entitled "Voting Matters: What's at Stake for Low-Income New Yorkers?" Moderated by David R. Jones, president and CEO of CSS, panelists will discuss whether low-income voices are being heard in the presidential campaign, and what is at stake for low-income communities in the election. CSS Associates is located at 105 East 22nd Street, NYC. More information can be found at [www.cssny.org/associates](http://www.cssny.org/associates)

Demos' Economic Opportunity Program is looking for individuals and families -- particularly young people (18-34), seniors, and people of color -- to share their stories about personal debt and credit card debt. These stories, which can remain confidential, will help further the Economic Opportunity Program's research and advocacy addressing the debt crisis. For more information or to share your story, please visit [www.demos-usa.org/debtstories](http://www.demos-usa.org/debtstories), email [debtstories@demos-usa.org](mailto:debtstories@demos-usa.org) or call Heather McGhee at (212) 389-1408.

Demos' Economic Opportunity Program has published a report entitled "Millions to the Middle: Three Strategies to Expand the Middle Class," forecasting the future of economic security in the New Economy. The report offers long-term ideas for fostering tomorrow's middle class, focusing on expanding access to higher education, closing the gap between wages and the cost of living, and boosting asset accumulation. Download the report from [www.demos-usa.org/pub274.cfm](http://www.demos-usa.org/pub274.cfm)

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) has embarked upon a voter education campaign with the publication of *5 Things You Need to Know on Election Day* cards. The cards are meant to familiarize voters with new election procedures, to ensure that votes are properly counted, and to kick off a public awareness effort that involves a LWVUS tour in the run-up to the November election. The League also issued a report *Helping America Vote: Safeguarding the Vote* that provides guidelines for state and local election officials to implement better election practices. Read the report at [http://www.lwv.org/elibrary/pub/voting\\_safeguarding\\_color.pdf](http://www.lwv.org/elibrary/pub/voting_safeguarding_color.pdf). To download a card or for further information, visit <http://www.lwv.org>. Finally, the the League of Women Voters has put together a guide to implementing the new federal provisional ballot requirement. To view the guide, visit [http://www.lwv.org/elibrary/pub/voting\\_help-vote.pdf](http://www.lwv.org/elibrary/pub/voting_help-vote.pdf)

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220 Fifth Ave, 5th Floor, New York, NY, 10001  
phone: 212.633.1405 fax: 212.633.2015