

Mississippi Secretary of State's Office

EYE ON ELECTIONS



ERIC CLARK
Secretary of State

MISSISSIPPI ELECTIONS LEAP INTO 21ST CENTURY A MESSAGE FROM ERIC CLARK

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The June Democratic Primary and Run-off Elections gave our local officials a great opportunity to implement the many improvements we've made in our elections, especially the new touch-screen voting machines now used in 77 counties.

I am pleased to report that, thanks to a great deal of work by these county election officials, party officers, and our office, the elections went very well.

While we expected, and have had, some bumps in the road, we have made tremendous progress in a short time. The new machines were enthusiastically received by most voters across the state. The new touch-screen voting machines are popular with Mississippians from all walks of life. They are easy to use and county officials from across our state, as well as this office, are making a massive effort to let all our people, from every corner of the state, learn about them.

The reason we are changing to these new voting machines, in addition to the federal mandate, is simple: they do a much better job of making sure every vote is counted the way the voter intends to cast his or her ballot. Uncounted votes, or "residual votes," have long been a serious but little recognized problem



in Mississippi politics. Official election returns indicate that 20 percent of the voters who went to the polls in some areas cast no votes for President in 2004. In all likelihood most of those people did cast ballots, but their votes were never counted.

The overwhelming reason for uncounted votes is the type of voting machine used. Antiquated voting machines result in legal votes being lost due to poor ballot design, hanging chads, or voter error. Now, thanks to the most accurate voting machines made anywhere, we are going to virtually eliminate the problem that has effectively disenfranchised many thousands of citizens without their knowledge.

All of this work on voting machines, as well as with our effort to clean up the voter rolls, requires a huge effort, especially on the part of our Circuit Clerks, Election Commissioners, and party officials. They are on the front lines of the new federal and state mandates and most are doing an outstanding job. Our Circuit Clerks and Election Commissioners, in particular, do not get enough public credit for the work they have done. They deserve our thanks.

So, whether you voted in June or not, you can know that our election officials were engaged in another exercise in democracy to get ready for the November general election and our statewide elections next year. Our elections are quickly moving into the 21st century. In fact, Mississippi is a national leader in going there!



Did You Know?

If a vacancy occurs in the office of County Superintendent of Education, such shall be filled by appointment by the County Board of Education. If the unexpired term exceeds 6 months, the Board of Supervisors shall call a special election to fill such vacancy. Meanwhile the Board of Education appointee shall serve until the special election.

*Miss Code Ann.
§37-5-75*

SEMS UPDATE

In preparation for the June Elections, the Statewide Election Management System (SEMS) was used to capture results and produce Recap Reports after the election. For the real-life trial, this process went relatively smoothly. However, we have identified several areas that will be improved for the fall elections.

With the Primary Elections behind us, we are now focusing on updates and enhancements to SEMS. Our SEMS Focus Group met in July and will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to help direct the enhancements. All Help Desk enhancement requests will be forwarded to the Secretary of State's Office and the focus group for review and

prioritization. We will continue to update the individuals who placed enhancement requests and the users as new items are released in the software. We appreciate the continued support of the SEMS Focus Group.

Another on-going component of the system is training. Saber has been very helpful in providing on-line training sessions. These sessions will continue to serve as refresher courses to the initial training. The team is also reviewing the possibility of conducting hands-on training as well.

An additional module that is scheduled for release soon is the Public Access Web Version of SEMS. This module will allow the public to log into the Touch and Vote website (www.touchandvote.ms.gov)

and enter their addresses to see their polling places and public officials. An announcement will be made on this functionality as soon as this new service is available.

If you have any questions concerning the SEMS Project, please contact Madalan Lennep, SEMS Project Manager at 1-601-359-6620 or mlepp@sos.state.ms.us. Thank you.

STATEWIDE VOTER OUTREACH

The Secretary of State's Office has begun a historic effort to take our new voting machines to the citizens of the state. Our office has hired eight regional coordinators to conduct voting machine demonstrations across the state to interested citizens.

At these events, the coordinators set up a voting machine and explain the use of the voting machine. Afterwards, all interested citizens are given the opportunity to practice voting. Events have been held at churches, libraries, malls, grocery stores, and local civic organiza-

tions. To date, we have conducted more 20,000 voting machine demonstrations to citizens across the state at more than 800 events.

We have developed a website dedicated solely to the new voting machine system. Visit www.touchandvote.ms.gov to learn about the new voting system, receive voting machine instructions, and actually practice voting, and also to download a voter instruction guide brochure. This brochure shows the voter how to use the machine in a step-by-step process that is very easy

to follow.

If our office can be of any assistance to you, call at 1-800-829-6786. Thanks!



ATTENTION!!

Do you have any Election Day stories that you would like to share? If so, please email your story to csmith@sos.state.ms.us



IMPORTANT DATES

SEPTEMBER

- 8th** Permanently Disabled Voters List: Circuit Clerks must deliver the list of permanently disabled voters who receive absentee ballots automatically for the June 6th primary to the Election Commission. The Election Commission is then charged with examining the roll for purposes of purging and maintenance. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-629(3)*)
- 23rd** Permanently Disabled Voters: Deadline for Election Commission to return the permanently disabled voters list to Circuit Clerks' office for the November 7th General Election. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-629(3)*) [Saturday]
- Absentee Balloting: Earliest day to vote absentee in the Circuit Clerk's office for the general election or to apply for an absentee ballot by mail. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-715*) Absentee ballots should be available for voting in the general election. Since this day is a Saturday, which for most clerk's offices is not a working day, this deadline will in fact fall on Monday, September 25.
- 28th** Permanently Disabled Voters: Last day for the Circuit Clerks to mail absentee ballots to disabled voters on the permanent list for the November 7th General Election. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-629(4)*)

OCTOBER

- 2nd-6th** Voter Registration: Circuit Clerks' offices may remain open from 8:00a.m. until 7:00 p.m., including the noon hour. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-37(2)*) Extended hours required unless individual counties obtain pre-clearance from US Justice Department to end extended hours.
- 7th** Voter Registration Deadline for General Election: Circuit Clerks' offices may remain open this Saturday until noon for voter registration. Noon is also the deadline for Circuit Clerks to accept hand delivered mail-in voter registration applications, if the clerk's office is required to be open. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-37(2)*) [Saturday] Extended hours required unless individual counties obtain pre-clearance from US Justice Department to end extended hours.
- 8th** Voter Registration: Deadline for mail-in voter registration forms to be postmarked when mailed to the Circuit Clerks' office for the November 5 General Election. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-47(2)(a)*) [Sunday]
NOTE: Since the legal 30 day deadline for mail-in voter registration forms falls on a Sunday, registration forms must be postmarked no later than Saturday, October 7th, to accommodate those post offices which do not affix postmarks on Sundays.
- 28th** Absentee Voting: Circuit Clerks' offices must remain open until noon for absentee voting. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-653*) [Saturday]

NOVEMBER

- 4th** Absentee Ballots: Last day to vote by absentee ballot in the Circuit Clerks' office, which is open until noon, for the November 7th General Election. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-631(1)(c) and 23-15-715(a)*) [Saturday]
- 6th** Absentee Ballots: Mailed absentee ballots must be received by 5:00 p.m. today, the day preceding the November 7th General Election. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-631(1)(c)*)
- 7th** **GENERAL ELECTION**: Polls open at 7:00 a.m. and close at 7:00 p.m. (*Miss. Const. 1890, §102*)
- 17th** Election Returns: Deadline for County Election Commissioners to canvass returns from all voting precincts and transmit to the Secretary of State the election results. (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-603*)
- 21st** **GENERAL ELECTION RUNOFF**: (if required) Runoff for Nonpartisan Judicial Offices, certain other offices and special elections.

DECEMBER

- 7th** Election Returns: By this date, the Secretary of State's office declares officials duly elected in the November 7th General Election (multi-county office). (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-605*)
- 21st** Election Returns: By this date, the Secretary of State's office declares officials duly elected in the November 21st General Election Run off (multi-county office). (*Miss. Code Ann. 23-15-605*)

HELPING MAKE HISTORY: VOTER OUTREACH

It is not every day that people have the opportunity to say they have been a part of making history. This year, Mississippi's election officials are doing that by implementing the Help American Vote Act. The statewide effort to teach our citizens of Mississippi to vote on the new voting machines before the primary and general elections falls partly on the shoulders of eight voter outreach coordinators from the Secretary of State's Office. Levi Patton, a coordinator who covers parts of the Pinebelt and Coastal Region of our state, feels rewarded every time he is able to show a senior citizen how easy the voting machines are to use. He explains, "It is wonderful to see the face of a senior citizen light up, literally, after they have finished voting on the machine for the first time. This encourages me by letting me know that every citizen has the potential to use this machine and I want to do my part by facilitating that opportunity."

Derrick Whittington, who covers the Delta Area of our state, enjoys seeing and experiencing Mississippi. He says, "I have seen more of the Mississippi Delta than I ever thought I would and I would not trade this experience for anything." Debra Williams relates it to rediscovering the state all over again. She tells, "Although I am originally from Mississippi, traveling all over this state, has renewed my passion and helped me rediscover my love for Mississippi."

Each of the voter outreach coordinators covers one of the four congressional districts. Each congressional district has been assigned two coordinators. This allows maximum exposure and accessibility of the voting machines to our citizens.

Although traveling and demonstrating the new voting machines is serious business, is not without its pleasures. Many of the voter outreach coordinators demonstrate at festivals and fairs. Jessica Graham held a demonstration at the Slugburger Festival in Corinth and Carlos D. Smith experienced the Jerry Clower Festival in Yazoo City. Smith and Graham agree that they did not see themselves ever really planning to go to the festivals before, but they are sure glad they had the chance to go and meet the citizens. The voter outreach coordinators have cherished their experiences and travels. No, it is not every day that a person has the chance to say "I am" or "I will" be a part of history in my state, but when the opportunity presents itself, Mississippi has citizens that are ready to go!

HAVA

On February 1, 2006, the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office added a Help America Vote Act (HAVA) Administrator to its staff. Matt Grubbs, who served more than five years as an Election Commissioner in Rankin County and in assisting the Elections Division in organizing election certification training of election officials, was promoted from Director of Marketing and Training in the Education and Publications Division to HAVA Administrator.

With Matt's years of experience, he understands the demands placed on election officials in developing procedural documents such as the

"Guide for Conducting Elections in Mississippi with the Statewide TSX Voting System" and "Precinct Procedures." These documents are developed with election officials and poll workers in mind.

Your suggestions are welcomed as these vital procedural documents are revised. Your suggestions should be mailed to the Secretary of State's Office to the attention of Matt Grubbs, HAVA Administrator. Thank you!

ACCESS FOR ALL

As we all know, every Mississippian who is eligible to vote has a fundamental right to equal participation in the electoral process. This includes the ability to cast a private and independent ballot. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) guarantees this right by requiring accessibility at every polling place utilized in a federal election. The minimum standards required to meet the accessibility requirements are set forth through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), reproduced in the US Department of Justice (USDOJ) ADA Checklist for Polling Places.

The Federal government awarded the State of Mississippi a grant to aid in HAVA compliance. The Secretary of State's Office created a sub-grant ACCESS to facilitate distribution of the federal funds. Counties were first asked to utilize the USDOJ-ADA Checklist for Polling Places in a county wide assessment of polling places. As Mississippi has more than 2100 polling places, this was a lengthy process. Following completion and submission of this survey, the Secretary of State's Offices returned to each county a summary report of all information submitted, detailing whether the polling place met each area of the required compliance. This summary report was designed to aid counties both in determining necessary improvements and calculating the funding necessary to reach compliance.

In the first step, a portion of the grant funds were equally distributed to each county that submitted an application for assistance. In the second step, using figures gathered from the 2000 Census Bureau, the remaining portion of the grant funds was distributed based on each county's percentage of the state's total disabled voting age population. The Secretary of State's Office is presently in the middle of the reimbursement process.

Funding is distributed to the county following submission of certification from the Board of Supervisors. This certification declares that all necessary improvements, permanent or temporary, have been made and the polling place is accessible according to the ADA requirements. Over half of the counties eligible for funding have received a portion of the \$1,000,000 allocated for improvements. Several counties have submitted partial certifications and their requests are pending until complete submission.

As an additional safeguard to counties, the Secretary of State's Office has requested assistance from the Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities. The Coalition is presently performing spot checks for accessibility using the USDOJ Checklist for Polling Places. They will inspect a minimum of six polling places in each county. This survey process will be complete by September 30, 2006. Any non-compliant areas will be brought to the county's attention for correction prior to the November election. Temporary improvements or permanent improvements are equally acceptable. However it is essential that the temporary improvements be in place on Election Day.

Regardless of whether the county participates in the ACCESS program, according to Federal law, **each and every polling place used in a Federal election must be disabled accessible.** The Secretary of State's Office continues to work with county officials to ensure that Mississippi reaches this mandatory compliance. If our office may be of assistance in any way, please call. For specific questions regarding the ACCESS program, you may contact Chelsea Brannon at (601) 359-1579 or the Elections Hotline at (800) 829-6786. Thanks!



Did You Know?

When a vacancy other than in the Legislature shall occur by death, resignation or otherwise, in any state or state district office, which is elective, and there is no special provision of law for the filling of said vacancy, the same shall be filled for the unexpired term by appointment by the Governor. *Miss Code Ann. §23-15-831*

401 Mississippi Street
P.O. Box 136
Jackson, MS 39205-0136

Phone: (601) 359-1350; (800) 829-6786
Fax: (601) 359-5019
Email: elections@sos.state.ms.us



Welcome to **Eye on Elections**, a publication of the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office. This quarterly newsletter focuses on Mississippi election issues. This newsletter is also available on our website at www.sos.state.ms.us/elections/elections.asp.

We wish to provide a newsletter that meets your needs, and we encourage your comments. To make suggestions or for additional information, please call, write, fax, or email us. All inquires or suggestions should be directed to Carlos D. Smith, Newsletter Editor at csmith@sos.state.ms.us or (601) 359-5213. We hope you find this newsletter useful. Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Clark". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ERIC CLARK
Secretary of State

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

ELECTIONS DIVISION STAFF

Jay Eads, Assistant Secretary of State
Linda Rigsby, Senior Attorney/Director of Training & Education
Willie Allen, Attorney/Director of Elections Administration
Matt Grubbs, HAVA Administrator
Kenny Jones, Lobbying Officer
Sandra Patterson, Executive Assistant to Jay Eads
Lisa Bunzy-Pullum, Administrative Assistant; Elections Training & Education Division
Kenyetta Sinclair, Candidate Qualifying & Returns
Carlos D. Smith, Training & Education Officer
Kell Smith, Statewide Voter Outreach Coordinator
Robbie Vance, Campaign Finance Officer

ELECTION DIRECTORY

Secretary of State: (601) 576-2550; (800) 829-6786
Attorney General: (601) 359-3680
U.S. Department of Justice: (202) 724-5897
Military Voting Assistance: (800) 438-8683
Democratic Party of Mississippi: (601) 969-2913
Mississippi Republican Party: (601) 948-5191
Mississippi Ethics Commission: (601) 359-1285
Federal Elections Commission: (800) 424-9530
Elections Assistance Commission: (866) 747-1471



MISSISSIPPI SECRETARY OF STATE'S OFFICE

"The Mississippi Secretary of State's Office will be the most user-friendly agency in state government."

Secretary of State Eric Clark