

1996 PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION MONITORING

BACKGROUND

The Grand Jury expressed interest in monitoring the Ventura County election process, as part of its oversight responsibilities. Accordingly, members monitored the Presidential election held on Tuesday, November 5, 1996.

SCOPE

The Grand Jury wanted firsthand knowledge of the election process and the procedures that are implemented by the precinct inspectors and clerks, as well as delivery of the ballot boxes to the designated receiving stations, and the transfer from there to the election office in the Government Center.

INQUIRY

The Grand Jury met with the County Clerk and Recorder and the Assistant Registrar of Voters to inform them of its intention to monitor the election process, and were given an Election Officer Handbook which contained information pertaining to pre-election checklists, the voting process, precinct closing instructions, and instruction on the handling and delivery of the ballot boxes to the receiving stations.

The Election Officer Class Schedule showing twenty seven class times in five cities was also provided. The California Elections Code requires inspectors to attend a training class before every election, while clerks are encouraged to attend (though not required) so they may be informed of the current changes in the law.

Other material obtained was the Ventura County Precinct List which was utilized in selecting the precincts to be monitored.

A prepared list of twenty five specific items to be monitored during the election was compiled for use in developing findings, conclusions and recommendations.

FINDINGS

1. The election inspectors and clerks were very cordial and accommodating to the voting public. The inspectors had prior experience in handling the election process. In some precincts the clerks were inexperienced, but they performed their tasks well. In response to questions, the clerks expressed a very favorable opinion on the training sessions offered by the County Clerk's Election Division.
2. One polling site did not adequately display polling place signs and voting instructions. However, we found that in most cases the polling sites and voting instructions were identified and displayed appropriately.
3. The verification of voters and the signing of Master Roster of Voter List appeared to be handled satisfactorily. In some instances where the voter's name was not included on the Master Roster, a pink provisional ballot was used. The voter is required to fill out the voter's declaration on the provisional ballot envelope. The inspector checked off the reason the provisional ballot was used and verified the

- voter identification. After voting and returning the ballot in the pink secrecy envelope, the inspector removed the stubs and placed the ballot in the voter's pink provisional envelope, which was then sealed and deposited in the ballot box.
4. Assistance was allowed for handicapped voters and the aide or helper was recognized at the time of voting.
 5. In two precincts the polling facilities consisted of modular trailers used by the school as part of its library. Because of the books and extra chairs belonging to the library, there was inadequate space for the voting booths and the election officers' work areas. Three election officers staffed each of the two precinct sign-in and registration tables. The election officials for these precincts were bilingual, which was helpful. In certain instances the name identification and voter verification process took more time than usual, thereby creating a backup line of voters waiting to vote.
 6. Reconciliation of the ballots at closing time appeared to be troublesome for the election officials. The ballot count for three of the precinct sign-in and registration tables did not reconcile. The reconciliation forms were eventually completed and deposited in the ballot box. The problem occurred when voters registered and picked up their ballots at one precinct table and, after voting, returned their completed ballot to another precinct table. After the reconciliation process was completed, a seal was placed around the metal loop of the ballot box, and it was locked.
 7. During the delivery of the ballot boxes to the area receiving stations it was noted that the deputy sheriffs responsible for receiving them conducted their tasks in an efficient manner. However, in a few instances some ballot boxes, although locked, were delivered without a seal, which was then provided and placed on the boxes before being loaded into the vehicle used to transport them to the Election Central Station.
 8. The Assistant Registrar of Voters explained the method for testing the validity of the ballot readers and the secured computer. The computer readers are tested by reading ballot cards with a known hole pattern that has an expected readout. This testing pattern was run on the afternoon of election day and again after tabulation of all the ballots.
 9. Printouts that include all the election results from federal to local level, are made available to the general public every half-hour.
 10. The County of Ventura has:
 - 616 precincts.
 - 189 of the precincts are mail precincts that are created when there are less than 250 registered voters in a specific precinct.
 - 456,865 residents of voting age.
 - 382,417 (83.7%) registered voters.
 - 253,866 (66.4%) who exercised their right to vote.
 - 2,306 voters used provisional ballots because they had moved and failed to notify the elections department. Of these 44%, or 1,022, were found to be satisfactory while 56%, or 1,284, were disqualified for the following reasons:
 - a. Were not registered to vote

CONCLUSIONS

- b. Did not have proper identification
- c. Were not in correct polling place
- d. Did not sign affidavit on voting form

1. The overall performance of the election department officials, the precinct election officials, and most election processes monitored were performed satisfactorily.
2. The reconciliation process demonstrated that problems occurred when more than two precincts shared one polling site.
3. One polling site had inadequate space for precinct tables and voting booths, thereby causing voters to wait in line outdoors exposed to the weather elements.
4. The materials produced by the Elections Department for use by the inspectors and clerks were very well prepared and served as excellent tools for the election officials in performing their duties.

RECOMMENDATION

1. The County Clerk and Recorder, Elections Division, should make every effort to insure that adequate facilities are provided for the electorate in forthcoming elections. Under normal conditions, voters should not be required to wait outside a polling place during the voting process, especially during inclement weather conditions.
2. Emphasis on ballot box security (lock and seal) should be stressed to the election inspectors during the training session held preparatory to an election. Security of the ballot boxes should be of the utmost importance.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

County Clerk and Recorder