



SAVE OHIO'S VOTES

URGE OHIO'S SECRETARY OF STATE TO MAKE *IMMEDIATE AND URGENT* ELECTION REFORMS

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Introduction:

In the Presidential election of 2000, Ohio's electoral votes were decided by a margin of approximately 165,000 votes. Based on national research, we estimate that well over 100,000 Ohio votes were "lost" in that election due to problems with registration, polling place issues, and voting systems. Youth and low income populations are disproportionately at risk. These problems are outlined below along with recommendations that will greatly reduce the number of lost votes in the 2004 election. We have appealed to the Secretary of State, who has the authority and responsibility, to immediately issue directives to implement the necessary reforms. As yet, the Secretary has taken few of the necessary steps to prevent Ohio from becoming another Florida in 2004.. We need your immediate help to press the Sec. of State to act quickly. Links are given below for more detailed information.

Problems and recommendations:

1. REGISTRATION ISSUES may disenfranchise up to 35,000 Ohioans if action is not taken immediately, before the deadline of October 4.

The Greater Cleveland Voter Registration Coalition recently found that of nearly 2500 new registrations and changes of address forms investigated, about 1 in 20 were not entered, improperly entered or were impaired by voter error. The results of this careful investigation will be reviewed by the Board of Elections, so they are preliminary. We are releasing them now because time is of the essence. Youth and people with low incomes, who move more frequently than others, would be repeatedly subjected to re-registration errors. In many cases, the voter would not know until election day that their registration was compromised. In **Cuyahoga County alone, this would amount to 10,000 compromised votes, and statewide, about 35,000 votes!**

Recommendation:

Begin immediately **an intensive public relations campaign** to instruct voters that if they have not received confirmation from their Board of Elections after registering for the first time or submitting changes of address, they must immediately call their Board of Elections to determine if they are on the registration lists. If not, they will need to *re*-register before Oct. 4. Continuous banners on TV news reports, newspaper boxes, PSA's, appearance of public figures, etc. all need to stress these messages repeatedly. We welcome the information just received that the office of the Secretary of State will be starting a media campaign next week, including these issues, but no details are available, and no directives to Boards of Election have been issued.

Just prior to election, ask Boards of Elections to send a forwardable notice to every voter informing them they are registered, giving the proper polling place and precinct (Cuyahoga County will be doing this).

2. PROVISIONAL BALLOTS: Ohio's protocol for a "provisional ballot" must not be confusing or restrictive, or it may disenfranchise thousands of Ohioans. The Secretary of State's office informed us yesterday (Sept. 13) that he has issued **no** official statement of policy on provisional ballots. We are concerned about some recent news reports that one interpretation **might** be as follows: **if** the poll worker tells a voter they are in the wrong precinct, then a provisional ballot cast at that place will be invalidated. Given that in a close election, each provisional ballot will be hotly contested, the issue of who said what and when should not be a source of contention. Add to that the finding that some 35,000 voters may have been registered incorrectly (through their own or through clerical errors), and there will be many provisional ballots cast for this reason alone. We ask the Secretary Blackwell to issue a far simpler interpretation, much closer to the spirit of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

Recommendation:

When a legitimate voter shows up in an incorrect precinct, has faulty information on the rolls, or insufficient ID, he or she should be able to cast a provisional ballot which will be counted if legitimate registration anywhere in the state is later verified. If the voter was at the wrong location, only votes on federal and state offices and issues would be counted. If the voter learns that he or she is at the wrong location, they can choose to go to the correct location if they wish to have their full ballot counted and avoid a provisional ballot. This will allow Ohio to honor the spirit of HAVA, as Pennsylvania has done.

3. VOTING SYSTEM ERRORS: About 90,000 Ohio Presidential votes were uncounted in 2000 mostly because of voter errors especially using punch cards, but also with optical scans or electronic recording devices. Low income populations were at greater risk for punch card and optical scan errors. In addition, management of these voting systems, if not at the highest standard of best practice, will risk irregularities and malfunction.

Develop and institute best practices for voter education and the operation of punch card, optical scan, and electronic voting systems based on recommendations of the Federal Election Assistance Commission (www.eac.gov/bp/index1.asp), and other national experts (summarized in [the attached CASE report](#); see also our report on [Punch Card Errors](#)). Among the most important measures are:

- Vigorous public outreach instructing voters, both before and on election day, how to use and avoid mistakes with punch cards, optical scan, and electronic recording devices; and
- Implementation of best practices by Boards of Elections in checking ballots for correctable errors, and in pre-testing and security testing of all counting devices

In general:

The Secretary of State can require these actions of all Ohio Boards of Elections. He could also greatly assist the Boards by supplying print-ready signs and handouts, software for Board web sites, statewide broadcasts and paid advertisements, standard state procedures for improved poll worker training, and standard statewide best practices for voting systems.

What you can do:

The Secretary of State's office has been polite but few actions are planned, and the clock is ticking. Only pressure will help. Here's what you can do:

- Write and also ask organizational or political leaders to call or write to Secretary Blackwell's public representative, Carlo LoParo, 614-752-8110; e-mail, cloparo@sos.state.oh.us, demanding that the Secretary take immediate positive action on the items above within the next few days;
- Write letters to the Editor and notes to local newspapers and TV stations, explaining the urgent need for these actions, deploring the Secretary's inaction, and asking them to do stories on these issues;
- If you belong to an organization working on registration or election issues, don't wait for our Secretary of State to take action. Ask them to check the votes they have registered against Board of Election lists, immediately notify those not on the rolls to re-register, and mount their own public outreach campaigns to educate voters on the above issues.

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