

Democracy in ACTION

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VOTE EARLY, BUT NOT OFTEN!

Department Profile:
Early Voting Coordinator

The early voting department within the Douglas County Election Commission is usually a busy place to be this time of year. This year is no different.

With a brand new voter registration system in place, the Early Voting Coordinator, Betsy Lawrence, has worked at a frenetic pace ensuring that the new system has all the features we need to provide early voting ballots to voters as efficiently as possible. Betsy has also been working on training her staff so that they are well acquainted with the new system and are able to answer voter questions when they arise.

"It's a daunting task," Betsy said. "Early voting is always a tough area to organize during election season, but with a new system, you simply have so many unknowns that it becomes an even larger struggle."

However, Betsy is up for the challenge. With over eight years experience in the Election Commission office, she is no stranger to dealing with election season pressure. "I've managed to survive two presidential general elections - I can make it through anything," she said.

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CAMPAIGNS, PARTIES & CANDIDATES COME TOGETHER

The Douglas County Election Commission hosted its second annual Campaign, Party and Candidate Meeting on March 8, 2006.

With nearly 45 participants, this year's event was a tremendous success.

"It was a wonderful opportunity to share with all the interested parties exactly what the Election Commission can offer," said Election Commissioner Dave Phipps. "I'm extremely happy with the results and the feedback we received."

The event included information regarding voter registration, early voting, polling place procedures, and election night logistics. The meeting also highlighted the services the Election Commission provides.

In addition, candidates were provided the opportunity to ask any questions that had been on their minds. Many people had never run for public office before, and therefore were unsure of how the entire process worked.

"I think that for the first-time candidate," said Phipps, "it was an opportunity to ask those questions that perhaps had never been explained to them before."

Many questions revolved around who regulates yard signs, how do they receive

voter registration statistics, or how they would receive early voting information.

"We tried to keep it short and simple," said Phipps. "However, most people I talked to felt that this was certainly a worthwhile event to attend. I don't think anyone went away feeling that their inquiries weren't addressed."

The 45-minute event highlighted some of the new changes in Douglas County this year, including a number of new precincts, the new voting equipment that will be at each polling place, and the new way to receive the early voting list.

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Many people waited and asked individual questions specific to their own needs after the presentation. Some

even asked to meet again later to discuss ideas that were generated from the meeting.

"I'm very pleased," said Phipps. "I wasn't exactly sure how many would attend, or how people would react to the presentation, but I heard nothing but good things. This was definitely a great event and I am certainly going to continue this tradition."



Don't Forget...

- Election Day is May 9, 2006
- Polls are open from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m.

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ELECTIONS IN THE NEWS

It must be election season because there seems to have been a great deal of interest from the media over the last few weeks in what's happening at the Election Commission.

The Election Commissioner has been interviewed regarding voter registration, party switching, felon voting, and the new equipment at the polls.

But the most interest seems to relate to the idea that voters are switching parties in order to vote a different ballot in the Primary Election.

While this notion seems to come up every two years or so, there's certainly a renewed interest this year. So, for the record, here are some cold, hard facts. First, between January and March of 2004, 200 people changed from being Republicans

and became Democrats. During that same period this year, 135 people have made the switch. In the period between January and March of 2004, 170 people changed their party registration from Democrat to Republican, versus 184 people making that change this year.

“Will this party switching affect the outcome of the election?”
Is it possible?
Yes. Is it likely?
Probably not.

These numbers can certainly be interpreted a number of ways, but they do not seem to indicate a giant leap in party swapping.

The other question we keep hearing is, “Will this party switching affect the outcome of the election?” Is it possible? Yes. Is it likely? Probably not.

In order for voters who have switched parties to affect a statewide election, there would have to

be a concerted effort made over 93 individual Nebraska counties. It would need to involve thousands of voters, and these voters would have to vote, en-masse, for a particular candidate so their votes did not cancel each other's out.

So, could it happen? Sure, but so could lots of more likely things. As for the Election Commission, we'll worry about making sure that voter registrations are entered correctly and that the election goes smoothly and we'll let others worry about party switchers.



Commissioner's Corner...

A Message from Election Commissioner Dave Phipps



Dave Phipps
Election Commissioner

Where do the days go? In this job, that question seems to come up quite often. One minute you're working on a few projects that got shuffled off to the side during the last election season, then the next moment, you start the whole election process over again.

We've just wrapped up the candidate filing deadlines with the typical last day flurry and we now begin to worry about creating the ballot and sending them out the door to the first early voting requesters.

Speaking of early voting, the first day ballots will be mailed, and the first day to vote in person at our office, is April 3, 2006. If you'd like an early voting ballot, please stop in or download a request form from our website and send it in.

In early March, I held a meeting for all the campaigns, candidates, and parties so that we could all talk about the services our office provides and answer those questions that always seem to come up. The meeting was a great success. We had over 40 participants attend and most of them seemed to greatly appreciate all the information we provided.

Of course the next big hurdle we'll face is election day. This is the time that our office really

Of course the next big hurdle we'll face is election day. This is the time that our office really hits its stride.

hits its stride. Now, more than ever, the office comes together to collectively work to get all of our tasks completed. It takes a monumental effort to put on an election, but I am extremely fortunate to have a wonderful staff who does whatever it takes to get the job done.

I invite you all to come to our office on election night. It may not be as glamorous as attending a victory party, but to see dozens of workers from across the county working to get ballots sorted and counted and to get results out to the public is a sight to behold. If you would like to be here on election night, please give my office a call so we can give you all the details. I look forward to seeing you, and I look forward to continuing to help the citizens of Douglas County carry out their most basic freedom.

ELECTION CALENDAR: *MARK IT DOWN!*

March 2006

24th - Deadline to have early voting ballots ready and sent to overseas and military voters with requests on file.

April 2006

3rd - First day to vote an early voting ballot at the Election Commission and first day to mail early voting ballots.

18th - First day for Secretary of State to begin publication of constitutional amendments (will publish for three weeks).

21st - Deadline for mailed voter registrations to be postmarked.

21st - 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.

May 2006

1st - Deadline for in-person voter registration at Election Commission, 6:00 p.m.

3rd - Deadline for early voting ballots to be requested and mailed to a specific address, 4:00 p.m.

8th - Deadline for in-person early voting at the Election Commission Office.

9th - Election Day. Deadline for agents to pick up early voting ballots is 7:00 p.m. All early voting ballots must be returned to the Election Commission by 8:00 p.m.



Question & Answer

Q. Can nonpartisan voters vote during the Primary?

A. Yes. Nonpartisan voters can vote during a Primary Election. They will vote a Nonpartisan ballot which contains amendments and other special issues, State Legislature candidates, MUD candidates, OPPD candidates, NRD candidates, School Board candidates (including Metro Community College and State Board of Regents), and may request to vote the Federal ballot for the House and Senate from one political party. They cannot vote the Primary ballot for President, Governor, or partisan County offices.

Q. What are the rules and laws regarding campaign signs?

A. Rules for campaign signs are governed by each individual city and municipality within Douglas County, therefore, you must find information from each city in which you wish to place campaign signs. We do provide information on our website, however, the Election Commission does not regulate campaign signs and has no jurisdiction over them.

Q. I just moved. What do I do about my voter registration?

A. You need to update your registration. You can do this by downloading a form from our website and mailing it to our office, or by registering in person at a voter registration location. Voter registration locations can be found by calling our office or visiting our website.

Q. I will be out of town on Election Day. How do I vote?

A. You can vote an early voting ballot (absentee). You can download a request form from our website and mail or fax it in, or you can visit our office beginning April 3, 2006 and vote in person.

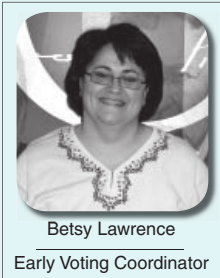
Q. Where can I see a sample of my ballot?

A. You can view a sample of your ballot on our website or at our office.

Q. Can I send in an early voting (absentee) request via e-mail or over the phone?

A. No. The request must have an actual signature. You may send the request by mail or by fax (402.444.4181).





Betsy Lawrence
Early Voting Coordinator

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course of 35 days – an all-time record in Douglas County and the State of Nebraska.

Douglas County. These changes will also help the other 92 Nebraska counties in the process.

When it is not election season, Betsy works on a variety of projects, but it's during this time of year when

It shouldn't be as busy for this Primary Election, however, you have to be prepared according to Betsy. "You just never know if the general public is going to want an early voting ballot instead of going to the polls. You just have to make sure you're prepared."

"I'm glad we could take a lead in making suggestions and changes," said Betsy. "It's been a difficult road, but I think that we've made significant progress. It's going to be a better system because of this hard work."

her responsibilities increase dramatically. She has a duty to hire, train, evaluate, and ensure that her staff are following the rules and regulations that she helped to design.

"I generally have a staff of eight to ten people prior to each election," Lawrence said. "So it's very important that I lay the groundwork early and have a plan to follow when new staff start arriving. It's a challenge, but I always look forward to it."

In the 2004 Presidential General Election, the Douglas County Election Commission processed nearly 30,000 early voting ballots.

Changes to Federal Election Law, including the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), mandated that each state implement a state-wide voter registration system. In Nebraska, that meant that instead of each county having their own unique system, the Secretary of State would implement a system that all jurisdictions would use. It also meant that

an early voting system that had served Douglas County well for years, could no longer be used.

During the most recent presidential general election, the Election Commission mailed over 22,000 early voting ballots and assisted nearly 8,000 in-person early voters over the

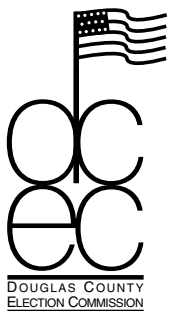
Betsy has spent months working with the Secretary of State and Election Systems and Software (ES&S), the state's election vendor, to implement changes that are critical to success in



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent."

- Abraham Lincoln



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