

## **POLL WORKERS FACILITATE ELECTIONS**

In consideration of my having served as an election poll worker for the last 20 years, with the last 14 of those years as precinct inspector, I have been asked to write a description of what local poll workers do, who we are, etc. in the hopes that others may be encouraged to participate as poll workers, perhaps as a substitutes.

Most of us know that Oklahoma, with the optical scanners that we have used for the last 16 years, has one of the best voting systems in the United States. In addition to having the reliable scanners, our Oklahoma system generates a paper trail, which, in the case of a contested election, would allow a recount of the votes in conjunction with a thorough examination of the record of who voted and what type of ballots each voter was issued. The only thing that cannot be known is how any of us voted. The ballots that we place in the voting device, as our optical scanners are called, have no number to tie them back to any specific voter. The machine reads and counts every vote cast (and yes, you can insert the ballot from either end or with either side up.) Every machine is carefully tested before each election. Following any election, our ballots are stored in sealed boxes for the amount of time prescribed by law. Please understand that every ballot that is issued to any precinct must be accounted for by the workers at the close of any election and that includes any ballots that are spoiled by a voter. Spoiled ballots are returned to the clerk, and destroyed before a new ballot is issued to that voter, who is required to sign an affidavit attesting to what was done in that regard.

The basic unit of workers who will be present in any Oklahoma election consists of three people: the judge, who locates the name of the voter on the precinct registry and directs the voter to sign on the appropriate line, the clerk, who hands each voter who has signed the registry the ballot or ballots which they are entitled to receive and the inspector, who has the primary responsibility for that precinct election. Before election day arrives, the inspector will pick up the supplies and equipment for the election at a designated time and will see to it that the polling place is prepared ( as you see it on election day) with privacy booths set up, sample ballots and other important information posted within the polling place or its entrance. The inspector also sees to it that each voter has one of the ballot marking pens and sorts out problems that may arise during the day. Finally, it is the inspector, who will return the voting device, the used and unused ballots, both in sealed boxes, and the official records of the precinct election to the courthouse after the polls close. In elections where a large turnout is expected, the county may provide an additional worker to assist. In such case, the registry is usually divided, with the extra workers assisting the judges in locating voter names. . Large precincts will have 6 poll workers – two of each: judges, clerks, and inspectors. The Washington County Election Board appoints one of the inspectors in these larger precincts to take the primary responsibility.

Depending on the election cycles, it would be fair to say that the number of elections held in any one year here in Washington County will usually range from one to six. Inspectors are paid \$97 for each election worked and judges and clerks are paid \$87. Our work is appreciated by those we serve. Often voters pause on their way out of the

polling place and thank us for serving. One of the voters in my precinct referred to us as “treasures” at our last election.

Elections have specific rules to be followed. The state provides precinct workers with instructional booklets, including an invaluable booklet entitled “Precinct Problem Solver” which does just that. Our Washington County Election Board (now under the capable direction of Yvonne House since Brad Johnson left that job recently to become Washington County treasurer) provides us with excellent training. And they are available to us by phone on election days to assist us as needed.

Poll workers play a vital role in our democratic process. We need a larger pool of people available to serve in that capacity. I hope the paragraphs above encourage you and/or your friends and neighbors, with whom you may choose to share this information, to contact the Washington County Election Board to indicate willingness to serve as a poll worker. A rewarding experience awaits you.

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