

Election Day Observation Program

November 4, 2014, General Election Report

This report summarizes the work of the Election Day Observation Program conducted by the Secretary of State (SOS) during the November 4, 2014, General Election.

Overall, the election, that saw more than 7.5 million ballots cast in almost 25,000 precincts, went smoothly. SOS observers witnessed first-hand the dedication and helpfulness county elections officials and poll workers showed to voters. However, no election is flawless, and on November 4, 2014, some voters and poll workers confronted a number of different issues that are discussed in this report.

Election Day Observation in 2014

For the November 4, 2014, General Election, SOS sent nine observers (two observers in Los Angeles County) to eight counties. Counties visited were:

Alameda	Los Angeles	San Bernardino
Fresno	Monterey	Solano
Lassen	Napa	

Observers were instructed to:

- Look for posted signs and flags to determine if polling places were easy to find;
- Report on any accessibility problems related to parking or the facility itself;
- Assess the effectiveness of poll worker training and voter education;
- Report if there were any groups present at the polls trying to intimidate voters and/or other groups making sure voters were not being intimidated;
- Note if there was a high incidence of voters going to the wrong polling place, and describe how poll workers handled the situation;
- Assess the voting environment as to proper lighting, effective staging of poll worker tables and voting equipment, and voter privacy;
- Determine if all required voter information was posted or available and easy to read in all legally required languages;
- Observe whether accessible voting booths and equipment were set up and readily available;
- Assess if the voting process was well organized;
- Report if voters were required to wait in line for more than 10 minutes;
- Report any issues that appeared to be confusing to either poll workers or voters;
- Determine if security measures for ballots and voting equipment were being followed; and,

- If possible, without disrupting the voting process or disturbing voters, ask poll workers if they had experienced any difficulties with equipment, procedures, or voter confusion.

SOS observers were instructed to call in reports of any problems or challenges they felt needed immediate attention from either county election officials or the SOS. They were also asked to provide an overview on issues that were common to the polling places they visited and any apparent underlying causes and/or possible remedies.

Issues

SOS observers reported a small number of problems encountered by voters and poll workers on Election Day.

The issues noted by the SOS observers in this election fall into five basic categories:

- Ballots and Registration
- Signs and Flags
- Polling Facilities
- Voting Equipment
- Poll Worker Training

Ballots and Registration

There were some instances in all counties visited by SOS observers where voters who came to the polls and found the roster showing they were registered as a vote-by-mail voter. Most voters did not recall registering to vote by mail. A potential solution would be to educate voters about the importance of making sure that their voter registration status is up to date. Also, when the VoteCal statewide voter registration database is implemented, voters will be able to check their status online.

Observers noted there were a few voters that arrived at the incorrect polling place. In these instances, poll workers redirected them to the correct location or instructed the voter on how to cast a provisional ballot. As has been the case in past election cycles, many voters brought their completed vote-by-mail ballots to the polling place on Election Day.

Signs and Flags

One of the most common problems reported was poor visibility of polling places or a lack of proper signage. The following are problems that SOS observers found in several counties.

- Location signs were too small or not placed close to the street, making it difficult for voters to see the entrance to the polling place.

- Some locations lacked directional signs to indicate the accessible path of travel. A possible remedy would be to have the polling place surveyor mark a map of each location surveyed showing the accessible path of travel and indicating where to place the directional signs which could then be included in the poll workers packet for Election Day. Also, additional signs could be purchased using HAVA section 261 funding.
- Not all of the voter information signs required by law were posted in all polling places. This was especially true of the sign indicating that no electioneering is allowed within 100 feet of the polling place. This required sign was missing from quite a few of the polling places observed, or in many instances, was placed right beside the entrance to the polling place. Since the sign reads “No Electioneering Beyond this Point” and is supposed to be posted 100 feet from the entrance, posting it at the doorway provided inaccurate information and is misleading to voters.

Although many county election officials have significantly improved their directional and polling place signage, overall this is an area that still needs to be improved. SOS staff will continue to work with county election offices to find a solution to this problem.

Another common problem was the lack of space in most polling places to post all of the required signs. Some signs were placed on tables making them difficult to find. Those counties that give their poll workers three-sided folding boards or sign kiosks on which all necessary signs were posted had a higher percentage of compliance than other counties.

Polling Facilities

County election officials continue to report difficulties in finding accessible buildings to use as polling places.

Indoor and outdoor lighting challenges and signage indicating the accessible path of travel appear to be the most common reported problems encountered at polling places. If there is not adequate lighting at every polling location during a November election, the path of travel is more difficult because it is darker sooner than in June when the Statewide Primary Election is held. The SOS staff will work closely with the counties to help resolve the outside lighting issue which may include allowing exterior lighting as an allowable expense for the next series of HAVA section 261 funding.

Because counties often combined multiple precincts into one polling location, at times voters were confused as to where to go within the polling place to sign in and receive a ballot. Poll workers at some polling places that housed multiple precincts assigned a greeter to direct incoming voters to the correct table. This reduced voter confusion and made the process more efficient.

Voting Equipment

There were few reports of problems with voting equipment. The most common challenge noted by observers was that there were not enough wheelchair accessible voting booths. Increased poll worker training and education specifically, about the importance of having accessible voting booths for voters with disabilities on Election Day. Also, HAVA 261 funding is an available resource if needed for accessible voting equipment.

Poll Worker Training

In most counties, poll workers reported their training was excellent. The SOS observers noted that, overall, the workers were knowledgeable, helpful, and sensitive to the needs of voters.

Conclusion

The Secretary of State's nine observers for the November 4, 2014, General Election attended poll worker training and observed the election process beginning with the opening of the polls through the receiving of ballots at the central counting location on Election Day. In the eight counties in California with SOS observers, the issues noted related to ballots and registration, signs and flags, polling facilities, voting equipment, and poll worker training. As a whole, many of the issues found by the SOS observers can be resolved or mitigated through HAVA section 261 funding or additional poll worker training. The SOS will work closely with the counties to identify and resolve issues.