

HB

351

HB 351

Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer

Dear John
We'd like to avoid
poll worker shortages
by recruiting youth.
Would you please
schedule the Youth
Voter Corps bill?
Fran

Subject: Interesting story from the LA Times on this week's CA primary

Date: Fri, 8 Mar 2002 10:08:38 -0500

From: "Kay Albowicz" <kay@sso.org>

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To: "Secretaries" <kay@sso.org>

CC: "SOS Staff" <kay@sso.org>

No-Show Poll Workers Leave Some Unable to Cast Ballots

■ Primary: Shortages of supplies at 27 county locations also hinder the process.
by John L. Mitchell, Times Staff Writer

Election officials scrambled Tuesday to staff, reopen and resupply more than two dozen polling places where voters were turned away or faced long delays because a troubling number of poll workers didn't show up.

The shortages forced officials to dispatch election workers and emergency supply kits containing ballots, voting rosters and other equipment to 27 of the 4,865 polling locations throughout Los Angeles County, from Valencia to Long Beach to Montebello.

"We normally have cancellations, but this was unusually high," said Conny B. McCormack, the county's registrar-recorder/county clerk. "This election was tremendously complicated anyway, but this time an unprecedented number of precinct inspectors didn't show up." At a polling place in Los Angeles' Mount Olympus district, would-be voter Joann Leonard was locked out and indignant.

"We get constantly told to go out and vote, go out and vote. And when people turn out to vote, what happens? No ballots. This makes you feel disenfranchised," she said.

Officials were dealing with a number of election complications: changes in the primary system; new rules reducing by almost half the number of days to register voters; and redistricting that eliminated the polling places of 11,626 voters who were told they would be forced to use absentee ballots this time.

The first indication of problems came over the weekend when 150 poll workers opted for various reasons not to work, McCormack said. "We scrambled to replace them, but it wasn't easy."

She said most poll workers are retirees who are not always comfortable with the growing complexities of the election system. Finding replacements hasn't been easy because the job has increasing responsibilities and the pay is low. An election inspector earns \$75 for 14 hours of work.

"There is not a cadre of people coming behind" the aging and dying poll workers, McCormack said. "It's a national problem."

She said the county has pressed many new people into service at the last minute. "They showed up, but we have had a number of polls where precinct workers didn't show or some showed up and found they were alone. They panicked and went home."

At Moffet Elementary in Lennox, there were no supplies when poll inspector Lana Burnett arrived. "I showed up, but the equipment didn't," she said. "It's frustrating. I turned away 30 people and told them to come back before the polls close. I hope they do."

Barbara Taylor, a poll worker, had a similar experience at Crescent Heights Boulevard Elementary. A shortage of supplies forced her to turn away 75 to 100 voters before more supplies arrived and the polling place was finally opened. "It's been very exasperating," Taylor said. "I kept asking myself why am I doing this."

"I kept thinking this is worse than Florida," said Joanne Boye, a voter. "At least [in Florida] they allowed you to punch things out."

At the Beverly Plaza Hotel, voters were delayed two hours before the polls opened. But in La Puente, a polling place never opened.

"I'm really surprised--we have had a polling place here for over 10 years," said Esther Romo, who works as a

Interesting story from the LA Times on this week's CA primary

secretary at Latin American Bible Institute, where the polling place is based. "We opened a special room [for voting], but no [poll workers] came. They called to confirm they were coming, but no one showed up."

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FRAN ULMER
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
STATE OF ALASKA

February 4, 2002

The Honorable John Coghill, Chair
House State Affairs Committee
State Capitol, Room 102
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representative Coghill,

I am writing to request a hearing for House Bill 351, an Act creating the Alaska Youth Voter Corps. The bill was introduced at the request of the Alaska Democracy Task Force by Governor Tony Knowles and was assigned to the House State Affairs Committee on January 23, 2002.

The Youth Voter Corps bill presents us with an unique opportunity to enliven the interest of young people in the election process, and in their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The Corps would also help to relieve the shortage of election workers.

Youth Voters Corps members, students age 16 or older, would be appointed and trained by an election supervisor and supervised by an elections board chairperson. The Ford-Carter Elections Commission supported this concept on a national level and almost one-third of the states have legislation that allows for high school students to work at the polls. Students would fill vacant seats on the election boards that the Division of Elections has been unable to fill. Consequently, no fiscal note is required.

The Youth Voter Corps bill is recommended and supported by Alaska Democracy Project (ADP) Task Force, a group of educators and community leaders appointed to consider ways to strengthen and enhance civics education in Alaska's schools.

I would appreciate a hearing on this legislation at your earliest convenience. Enclosed is a sponsor statement may be of interest to the committee. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fran".

Fran Ulmer
Lieutenant Governor

Enclosure



FRAN ULMER
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
STATE OF ALASKA

Sponsor Statement
House Bill 351/Senate Bill 251

Youth Voter Corps

The Youth Voter Corps bill presents us with a unique opportunity to enliven the interest of young people in the election process, and in their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Introduced at the request of Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer and the Alaska Democracy Project Task Force, the bill allows high school students to work at the polls during elections.

The intent of the bill is threefold:

- To increase young persons' awareness and interest in voting;
- To allow for meaningful student involvement in elections; and
- To relieve the shortage of election workers.

Youth Voters Corps members, students age 16 or older, would be appointed and trained by an election supervisor and supervised by an elections board chairperson. According to an informal poll conducted by the Division of Elections, of the twenty-one responding states, fifteen states and the District of Columbia have legislation allowing student workers at the polls. In Maryland, a pilot program in one county was so successful that the program was expanded statewide in 2001. In Alaska, legislation is necessary to create the Corps since current law requires that members of the election board be qualified voters, which means they must be 18 years of age.

The National Association of Secretaries of State has endorsed a proposal by Youth-e-Vote for a national Youth Voter Corps that would be funded by Congress. The Ford-Carter Commission on Federal Election Reform report stated: "Youth Voter Corps is a promising idea for how to encourage and train school and election administrators to recruit and energize high school students as poll workers and poll watchers." The Youth Voter Corps is part of the House Election Reform bill currently before Congress.

The Alaska Youth Voter Corps bill is supported by the *Alaska Democracy Project* Task Force. This group of educators and community leaders was appointed to make recommendations to enhance and strengthen civics education in grades K-12.

The bill also would amend the qualifications for appointment to a precinct election board to remove the requirement that the appointee be registered to vote in that precinct. This change would allow a qualified voter in the state, regardless of which precinct the voter is registered in, to serve on any precinct's election board. This would give more flexibility to the election supervisor to find qualified voters to serve this important function.

State of Alaska
Office of the Lieutenant Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Alaska Keeping Eye on Federal Election Reform Bills

Lt. Governor Ulmer says 'Grade A' State System Could Use Federal \$\$

WASHINGTON – While some states are concerned about the requirements of a new federal election reform law, Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer says Alaska is ahead of the curve and is more focused on ensuring that any assistance provided by Congress to improve voting systems around the country meets Alaska's needs.

Bills outlawing punch card ballots, requiring statewide voter registration lists and other reforms are scheduled for final votes in Washington, D.C., this month.

"Many of the election improvements contained in the bills before Congress have been enjoyed by Alaska voters for a number of years," Ulmer said. "But as good as our election system is, there are specific improvements we could move forward on if the federal legislation is crafted properly."

Ulmer said Alaska is seeking funds to purchase electronic voting machines accessible to blind and sight-impaired voters and to upgrade its statewide voter registration system. The state also supports a provision of a House-passed reform bill that establishes the "Help America Vote Foundation," which could be used to fund a proposed Alaska Youth Voter Corps.

The Youth Voter Corps, envisioned in House Bill 351 and Senate Bill 251 before the Alaska Legislature, has been advanced by Ulmer to enlist qualified high school students as election workers. Under current state law, those workers must be 18 or older. Ulmer said the change in state law, designed to bolster the ranks of Alaska's 2,000 election workers and engage young Alaskans, could be assisted if federal funds are secured.

Another innovation, electronic voting machines for the blind, is proposed in House Bill 320, by Rep. Joe Green of Anchorage. Ulmer, who outlined the state's plans for the new voting technique at an Anchorage workshop last week, said she is hopeful those and other improvements in the state's voting system could be funded as part of an estimated \$3 billion contained in the federal election bills for all the states.

(more)

Election reform 2-2-2-2

"It's unfortunate it took a very controversial election mess in Florida for Congress to step up with funds to help democracy work better in America," Ulmer said. "But progress is finally being made for the many counties and states that need encouragement and money to do the job."

Alaska has enjoyed a centralized statewide registration system for voters since 1985. In 1997, Ulmer initiated a switch from outdated punch card ballots to optical scanning voting machines in most Alaska precincts. The election system improvements, which reduced incidences of voter error dramatically, have been judged among the best in the country, earning a grade of "A" from the group Common Cause.

"I'm really proud of the Division of Elections. I appreciate the progress we've made, our service to voters and our focus on improving that service," Ulmer.

Ulmer is attending the annual conference of the National Association of Secretaries of State and the National Conference of Lieutenant Governors in Washington this week.

Broadcast advisory: An audio actuality of the Lt. Governor discussing election reform issues is available on the Governor's Actuality Line, 465-5213, or 1-800-478-5669.



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