

**U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING - OCTOBER 25, 2005
THIRD PARTY VOTER REGISTRATIONS**

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To the Commissioners of the Election Assistance Commission, fellow election administrators and distinguished guests, Louisiana faced a major challenge during the 2004 Presidential election in its four major jurisdictions with the issue of third-party voter registration applications and in particular, with the delayed transmittal of those documents to the Registrar of Voters offices. This delay nearly resulted in the inability to process the voter applications prior to Election Day in a manner that would allow the mailing of the address verification and voter identification card to the applicant. As a result of this situation a new election offense category was added to Louisiana law (La. R.S. 18:1461A(23) which defines a period of thirty days after the application has been completed by the potential voter, if it is "collected through a registration drive/" for submission to the parish registrar of voters. Failure to submit the application in a timely manner is an election offense punishable by a fine up to one thousand dollars or imprisonment for not more than one year, or both (La. R.S. 18:1461B. These new provisions will be effective January 1, 2006.

Voter registration through the mail, using federal forms over the internet, or community and/or national based organizations reached full bloom in Louisiana during 2004. Orleans Parish had 15,149 applications submitted during the peak period with nearly 10,000 of those submitted in the last few days before registration closed. Jefferson Parish with about 280,000 voters had 7,267 applications processed, East Baton Rouge Parish had 11,025 new voters and Caddo Parish with a normal base of 153,000 voters had about 12,000 total applications received with 7,567 new applicants and nearly 3,500 changes of some sort processed. While duplicate applications were not measured it is estimated that at least 10-15% of the applications received were duplicates. By comparison during the Governor's race the previous year, Caddo had less than half as many new applicants. It must be remembered that Louisiana like many jurisdictions inputs the applications by hand or typing them into a computer system without any scanning or imaging. Under optimum circumstances it takes about two and half minutes to input an application. The Secretary of State emptied its offices to aid Orleans Parish while the other major jurisdictions sought temporary workers and increased the length of workdays for its employees.

In the case of Caddo Parish with only four employees engaged in voter registration who also answer phone inquiries, in person questions and also handle in person absentee voting, it meant some exceptionally long hours as well as the addition of temporary staff. The staff increased by eight additional workers.

In many ways we have become the victims of our own success. "Motor Voter" has worked exceptionally well but the corresponding need for technological developments in many jurisdictions has not been funded or the need even recognized. The growth of voter registration organizations, the availability and capacity of the internet especially its use by younger citizens and the attention by political parties to influence registration is healthy for our system. However, the timely submission of voter registration applications is a clear need. In the case in Orleans Parish some voter groups held their applications from drives in June and July to hand them in for media attention near the registration deadline in October.

Would numbering the applications serve to assist election administrators who are already overwhelmed by the mound of applications? I would suggest it may have exactly the opposite effect. What is the best means to encourage groups to quickly submit the applications? Would having the registration staff contact the organizations frequently aid in more timely submissions? It will drain precious resources from registration staffs and in some cases, registration groups are difficult to pinpoint by phone, mailing addresses or emails;

Possibly, registration groups could be required to furnish a receipt to the potential voter specifying that their application has been received, a name and phone number contact for the organization and a statement that the application will be submitted within seven days. I clearly believe it is the responsibility of voter registration groups to be responsible for the applications' submission. The groups have represented an implied fiduciary trust obligation to submit the applications in a timely manner. It is what the voter expected when they registered via the registration group. To suggest that election administrators' offices handle even more details during peak registration periods is a faulty suggestion.

It must be remembered that many voter registration groups got the job done the way it should be done. I publicly cite the Shreveport Branch of the NAACP, Voices for Working Families and an individual who is a barber and minister, Brother Lee as examples of the best in our community. One idea that I will institute during the next major election cycle is to work with known voter registration groups well in advance of the voter registration season to stress deadlines, processing times and logistics in submissions to the Registrar's office.

I encourage the EAC to consider the possibility that the terrible consequences of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita could have happened in the same time period of 2004. What would we have done faced with a Presidential election bearing down on us with parishes and counties under water, no communications, no electricity for voting machines and hundreds of thousands of displaced voters with no time to send absentee ballots by mail? Possibly a disaster plan for Presidential elections needs to be reviewed in the light of these uncertain times. We have all learned lessons in recent years and I believe it is time to consider a safety net type plan that would not involve legal and court challenges that the absence of such a plan guarantees.

**MAJOR LOUISIANA JURISDICTIONS
2004 PRESIDENTIAL WORKLOAD**

The following is a representation of some of Louisiana's major jurisdictions and the workload during the 2004 Presidential election.

<i>Parish:</i>	<i>Registered Voters 8-06-04</i>	<i>Registered Voters 10-29-04 (Net+)</i>	<i>Absentees Mailed</i>	<i>Absentees In Person</i>
<i>Orleans</i>	<i>305,374</i>	<i>320,253(15,149)</i>	<i>2,660</i>	<i>4,116</i>
<i>Jefferson</i>	<i>279,600</i>	<i>286,867 (7,267)</i>	<i>3,561</i>	<i>6,297</i>
<i>E. Baton Rouge</i>	<i>251,306</i>	<i>262,331 (11,025)</i>	<i>4,264</i>	<i>8,435</i>
<i>Caddo</i>	<i>153,956</i>	<i>160,455 (6,499)</i>	<i>2,240</i>	<i>3,005</i>
<i>St. Tammany</i>	<i>137,723</i>	<i>143,129 (5,406)</i>	<i>2,838</i>	<i>7,057</i>
<i>Lafayette</i>	<i>126,716</i>	<i>130,200 (3,484)</i>	<i>1,339</i>	<i>5,546</i>
<i>Calcasieu</i>	<i>122,938</i>	<i>124,892 (1,954)</i>	<i>1,456</i>	<i>3,460</i>
<i>Ouachita</i>	<i>96,295</i>	<i>98,860 (2,565)</i>	<i>1,409</i>	<i>3,374</i>
<i>Rapides</i>	<i>79,117</i>	<i>80,541 (1,424)</i>	<i>2,354</i>	<i>3,0078</i>
<i>Tangipahoa</i>	<i>63,999</i>	<i>65,445 (1,446)</i>	<i>655</i>	<i>2,944</i>
<i>Bossier</i>	<i>61,917</i>	<i>64,142 (2,225)</i>	<i>886</i>	<i>2,448</i>
<i>Livingston</i>	<i>63,818</i>	<i>65,705 (1,887)</i>	<i>536</i>	<i>2,261</i>
<i>Terrebonne</i>	<i>60,623</i>	<i>61,711 (1,088)</i>	<i>544</i>	<i>2,020</i>

Nearly 40% of Louisiana registered voters reside in five parishes: Orleans, Jefferson, East Baton Rouge, Caddo and St. Tammany.

Nearly 67% of Louisiana's voters reside in the state's largest 14 parishes based on Presidential election registration.