

THE REGISTRATIONS ARE COMING -- LIKE THE FLOODS

The one point of agreement on the 2008 election is that the turnout will be at record levels. The first bottleneck is at the registration desk, though which all new or re-registering voters must pass. Although there are still almost two months until the close of registration in most places, some simple steps taken now can reduce trouble later on.

- Go on the offensive and don't wait until the flood arrives. The parties and the voter registration groups -- state and national -- are engaging in major efforts, and they *should* be contacting both state and local officials in advance, whether they are required to register under state law or not. If you don't hear from them, call them and ask what their plans are. Explain your needs and problems and remind them "the earlier the better," because the goal is to get every voter's name on the rolls so that their names show up in the poll books on Election Day.
- State laws generally treat a registration as timely if it is received and in some cases postmarked by the deadline, but that does not ensure full processing, which may mean that some voters will have to cast provisional ballots. Especially for those groups that are registering voters by mail, they know long in advance when their materials will arrive in your state and when the applications should start arriving in your office. Ask for that information and plan accordingly.
- Voter groups and the parties are working with student and youth groups to register thousands of first time voters. Some of this is being done at concerts and other major venues over the summer, but much of it will not happen until late August when students arrive on campus. Many colleges are encouraging students to vote, and the law allows those who come from out of state to vote where they go to school, if they declare their new residence to be their official domicile, as many students do. The result is that you can be certain that you will receive a huge number of student and other youth registrations, and you should contact both the groups of which you are aware and the dean of student affairs at your local institutions, since most student groups have to get some official approval to do voter registration on campus.
- One other issue arises with students and that is lack of an ID with their address on it, especially if they do not have a local driver's license (they don't drive, they just kept the one where their family lives, or it didn't occur to them). The school ID may have a photo, but no address (so that a new one is not issued every year). Students have an address, generally, but not always in a dorm, and so the problem to solve is, what kind of university-issued document will satisfy the address requirement? There are a number of relatively simple solutions, but if the problem is not anticipated, there could be real issues with registration and, in at least some states with ID rules for voting, huge lines at the polls as the issue stymies poll workers who have had no training in what to do in this situation.
- Heavy student voting raises another issue: assuring that there are convenient and not overcrowded precincts, preferably on campus. Failing to take into account last minute student registrations in establishing precincts and allocating poll workers and equipment is a recipe for big trouble.