

Straight-ticket voting could trip up election

Presidential race excluded from option

BY JULIANA HANSON
STAFF WRITER

Voters in North Carolina could find that their choice for president isn't counted if they aren't careful at the polls Tuesday.

Confusion over a 37-year-old state law that separates the different parts of the ballot could mean that voters who don't know the rules will get left out in the cold.

When people enter the polling booth, they have the opportunity to vote for a "straight-party ticket," meaning they can vote for all Democrats or all Republicans without checking off each individual candidate.

But because of a 1967 law passed by a Democratic General Assembly that wanted to protect itself from the strength of national Republican candidates in the state, North Carolina's ballots exclude the presidential race from this process.

This means that Tuesday, voters must cast their vote in that particular election separately.

The rule has caused confusion at the polls every year since its inception.

In the 2000 election, about 3.02 million ballots were cast by N.C. voters, but only 2.91 million included votes for president.

These numbers indicate that about 100,000 people cast votes in the election without indicating a choice for president.

But although there was some

confusion, Don Wright, general counsel for the N.C. Board of Elections, said that most people vote without any problem and that "not everyone votes for every office."

Wright acknowledged that some of the 100,000-vote discrepancy can be attributed to the straight-ticket law but added that it is impossible to determine what percentage of the vote accounts for each factor.

"It is an issue we are aware of," said Kevin Howell, communications director for the N.C. Republican Party, adding that the problem affects voters on all ends of the political spectrum.

"We have been proactive in reminding people," he said.

"We have encouraged voters to go for the Lucky 7," or the number of times Republicans would have to vote to cover all of the state and national elections.

Schorr Johnson, communications director for the N.C. Democratic Party, said that both parties have faced difficulty in informing voters about the rule but that the Democrats are trying to make the issue as public as possible.

"We are working tirelessly to get the word out," he said.

Both parties, as well as the N.C. Board of Elections, have reminders about the straight-ticket law posted on their Web sites.

Volunteers at polling locations, including the Morehead

Planetarium one-stop site that closed Saturday, also are charged with spreading the word and showing voters sample ballots.

Several voters said that although they did not know about the law before coming to the polls, workers explained it well.

"It's not confusing because I had seen a ballot before, in the mail and here," said Steve Moore, an Orange County voter.

"There has been enough effort made on all parts to get the word out."

Ultimately, though, the issue lies not in the hands of political parties or the Board of Elections, but of the N.C. General Assembly, which has jurisdiction over election laws.

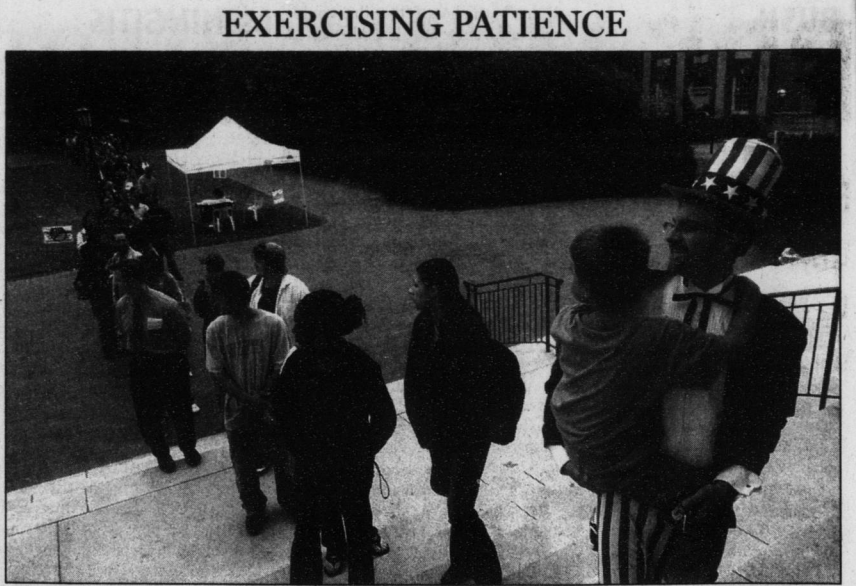
Howell, Johnson and Wright all said they will continue to implement the law and do their utmost to guarantee that people understand the process involved until N.C. state legislators tell them otherwise.

"I think people are aware of it, and if not, they are being told," said N.C. Rep. Henry Michaux, D-Durham and chairman of the House Election Law and Campaign Finance Reform Committee.

He added that although he has not heard a great number of complaints from voters, the laws are confusing and "ought not be that way."

"We're going to take a look at it during the next session."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.



DTH/SARA LEWKOWICZ

Phil Susanne of Chapel Hill and his son Phil, 6, stand in an early voting line at the Morehead Planetarium Friday afternoon where there were reported waits of 2.5 hours before getting to the booth. Early voting ended in North Carolina on Saturday, October 30th. Susanne has been volunteering at Ephesus Elementary School, where his son attends. He said he dressed up as Uncle Sam because it seemed appropriate.

Lawyers gear up for battles

BY ERIC JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

In what could be an extraordinarily close presidential race, Democrats and Republicans alike are gearing up to take the fight straight from the campaign trail to the courtroom.

Mindful of the legal battles surrounding the Florida recount that ultimately decided the 2000 election, both parties are preparing to immediately challenge any perceived irregularities on Election Day.

"I think people are anticipating

the same sorts of problems that happened last time, and we've seen it going on already," said Neil Siegel, a professor at Duke University Law School.

Lawsuits already have been filed in some states over a host of different issues, and both campaigns have fielded teams of lawyers to respond rapidly if no clear winner emerges Nov. 2.

Around the country, and particularly in swing states that have the potential to turn the Electoral College tally, questions have arisen about everything from provisional ballots to the polling locations.

In Florida, there are at least 10 lawsuits pending, including a demand that new electronic voting machines create a paper trail to be used in the event of a recount.

There also have been complaints that there are not enough voting machines in place at early voting sites.

The massive scale of voter drives this year has left many states struggling to process new registrations in time for the election. Alabama's director of voter registration quit less than 14 days before the election.

In Ohio, Democrats have accused the Republican secretary of state of trying to disenfranchise voters by invalidating registration forms on dubious grounds. Republicans have countered with charges of fraud on many new registrations.

In 2000, it was more than a month after Election Day before the U.S. Supreme Court ordered a halt to the Florida recount, leaving Bush with a narrow margin of victory in

the state and determining the outcome of the national election.

"If there's a five-point margin, these things aren't going to matter much," said Roy Schotland, a professor of law at Georgetown University. "It has to be close."

With Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry and President Bush in a virtual tie in many crucial swing states, operatives in both parties are at the ready.

Appearing on NBC's "Meet the Press," Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe described an elaborate effort by Democrats to monitor this year's polling.

"We will have 10,000 lawyers at polling places," he said. "If there are issues as we had in Florida in 2000, we will have people quickly on the ground."

Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie accused Democrats of trying to taint the electoral process.

"If John Kerry loses, they're going to sue," he said. "They're going to haul the election process into courtrooms across this country."

Schotland called the effort on both sides an "unprecedented bunch of people running around with matches to light fires."

"They're both as ready as can be with the best (legal) talent they can find, so I don't think one is going to out-lawyer the other," he said.

"I think it's just a matter of what happens."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Students seek to make vote count

BY ERIC JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

When packing up to head off to college, students have to make tough choices about what stays and what goes. For many, that choice includes their ballot.

Though every vote counts, pundits say the reality of American politics is that an individual vote might have more sway in one state or county than in another.

"I pretty much knew that I was going to do absentee before I came here," said Emily Dunn, a UNC freshman from Florida. "I think (my vote) will make more of a difference in Palm Beach County."

In presidential races, the mathematics of the electoral college are such that a vote cast in a swing state matters more than a vote cast in a state where the race is not so close.

In this year's election, there is a relatively small number of states considered to be "in play." Polls sug-

gest a reasonable chance that states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida, could deliver their much-coveted electoral votes to either President Bush or Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry.

Most other states are assumed to be locked up, with a firm majority of residents already decided.

Megan Meyer, a junior public policy major from Cincinnati, Ohio, chose to keep her registration in the state she still considers home.

"It does make me happier that Ohio is a swing state," she said. "I feel like my vote will count more or possibly have more influence."

John Aldrich, a professor of political science at Duke University, said electoral calculation is common among out-of-state students.

"In the strategy sense, (moving your vote to North Carolina) is not particularly wise on the presidential level because the presidential race isn't likely to be competitive in North

"(Moving your vote to North Carolina) is not particularly wise on the presidential level." JOHN ALDRICH, POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR, DUKE UNIVERSITY

Carolina," he said. "It's much more of a short-term, quasi-strategic decision for most students about where their vote will do the most good."

Even in-state students, Aldrich added, might take into account the significance of their vote in a particular district before deciding whether or not to re-register. "There aren't likely to be a great many competitive races in Orange County."

University students can choose to switch their registration to Orange County, traditionally a Democratic stronghold.

Barry Katz, chairman of the Orange County Democratic Party, said he is thrilled to have the active volunteer base that students provide, but students' actual votes

hold little sway in local elections.

"This year, there are no tight races at all," he said. "There are no local races where the student vote has any consequence at all."

The Democratic candidates in Orange County for N.C. House and Senate face little opposition this year, leaving some in-state students from other counties inclined to vote in their home districts.

That's exactly what freshman Ryan Thorpe chose to do.

"I left my ballot back in Stanly County. I figured my vote — since I'm voting Democrat — would go further there than it would here."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

STUDENT VOTE

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said Carolyn Thomas, director of the Orange County BOE.

Thomas added that new voters in Orange County receive a voter card following registration that pinpoints the location of his polling site.

The board's office phones have been ringing constantly during the past weeks as anxious voters call with questions about their polling site location, Thomas said. "It's easier to call us than to find their card."

And voters' potential confusion doesn't end at finding their polling locations. Once they make it to the polls, voters sometimes struggle with the complexity of the ballot, officials said.

Votes cast for president, nonpartisan offices and state or local referendums are separate from the straight-party ticket. Voters can't simply vote a straight ticket and have their votes count in these races.

But precinct officials at all polling sites are prepared to answer voters' questions about the ballot.

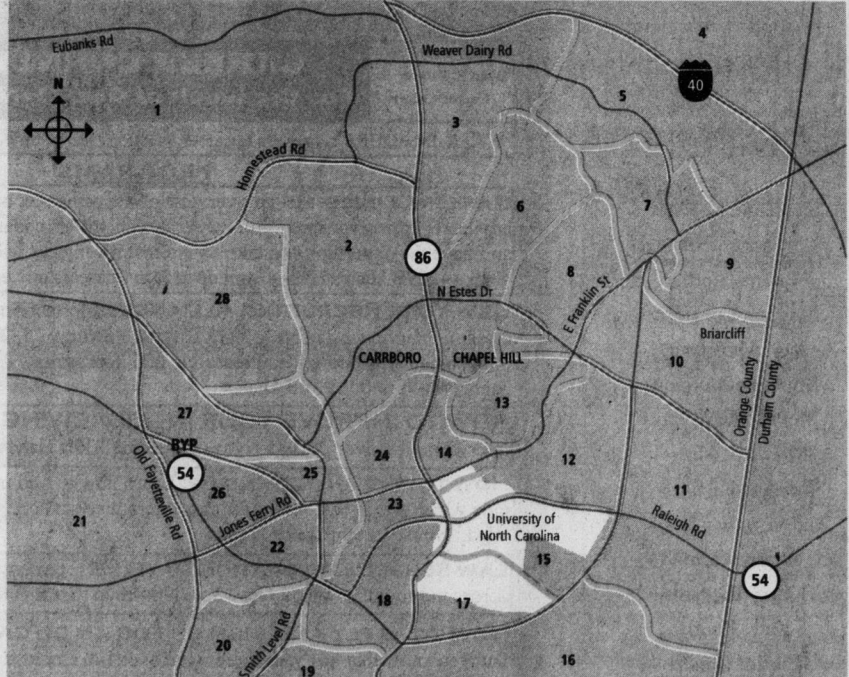
When arriving at the polls, all citizens voting in Orange County will have to identify themselves by stating their local address.

Thomas said any form of identification, including a student ID card or a utilities bill, will be accepted. But social security numbers are never necessary. Chase Foster, president of VoteCatalyst, a subgroup of VoteCarolina, said students should take their school ID to the polls to further prove they've been residents of the county for more than 30 days.

If other registration problems occur or if students go to the wrong precinct and do not have time to travel to the correct one, they should request a provisional ballot. Doing so will ensure that their votes still count, Foster said.

Provisional ballots are investigated and verified after Election Day. If a person who votes by a provisional ballot is registered in Orange County but went to wrong precinct, their

CHAPEL HILL AND CARRBORO VOTING PRECINCT LOCATIONS



- | | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 1 Coles Store | 6 Estes Hills | 11 Glenwood | 16 Kings Mill | 21 St. John | 25 Town Hall |
| 2 Colonial Heights | 7 Booker Creek | 12 Greenwood | 17 Mason Farm | 22 Owasa | 26 Lions Club |
| 3 Weaver Dairy | 8 Coker Hill | 13 Battlepark | 18 Westwood | 23 Lincoln | 27 Carrboro |
| 4 Patterson | 9 Eastside | 14 East Franklin | 19 Dogwood Acres | 24 North Side | 28 North Carrboro |
| 5 Cedar Falls | 10 Ridgefield | 15 County Club | 20 Damascus | | |

NOT SHOWN ON MAP
Transfer Precinct - Chapel Hill Police Station, 306 N. Columbia St.
Weaver Dairy Sat. - Carol Woods Retirement Community, 750 Weaver Dairy Road
Road - Knapp-Saunders Building, UNC Campus
White Cross - Antioch Baptist Church, White Cross Road
DTH/MARY JANE KATZ, MICHELLE FURLER

Such guidelines and aids were developed to make sure citizens turned out at the polls, officials said.

"Voting has been such a pain in the past, but it's so important for students to make sure they get out there and vote," said Student Body President Matt Calabria.

Foster noted the possibility that the presidential election will be decided by a slim margin in explaining the particular importance of voting in this year's contest.

"Allocate as much time as possible for voting," Foster said. "It's important for everyone to have their say."

Any Election Day problems or questions about the ballot or voting day requirements should be directed to the county board of elections office at 245-2350.

City Editor Ryan Tuck contributed to this story.
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Young voters, blacks could sway electorate

After 2000, groups wield much power

BY INDIA AUTRY
STAFF WRITER

Officials are looking for a record number of young people and blacks to turn out to the polls this election season.

Surges have been predicted for months, but with the big day Tuesday, officials still are expectant.

Youth Vote Coalition is anticipating two million more 18- to 30-year-olds than usual — 20 million compared with an 18 million voter average, said Holly Teresi, YVC's national communications director.

Advocacy groups such as MTV's Choose or Lose, Rock the Vote and other voter programs each have reported 100,000 to 250,000 young sign-ups this election year.

Numbers like that could have a huge effect on the neck-and-neck presidential race.

"Young people are going to either give the president a mandate or change the leadership," Teresi said.

She pointed out that the 2000 election was decided by a few hundred Floridians. "Five hundred thirty-seven votes — that's a dorm full of college students," she said.

Young people say being uninformed has kept them from voting in the past, Teresi said. But the media — from MTV ads to celebrity news statements — have worked to make election education appealing to youth.

A Harvard University poll released two weeks ago reveals that college students across the country favor Democratic candidate Sen. John Kerry to Republican President Bush, 52 percent to 39 percent. Nine percent are undecided, down from 11 percent by the same poll six months ago.

Young people are most con-

cerned with the same issues as other voters — the economy, terror and the war — but affordable education also comes high on their list of priorities, Teresi said.

"Young people tend to perform in very similar ways as older Americans when it comes to voting behavior," she said.

Mobilization efforts led by black media, hip-hop activists and civil rights groups are targeting black youth, in particular by emphasizing how politics affects day-to-day life.

"People like these are going into the (black) neighborhoods, focusing on making the connection between voting and changing the situation people are in," said Edrea Davis, director of media relations for the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation.

Many black registration groups such as the NCBCCP are nonpartisan, but 90 percent of blacks vote Democratic.

Officials expect a greater portion of the black community than ever to turn in their ballots this year.

Last year, blacks made up 11 percent of the voting body, and that number is expected to rise to 13 percent this year.

This increase would mean a slight over-representation for the minority group, which makes up 12.8 percent of the U.S. population.

The hike comes after the 2000 election, in which black votes constituted a disproportionate number of the uncounted ballots in Florida and about 1 million black votes across the country went ignored.

"We're looking at the surge in registration and also listening to people on the street," Davis said. "Everyone's excited."

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