

Election Day Observation Program

June 3, 2014, Statewide Primary Election

This report summarizes the work of the Election Day Observation Program conducted by the Secretary of State (SOS) during the June 3, 2014, Statewide Primary Election.

The June 3, 2014, election saw more than 4,400,000 ballots cast in 22,353 precincts. SOS observers witnessed first-hand the dedication county election officials and poll workers showed to voters. However, no election is flawless, and on June 3, 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 June 3, 2014, election, the SOS sent eight observers to Alameda, Contra Costa, Lassen, Los Angeles (2 observers), Riverside, Sacramento, and Santa Clara.

The SOS observers witnessed the election process beginning with the opening of the polls through the intake of ballots at the central counting location on Election Day. 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;
- Report any electioneering within 100 feet of the voting booths, and any pollsters and or press present within the 25 foot boundary of the voting booths;
- 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 identify and/or describe any apparent underlying causes and/or possible remedies.

Issues

SOS observers reported very few 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
Accessibility
Signs and Flags
Polling Facilities
Voting Equipment
Poll Worker Training

Ballots and Registration

Most voter registration issues observed during the June 3, 2014, election stemmed from voters who appeared at the wrong polling place. In these cases, poll workers either redirected them to the correct location or instructed the voter how to cast a provisional ballot.

There were also instances of people who had registered to vote by mail, but did not receive their vote-by-mail ballot. Many of these voters voted provisional ballots at a polling place within their county. Voters who did not bring their vote-by-mail ballot to return it at the polling place were instructed to cast a provisional ballot. There were also voters who chose to return their vote-by-mail ballot at a polling place. The majority of SOS observers also noticed polling facilities were not providing secrecy sleeves. The secrecy sleeves protect voter privacy by covering the voted ballot when being scanned. One polling facility also ran out of sample ballots.

Accessibility

Polling places are supposed to be accessible to all voters, including voters with disabilities. However, county election officials continue to report difficulties in finding available accessible buildings to use as polling places. There were some reports of accessibility issues at the observed polling facilities on Election Day. There were path of travel issues at polling facilities, including multi-story buildings without elevators, blocked paths of travel, narrow pathways, ramps that were too steep and/or had no landing area.

Some observers reported some polling facilities did not offer curbside voting or did not provide adequate accessible parking. Most of the polling facilities that did offer curbside voting did not provide a way for the voters to let the poll workers know they needed curbside voting assistance. Instead, voters needed someone to accompany them to alert the poll workers.

Signs and Flags

The most common problems were poor visibility of polling places from the road, a lack of proper signage directing voters to the polling location and into the polling facilities. Following are problems SOS observers found in several counties:

- Location signs were posted too far from the road or at an angle that was difficult for drivers to see.
- There were no directional signs to indicate the accessible path of travel to get to the polling place.
- Not all of the voter information signs required by law were posted in all polling places. Frequently missing was the sign indicating no electioneering is allowed within 100 feet of the polling place. This required sign was missing from most of the polling places observed, or in many instances, was placed inside the polling facility. Some polling facilities also failed to post the Voter's Bill of Rights and instructions on how a voter can check the status of a voted provisional ballot.
- Some observers found it difficult to find posted signs that were placed in areas not clearly visible to voters entering the polling place.
- American flags were not visibly hung at the entrances of polling locations.

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

Polling Facilities

Inadequate lighting and parking was a commonly reported problem encountered at the polling places. SOS observers also found poll workers eating and drinking around voting materials.

Voter privacy and electioneering problems were also observed at some polling locations on Election Day. Voter privacy was compromised at a couple of locations where people that were not voters would use the voting area as a pass through, including one instance when groups of school children walked through a polling location in a library. SOS observers reported seeing voters taking photos at the polling place and cell phone use by both voters and Elections Officers near the voting booths. Another observer overheard poll workers discussing politics around the voting booths.

Because counties often combined multiple precincts into one polling location, it was not uncommon for voters to be confused about where to go within the polling place to vote. Some polling stations did not have greeters to help voters find which precinct to vote in and many voters did not bring their sample ballots to check this information.

The majority of observers found that the poll workers were well organized and efficiently opened and closed the polls. However, SOS observers noticed that at some polling facilities poll workers were either arriving late or opening poll facilities after 7:00 a.m. An observer also noticed staffing issues in one of the counties, where some precincts were understaffed and others were overstaffed. There were also issues with task management at the polling facilities. Tasks were not assigned ahead of time to poll workers and this consequently caused delays and confusion in setting up tables and equipment, and also when closing the polls. Some poll workers appeared not to have been properly trained as they relied heavily on the training materials and called the county elections official for assistance multiple times.

Voting Equipment

Overall there were few reports of problems with voting equipment. Issues that were observed included machines that did not function. However, in all instances these were quickly fixed by a poll worker, a roving technician or the county elections official.

In one small county, the requirement to provide one voting machine at each polling place to ensure voters with disabilities could vote independently was not met. The county elections official appears to have misinterpreted the law and stated a loss of employees in the office made it impossible to adhere to the requirement. The county elections official was unable to program the voting system and could not secure additional assistance from the voting system vendor, temporary workers, or other external resources. The SOS is working closely with the county to ensure the county elections official is crystal clear on the requirement prior to future elections. The SOS is helping the official adhere to the law by offering to provide assistance with such things as preparation and mailing of sample ballots, preparation and mailing of vote-by-mail ballots, and assisting with logic and accuracy testing on the voting systems.

Poll Worker Training

SOS observers attended the poll worker training for the county they observed on Election Day. In all of the counties, poll workers reported their training was excellent. SOS observers noted that on Election Day, the poll workers were knowledgeable, helpful, and sensitive to the needs of voters.

Recommendations

The Secretary of State's eight observers for the June 3, 2014, Statewide Primary Election attended poll worker training and observed the election process beginning with the opening of the polls through the intake of ballots at the central counting location on Election Day. In the seven counties in California with SOS observers, the

issues noted related to ballots and registration, accessibility, signs and flags, polling facilities, voting equipment, and poll worker training. Based upon the observations, the SOS recommendation that:

- ✓ County election officials should appoint either one of the poll workers as a greeter or apply proper signage to direct voters to the proper table or room if more than one precinct is in the polling facility.
- ✓ Training should place more of an emphasis on electioneering and spoiled ballots. Specifically, there should be an emphasis in training on how to recognize and handle individuals who are in violation of electioneering laws. There also need to be additional training on how to handle spoiled ballots as some poll workers were not familiar with the handling procedures.
- ✓ All polling facilities that provide curbside voting should provide a means for the voter to call or alert a poll worker without leaving their vehicle.
- ✓ Because some poll workers were relying heavily on training materials on Election Day, county poll worker training may benefit from the use of other teaching tools outside of lecturing, such as the use of videos, scenarios, and role playing.

The SOS will continue to work with counties to improve the election process at the polls on Election Day.