

# Democracy in ACTION

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## MY POLLING PLACE IS WHERE?

Department Profile:  
Election Resource Coordinator

The Election Resource Department at the Douglas County Election Commission is always a busy place to be.

Charged with finding polling places, sending and recording contracts with polling places, ensuring the facilities we utilize on Election Day are handicapped accessible, and then making sure all the supplies needed to run an election are delivered, the Election Resource Coordinator must juggle many balls at once.



The job can be daunting, but luckily, Lizz is on top of it. Lizz Zorko, the Election Resource Coordinator for the last seven months, has been involved in the election process for years, but has just recently joined the staff.

“I started as a poll worker, a Clerk taking names in the books, then I moved to be an Inspector, the person in charge of the polling place. Finally, I became a District Supervisor, someone who checks several polling sites throughout Election Day,” Lizz said. “I know what it’s like out in the field, and I know how important it is to have a good facility and the proper supplies. I’m not going to let any of my poll workers down.”

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## ELECTION DAY SUCCESS

Election Day is the day that campaigns, political parties, and candidates all work toward. This is the day that they find out if all their hard work will actually pay off.

For the Election Commission, Election Day is a test. Did all of our plans come to fruition? Did voters have problems that we didn’t foresee? Did we choose the correct location for a polling place? Did the poll workers understand all their training?

Election Day can be a day of stress or it can be a day of boredom. Mostly, we look for a day where we are looking for something to keep us busy – if we’re lucky.



If all the months of preparation and stress turn out correctly, Election Day will seem like a breeze. If we did something wrong two months out and didn’t know about it, Election Day will seem like a never-ending day of frustration and hard work.

May 9, 2006 was the Statewide Primary Election Day. In Douglas County, it was fairly boring. Our months of preparation were well worth it. We didn’t have any major problems.

We had a couple of typical election-related issues that were quickly fixed by early morning. All in all, a fairly straightforward day.

In the end, nearly 84,000 voters went to the polls or voted early, which translates to slightly more than 27% of all registered Douglas County voters.

In the end, nearly 84,000 voters went to the polls or voted early, which translates to slightly more than 27% of all registered Douglas County voters. This was a little more than the predicted 26%, but we were close.

This number also represents the heaviest turnout in eight years in a statewide primary election. Of course, it took a multimillion dollar Senate race and a Governor’s race that drew national attention to get us there, but we’ll take it.

So Election Day has come and gone, and people often wonder what’s next at the Election Commission.



Well, after we finish finalizing the results, we will begin to prepare for a summer filled with petitions, Sanitary and Improvement District Elections, and the November Election. It may have been dull on Election Day, but it rarely stays that way in this office.



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## SMILES ON EVERY FACE

Smiling faces are all we ever see at these meetings, even if their participants can't see the faces themselves. Over the last few months, we've demonstrated a new piece of equipment at three different meetings held by the blind community.

We spoke to the National Federation of the Blind - Omaha Chapter on March 13, 2006 in Omaha. Then we spoke to the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska - Greater Omaha Chapter on April 13, 2006 in Omaha. Finally, we were invited to speak to the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska's state convention in Bellevue on April 22, 2006.



At each of these meetings,

men and women of all ages and races came together to let us show them the AutoMARK. This machine allows blind and disabled voters to mark their ballot without assistance for the very first time. And our reward for coming to their meetings after hours and on the weekends: smiling faces.

For years, these members of our society had to trust that whoever marked their ballot for them, actually did so in the way they desired. They had to trust another person with their right to vote. Not any longer.

The AutoMARK Voter Assist Terminal, made by Omaha-based Election Systems & Software (ES&S), allows blind and disabled voters a freedom they have never before enjoyed. The AutoMARK allows for a paper ballot to be scanned and then "read"



to a voter via a computerized voice. The voter can then scroll through the ballot and the machine will mark their choices. When the voter is finished, the machine prints the selections and returns the ballot to the voter, who then gives it to the election official to place in the ballot box. The disabled or blind voter's ballot now is like everyone else's.

Many in the blind community were so thrilled with the machine that they tried it more than once. It was a joy to watch their faces light up, knowing that they, too, felt their vote was now their own.



## Commissioner's Corner...

A Message from Election Commissioner Dave Phipps



Dave Phipps  
Election Commissioner

It's finally over. That is what I kept telling myself late on Election Night. We made it. We did it. Now we get to start all over again.

This was my first election as Election Commissioner, but my fifth major election since I started working in the office nearly three years ago. While I certainly had a firm grasp on the technical requirements of the office, I really had no concept of just what it would mean to be the person responsible for everything that happened in the Douglas County Election Commission Office.

I had no idea just how many times I would

be in the newspaper, on the radio, or, even worse, on TV. I always liked to joke that I had a face for radio and a voice for print, but I'm not sure how much of a joke it really was.

You see, no one can really prepare you for the fact that people might now recognize you. No one told me that I might be having lunch in my favorite restaurant and a total stranger might come up and start asking questions. I wasn't ready.

I kept telling everyone that I guess I knew what Brad Pitt feels like. They would all laugh, but I'm not sure if it was just the joke they were laughing at. Oh well, hopefully my fifteen minutes of fame are up. At least until November, then I'm sure it will all begin again.

No one can really prepare you for the fact that people might now recognize you...I wasn't ready [for that].

Celebrity aside, I did have many challenges during this election. First, we had a new voter registration system to contend with. My staff worked long and hard over several months to ensure everything was working the way we needed it to, and everything ended well in that respect.

Second, we had a new piece of equipment at every polling place. This was a logistical problem for us because we needed to be able to safely store the equipment as well as get it delivered to and picked up from the polls. Again, everything worked as it should.

Finally, I had to find a new Chief Deputy Election Commissioner. My old Chief Deputy switched parties and vacated the office. The problem was, it happened six days out from the election. This problem could have been even more catastrophic had the leadership of the Douglas County

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## Commissioner's Corner...

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Democratic Party tried to play political games with the process. Fortunately, they had no such intentions. In fact, their Chairman, Chris Jerram, worked tirelessly to come up with a list of candidates within hours of my calling him. He acted in a truly honorable and bipartisan manner at all times, and did the people of Douglas County a great service.

After interviewing the list of candidates, I announced that Lisa Wise would fill the newly opened position. With the help of the Douglas County Democratic Party leadership, I was able to fill this position in less than 40 hours.

Lisa started her new job on the Saturday before the Election and worked incredibly long and hard to make sure she understood everything she needed to know on Election Day. I know that she will be a wonderful asset to this office, and I look forward to continuing to work with her.

So, it's over. We'll now begin preparing for the fall. We'll see if we have petitions this summer, do our normal work over the next few months, and do our best to make sure we have a nice, easy, boring Election Day on November 7, 2006.



## HELPING HANDS

We have had several articles now featuring or mentioning the new piece of equipment, the AutoMARK, which would be stationed at each polling place on Election Day. With all the attention that the AutoMARK was receiving and all the unknowns about how the poll workers would handle this new equipment, we decided that we needed some election day support for the AutoMARK.

We brainstormed and came up with the idea of asking Douglas County high school government teachers to nominate one student from one of their classes to work as a Technology Assistant for us on Election Day. We received a great response considering this was our first time organizing something like this. Nineteen students worked with us on Election Day representing Blackburn Senior High, Elkhorn High School, Millard North High School, Millard West High School, Omaha North High School, Ralston High School, and Westside High School.

The Technology Assistants were trained prior to Election Day on how the AutoMARK worked and also how to troubleshoot possible problems and then fix those problems. The Technology Assistants arrived at the Election Commission Office at 7:00 a.m. on May 9, 2006, received instructions regarding their day, and then headed off on their routes visiting polling places.

The Technology Assistants were a huge help to us. They were able to answer poll worker questions when they visited each polling place and assist them in verifying that the AutoMARK was working properly. A few things that the Technology Assistants helped out with were setting up the AutoMARK, clearing paper jams, and re-calibrating the touch screen. Having the Technology Assistants allowed the poll workers to receive in person assistance rather than help over the telephone.

When the students returned from their routes around 1:00 p.m., they gave us good feedback. About half of the students were seniors and were graduating, but they said to give them a call for the General Election in November. All the students caught on quickly to using the AutoMARK and did a fantastic job on Election Day.



## NEW FACE AT THE ELECTION COMMISSION

Lisa Wise started her new job as Chief Deputy Election Commissioner on Saturday, May 6, 2006, just three days before Election Day. That's what we call jumping in with both feet.

Prior to her appointment as Chief Deputy, Lisa served as a campaign fund-raiser for Senator Ben Nelson's re-election campaign.

Lisa is a Nebraska native. She grew up in Omaha, but graduated from Logan View Junior Senior High School in Hooper, Nebraska in 1995. After high school, Lisa moved to Kansas City to attend Park University where she studied



Political Science and Public Administration at Park.

Lisa was very active in the Political Science Club and Student Senate, which led her to spend a semester in Washington D.C. interning for Senator Bob Kerrey in 1999.

She received her degree from Park in May, 2000. After graduation, Lisa was hired by the Nebraska Democratic Party as a field coordinator. She also served as a field coordinator in Mayor Mike Fahey's first campaign. Following Mayor Fahey's election, Lisa worked as the Mayor's scheduler until 2002.

Lisa returned to school in 2002 to pursue a Masters degree in Public Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Lisa specialized in

State and Local Government. While working on her MPA, Lisa interned with the City of Omaha, Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, and the Omaha Housing Authority.

In 2004, Lisa completed her graduate program and returned to politics as a fund-raiser for Mayor Fahey's re-election campaign.

Lisa is the oldest of three daughters and loves spending time with her sisters Sharon and Amy. Lisa was married in October of 2005. She and her husband Joe enjoy working on home improvements and playing with their three dogs Riley, Cliff, and Duffy.





Lizz Zorko  
Election Resource Coordinator

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One of the newest challenges for Lizz this year was the addition of new pieces of equipment, the

AutoMARK Voter Assist Terminal. We now had to deliver and pick up the equipment – something the Election Commission had not had to do before.

“The logistics are a little tricky sometimes,” according to Lizz. “We put together a plan, followed it, and it worked. Just the way it’s supposed to.”

The other challenge facing Lizz this year was the fact that we needed an additional 15 to 20 polling places because of the tremendous growth in Douglas County. Using a little innovative thinking, she came up with some non-traditional sites that seemed to work out very well, including a few car dealerships.

“The car dealers were great. They set aside parking for us, and of course tried not to sell too many cars to the people voting,” Lizz said jokingly.

Douglas County has 263 different polling places for 354 precincts. Each of those precincts has to receive the correct supplies, as well as the correct ballots and equipment.

Douglas County has 263 different polling places for 354 precincts. Each of those precincts has to receive the correct supplies, as well as the correct ballots and equipment. If ballots or equipment end up in the wrong area, voting cannot occur. Lizz’s job was to check and double-check everything to make sure voting went off without a hitch.

Now that the election is over, Lizz has another big task. She has to record the information gained on Election Day via the several surveys that are filled out by poll workers, then she must analyze the information to ensure that everything that is required by our poll workers is available to them. She then must oversee cleaning out all the hundreds of boxes, restocking supplies, and re-filling the boxes so they will be ready on November 7th.

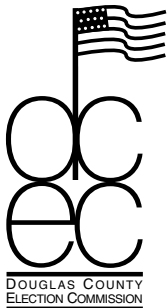
“You tend to think you’re going through a revolving door sometimes,” Lizz said. “It looks like you’re going around in circles, and you think ‘Didn’t I just do this?’ but eventually you make it through. As stressful as it can be, it’s still a great place to work. I always feel proud that I’m helping people do their civic duty by voting.”



**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

“It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.”

- Sir Winston Churchill



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