

Democracy in ACTION

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REGISTER. VOTE. REPEAT.

Department Profile:
Voter Registration Department

The Voter Registration Department at the Douglas County Election Commission always seems to be a busy place. The Voter Registration staff, Susan Stogdill and Ron Urbach, is supervised by Carol Prokop, and includes some of the longest-serving staff in the office. It is an area that has seen many changes over the years, and this year is no exception.

Over the past several months, the Election Commission has had to adapt to a brand new voter registration system hosted by the Secretary of State's Office. This change meant leaving behind a voter registration system that has served the office for over 20 years. To say it's a change is an understatement.

The new voter registration system, mandated by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), is starkly different than the previous system. Instead of a mainframe based system, the new voter registration (VR) system is state-of-the-art and uses Internet based technology to allow all 93 Nebraska counties to connect and process voter information.

While the conversion process was relatively smooth, it still meant dozens of hours learning a completely different way of doing things. But now that the system is in place and the users are trained, it seems as if the

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PETITIONS & MORE PETITIONS

There has been much debate regarding the petitions that were circulated over this summer. Luckily or unluckily for us, depending on how you look at it, the Election Commission's sole responsibility regarding petitions is to verify that the petition signers are registered voters, which makes them eligible to sign a petition.



Over the past several months, the Douglas County Election Commission has been preparing to receive the petitions from the Secretary of State's Office. Nebraska Law provides the deadlines for when petitions are required to be turned in to the Secretary of State's Office by the circulators and also the deadline when county election officials need to have the petitions verified. For us, this means that we have from July 7th to September 15th to verify nearly 150,000 signatures for three petitions.

With such strict deadlines, it was imperative that the Election Commission prepare in advance. The first item on the list was to place advertisements for temporary help so that we could ensure that we met the deadlines. It was determined that 40 extra people would need to be hired



based on the performance of petition workers from 2004, the number of expected signatures, and the fact that we were using the new voter registration system. Hiring 40 additional employees takes a great deal of work; scheduling interviews, setting up drug tests, and determining who to hire, but the Election Commission Administration Department did a fantastic job.

Once the hiring process was under way, it was time to start preparing to train the new employees. Several hours went into creating new training materials based on the new voter registration system. Four different training classes were scheduled to make sure the temporary workers received plenty of one-on-one time with the permanent staff learning the process.



Currently, the Election Commission is filled to the brim with workers. Every work station is in use and almost every parking stall filled. The petitions are well on the way to being verified, however, the end is not quite visible yet.

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ELECTIONS IN THE NEWS

Civil Service Election

Every three years, Douglas County employees are given the opportunity to elect either a Republican or Democratic employee representative to the Douglas County Civil Service Commission.

The Douglas County Civil Service Commission is appointed and organized in accordance with the provisions of Nebraska Revised Statutes §23-2501. The Commission is comprised of two elected officials, two employee members, and a public member. This group has the authority to establish policies, hear grievances, and set benefits and leave policies for the employees of Douglas County. The Civil Service Commission also has authority over the Human Resources Department that handles the day to day functions of human resources for Douglas County.

The deadline to file as a candidate for the Civil Service Commission was July 21, 2006. The Election Commission mailed ballots to

Douglas County employees on Thursday, July 27th. All ballots were returned by 5:00 p.m., on Tuesday, August 8, 2006. The results can be found on the Election Commission website located at www.votedouglascounty.com.



Sanitary and Improvement District Elections

Sanitary and Improvement District (SID) elections are here again. Every year, the Election Commission runs the elections for SIDs within Douglas County, however, each SID has an election once every two years to elect five trustee board members to oversee the SID. This year, 97 SIDs are scheduled to have an election on Tuesday, September 12, 2006.

The deadline to file for the SID board was Monday, July 24, 2006. All filed candidates can be found on the Election Commission website under "SID information" at www.votedouglascounty.com.

On August 23, 2006, the Election Commission will mail the ballots to property owners within each SID having an election this year. Ballots must be returned to the Election Commission Office by September 14, 2006 at 10:00 a.m.



Commissioner's Corner...

A Message from Election Commissioner Dave Phipps



Dave Phipps
Election Commissioner

With the Primary Election over, it must be time for a nice leisurely summer, relaxing in the sun, lazing by the pool, sipping on a nice cool refreshing... wait – that must have been a dream. That happens sometimes. Sorry.

Reality here in the Election Commission is a little bit different. While some are off enjoying summer vacations, my staff is working – working hard. It's petition season. It's Sanitary and Improvement District (SID) Election season. It's Civil Service Commission Election season.

It's General Election season. It's every season, except for leisure season – that will have to wait.

With three petitions to process (close to 150,000 signatures in Douglas County alone), and possibly more to come, it has been hectic. We had to hire an additional 40 workers to help us process signatures. Then we had to ensure we had the physical space to house that many people. We also had to make sure we had computers for them to work with. It's a challenge we face all the time, but it's still never easy.

We are also in the process of SID elections. This is a process that takes a great deal of time

and coordination with various county government agencies, clerks of SIDs, and legal representatives for the SIDs. It's a challenge we face every year, but, once again, it's still never easy.

Finally, it was time for nearly all of Douglas County's employees to vote on two new representatives to the Civil Service Commission.

Because we didn't have anything else going on, we thought we'd try to do it in a completely new and different way. We decided to do the election by mail, because it was more cost effective and efficient for us, but it was new, and therefore, a little more challenging. Sometimes when it rains, it pours.

This office is like no other. Our deadlines don't move. They can't.

But that's why we work here. The Election Commission presents everyone that works here a new challenge nearly every day. It's not an office that does the same thing, day in and day out. It's the

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ELECTION CALENDAR

September 2006

1st - Deadline for candidate nominated at the Primary Election to decline nomination.

1st – Deadline for political subdivision to submit special issue for General Ballot.

1st – Deadline for candidate to file for office by petition.

22nd - Deadline to have Early Voting ballots ready and sent to overseas and military voters with requests on file.

October 2006

2nd – First day to vote early in person or request ballots by agent at the Election Commission.

20th - Deadline for mailed voter registrations to be postmarked.

20th - Last day to register at DMV, agencies, libraries, or with Deputy Registrars.

27th - Deadline for write-in candidate to file notarized affidavit and filing fee.

27th - Deadline for in-person voter registration at the Election Commission, 6:00 p.m.

November 2006

1st - Deadline for early voting ballots to be requested and mailed to a specific address, 4:00 p.m.

6th - Deadline for in-person early voting at the Election Commission Office.

7th - Election Day. All early voting ballots must be returned to the Election Commission by 8:00 p.m.



PETITIONS & MORE PETITIONS

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The Secretary of State's Office ruled that three petitions were not valid because of the similarity between petitions from 2004. The Constitution does not allow petitions of the same form or substance to be submitted within a three year period. So it is up to the courts now to determine whether we will receive the three additional petitions.

So, it's still up in the air whether these other petitions will arrive or not, but regardless, due to the extensive preparation and ground work that was done in the time leading up to the petition process, the Election Commission Office will be ready to handle the challenge.



Commissioner's Corner...

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challenge. It's the desire to make things happen. To make changes for the better. To push ourselves. Stress happens, but we push through.

This office is like no other. Our deadlines don't move. They can't. It pushes us to the limit sometimes, but this staff works hard to make sure that we get it done. For that, I'm extremely proud to lead them. My job is a wonderful challenge, and the rewards go well beyond a title and paycheck. The rewards are seeing a group of people dedicated to the same ideals I have – make the office better, make it more efficient, and do it the right way, because that's what the voters and taxpayers expect and deserve. Together, we'll get it done.



CHIEF DEPUTY ELECTION COMMISSIONER SWORN IN



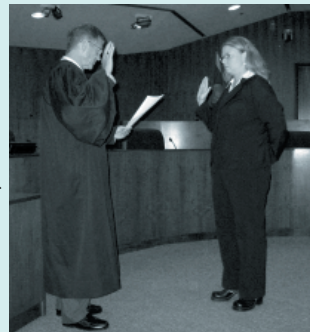
The Douglas County Election Commission's new Chief Deputy, Lisa Wise, was officially sworn into office in a ceremony in the Legislative Council Chambers on June 21, 2006. Dozens of dignitaries and guests witnessed the event, presided over by the Honorable Greg Schatz.

Lisa began her work in the Election Commission just three days prior to the May 9, 2006 Primary Election, replacing the previous Chief Deputy who vacated the office after switching political parties.

Lisa has since worked tirelessly to bring herself up to speed on the inner-workings of the Election Commission and taking over her specific duties, which include

outside voter registration and public outreach.

"Her expertise and work ethic have been a tremendous asset to the office," said Dave Phipps, Douglas County Election Commissioner. "She has jumped at the chance to learn everything she can about this office, and has volunteered to assist us with a number of important projects. She is an outstanding Chief Deputy."



Lisa, who now has at least one election under her belt, looks forward to the next challenge – the 2006 General Election. "The Primary was much more about learning the ropes," said Lisa. "For November, I'm really looking forward to pitching in more and helping us get everything done in the best way possible."





Carol Prokop
Voter Registration Supervisor

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transition was nothing more than a bump in the road, and voter information is being processed as well as ever before.

“We have a great staff working with the system,” said Prokop. “They have all adapted well to the new environment and have been working to ensure it all runs smoothly.”

Prokop is in her 14th year of service in the Election Commission. Stogdill is in her 12th year and Urbach his 17th year, marking a great deal of institutional knowledge that certainly is valuable.

The Election Commission is responsible for over 305,000 registered voters. Those registrations are all kept electronically, including digital images of all the paper records. Having all that information at your fingertips is a wonderful advantage.

With a few clicks of a mouse, the entire database can be exported for use by candidates and campaigns, so they can easily target the voters they need and look for trends, which helps



Susan Stogdill
Voter Registration Clerk

make their campaigns run smoothly. The voter registration staff works hard to make sure the information is up-to-date, accurate, and accessible.

But, it wasn't always that easy. Long before

the advent of the age of personal computers, all voter registrations – the physical pieces of paper – were kept in the office and shipped out to polling places so people could vote. That meant endless hours filing and organizing, something that happens automatically now.

If there was a problem or question regarding someone's registration, it had to be found in the numerous filing cabinets in the office. The information would be verified or corrected, and then the piece of paper would have to be re-filed. It was extremely time-consuming, but necessary.

Finally, in the late seventies and early eighties, the Election Commission asked the county's computer services department to program a system to help store the information elec-

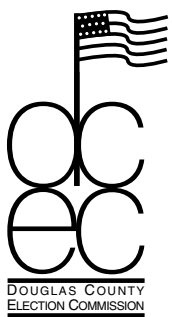


Ron Urbach
Voter Registration Clerk

tronically. The system was a great success, allowing records to be quickly accessed and updated. The problem that remained, however, was that the physical records still had to be occasionally accessed.

This problem was solved in the mid nineties when the county's computer services department created an imaging system that would work in conjunction with the voter registration system, allowing workers to view the images instead of pulling a piece of paper. Technology became a true time-saver for the Election Commission.

This system served the office and people of Douglas County for years, but as with all technology, change happened. With the new state-wide voter registration system, the principals of going paperless remain the same, but the technology to accomplish it, has been upgraded. So far, it has been a great success, but the staff, as always, is ready if the need to change occurs again.



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