

## **Machine, registration problems in Pa. primary elections**

Posted on Tue, Apr. 22, 2008

By Anthony R. Wood

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

With record numbers of new registrants for a primary election, voter-protection groups have logged some 750 voter complaints across the state today, including at least 150 about malfunctioning machines.

Given the tremendous numbers of first-time registrants - more than 215,000, some glitches were to be anticipated. And similar problems have surfaced in other states, said Jonah Goldman, of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, based in Washington.

To help sort the problems, the organization's Election Protection's 1-866-OUR-VOTE line for voter assistance is staying open until 8:30 p.m.

"These really large turnouts are putting a strain on the election-administration system," he said. "Unfortunately we expect problems because we know the infrastructure of the elections isn't up to the weight of the problem."

After Richard Brown, of the 5700 block of North 12th Street in Philadelphia showed up at his polling place at 6:55 a.m., it took nearly two hours for the machines to be either repaired or replaced, he said. In an affidavit cited in a failed-attempt to keep city polls opened later, Brown said he waited more than an hour for election officials to produce paper provisional ballots.

Voters at a polling place in the 49th Ward near the Fern Rock station had to wait two hours because of machine malfunctions, said Kathryn Bookvar, an attorney with the Advancement Project, based in Washington, who was in Philadelphia to monitor the election. Machine problems also were reported in West Oak Lane; Upper Darby, Delaware County, and Elkins Park, Montgomery County.

In Elkins Park, the problem was a machine accidentally powered down by a poll worker, said county spokesman John Corcoran.

In addition to the machine issues, "numerous" registration snafus were reported to the Committee of Seventy, said its election coordinator John David.

The bulk of those complaints have come from voters who switched parties and whose names did not appear on the rolls of the new party. The city has been inundated with calls, said David, adding: "It's swamping the voter-registration office."

In some instances, voters whose names were missing were not being offered provisional ballots, he said. .

That included Alfreda Stowers, who attempted to vote at Fourth and Race Streets. She was not aware that she could have voted by provisional ballot until she left the polling place and called the Committee of Seventy. She planned to go back and vote.

"There needs to be mandatory training of the poll workers," Bookvar said.

One problem evidently unrelated to the high turnout surfaced in South Philadelphia. In the hotly contested primary for the seat being vacated by Democratic State Sen. Vincent J. Fumo, workers for candidate Larry Farnese complained that an election judge in one polling place was improperly accompanying voters inside the booth as they voted.

It is illegal for election judges to enter the booths, and Common Pleas Judge Glenn B. Bronson issued an order barring that judge from doing so.

---

Contact staff writer Anthony R. Wood at 610-313-8210 or [twood@phillynews.com](mailto:twood@phillynews.com).