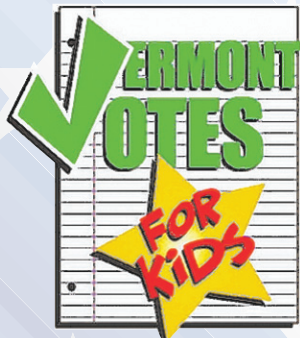


DEMOCRACY in Action



PART 4: HOT ELECTION ISSUES

Test Your Election IQ

1. What is the name of the new voting system for voters who have trouble marking a regular ballot?

- a. McVote
- b. Vote-by-phone at the polls
- c. Hands-free voting
- d. I-vote

2. True or False: Campaign finance reports protect the privacy of people who donate over \$100 to a candidate's campaign.

3. By what date must an eligible voter register to vote in order to vote in the general election?

4. True or False: Vermont voters currently must show a valid photo ID when entering the polling place to be allowed to vote.

5. What does the term "contribution limit" refer to?

- a. The amount of money a donor is allowed to give to a campaign.
- b. The deadline by which a candidate must receive campaign donations.
- c. The amount of money allowed in most bank checking accounts.

Answers:
1. B. 2. False. 3. 5 pm the Wednesday before the election.
4. False. 5. A.

The Contested Election of 2000

Though the Election Day was November 7, the results of the 2000 presidential election were not known until December 13. The election in Florida was too close to call, and when it went to Bush by a razor-thin margin of 537 votes the Democrats requested a recount.

The Democratic Party requested that disputed ballots in three heavily-Democratic

counties be counted by hand. After some local court rulings said that recounting in only certain counties was unfair, the Gore campaign appealed to the Florida Supreme Court, where it was ordered that the recount proceed. In response, the Bush campaign appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, where the Florida Supreme Court's decision was

nullified and the recounts declared unconstitutional. The court cited different recount methods from county to county and the lack of one single judge to oversee the recount as reason for the decision to end the recounts.

During the recount process the nation took a close look at the election practices in Florida. Critics pointed to faulty voting machines that failed to count votes, to ballots that were confusing so that voters ended up

voting for candidates they did not support and the practice of removing people from the voter rolls because their names were similar to individuals who were not qualified to vote in Florida because of a felony conviction. There were also many allegations of voter fraud – voters casting more than one ballot. In 2001 Congress passed the Help America Vote Act to address these problems.

Election Reform and the Help America Vote Act of 2002

The vigor of American democracy rests on the vote of each citizen. Only when citizens can freely and privately exercise their right to vote and have their vote recorded correctly can they hold their leaders accountable. Democracy is endangered when people believe that their votes do not matter or are not counted correctly." Carter-Baker Commission Report 2005

There has been much progress since the election of 2000 when many Americans recognized for the first time that there were serious problems in our electoral systems. Congress passed the Help America Vote Act in November, 2002 (HAVA) in response to widespread calls for changes in the law to guarantee that every vote was counted, that no one was allowed to vote more than once, that voters wouldn't be improperly turned away from the polls and that all votes would be cast on reliable voting equipment. HAVA is the first comprehensive federal



law in our nation's history governing how we run our elections. Congress also provided money to help states in meeting the requirements of the new law.

Among its many provisions, HAVA requires:

1. REPLACE UNRELIABLE VOTING EQUIPMENT.

States with outdated voting equipment (punch cards and lever machines) were given money to buy new voting equipment.

2. STATEWIDE VOTER CHECKLIST.

The law requires states to create a single database with information about every voter to prevent people from registering and voting in more than one town.

3. ACCESS FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES.

Every polling place must have some technology available to permit voters with disabilities to vote privately and independently.

4. TRAINING FOR ELECTION WORKERS AND VOTER EDUCATION.

States were encouraged to improve their efforts at recruiting and training the people who work at the polls on Election Day, and to provide more extensive voter education to ensure that everyone who is eligible to vote knows what they have to do to vote in their state.

5. PROOF OF IDENTITY.

First time voters who registered by mail through motor voter must show proof of identity before their vote can be counted.

6. SECOND CHANCE VOTING.

Voters must be given a chance to check for and correct errors before casting their ballots.

7. PROVISIONAL BALLOTS.

Citizens who are not on the checklist must be given an opportunity to cast a provisional ballot to ensure that no voter is turned away at the polls.

8. DRIVERS LICENSE REQUIREMENT FOR REGISTRATION.

Individuals must include their driver's license number or the last four digits of their social security number on their voter registration form.

9. CREATION OF A FEDERAL AGENCY TO OVERSEE ELECTION REFORM EFFORTS.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) was created to give out federal funds, develop guidelines for voting systems, and to study and report on how to improve our elections.

In Vermont, most voters will not notice many changes as a result of HAVA. We vote using a paper and pen, so there is no outdated voting equipment to replace. However Election reform has made a difference in Vermont. For the first time, voters with disabilities will be able to vote privately and independently using the Vote-by-Phone (at the polls) system and Vermont's town and city clerks can use the statewide voter checklist to better manage the voter rolls. Programs to educate voters and election workers will help ensure that the 2006 elections run smoothly.

Vermont received nearly 17 million dollars to implement the Help America Vote Act.

Web Connection

Vermontvotesforkids.com
e-democracy.org
Scholastic.com

Mumble, Grumble, Complain, Wallow, Hope, Despair, Worry...

VOTE!

Just a reminder: The last one changes things a lot faster.

Talk Back

Here are the results of last week's question "Should candidates be allowed to use negative ads when campaigning?"

45% voted YES
54% voted NO

Hot Election Issues

Legislatures across the country are debating whether we should require voters to show identification at the polls in order to vote. What do you think?

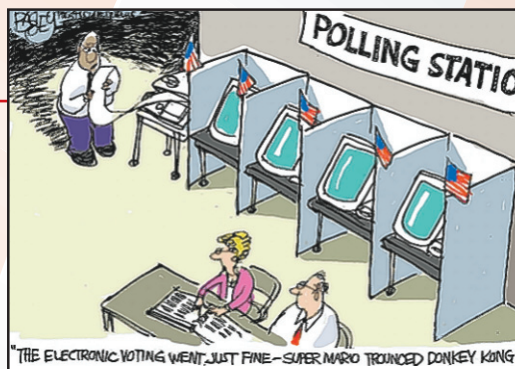
Pro: "Today, one of the most common ways by which any citizen is denied a voice in the process of electing our leaders is by having his ballot cancelled by one fraudulently cast. Sadly, over the years, thousands of honest and legal American citizens have been disenfranchised in this very manner. . . ."

One of the best protections against vote fraud is for individual states to pass legislation that requires a voter to provide photo identification in order to cast a ballot. . . . Photo ID is a common-sense

solution whose time has come. It is a solid safeguard and insurance policy against vote fraud which undoubtedly exists. . . . Government-issued photo ID – provided without cost to the voter – will go a long way toward securing our electoral integrity and providing Americans the confidence that the leaders we have chosen are truly those elected by voters, not by special interests trying to game the system through vote fraud."

–Mark "Thor" Hearne, Counsel to the American Center for Voting Rights

Con: "Although at first glance photo identification bills seem harmless, they pose significant



barriers for millions of Americans. Proponents of ID, often state legislators and election officials, claim they want to prevent voter fraud. However, their claims that fraud is rampant on Election Day are unjustified and unfounded. Restrictive voter ID does much more to inhibit eligible voters' ability to cast a regular ballot than it prevents voter fraud. Photo identification requirements discriminate against

people of color, rural voters, young people, the homeless, low-income people, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, frequent movers, and persons in large households. First, identification, particularly state-issued identification, is costly; therefore not all segments of the population can afford to purchase identification. Second, certain segments of the population are less likely to have state-issued identification than others and those citizens without current addresses on their forms of ID have a much higher chance of being turned away from the polls. Long lines at the polling place, created by the voter ID requirements, will also hinder many working citizens from having the chance to vote."

– Lawyer's Committee on Civil Rights