

# Democracy in ACTION

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## THE ELECTION COMMISSION WANTS YOU!

Department Profile:  
Election Board Coordinator

One of the major functions of the Election Commission is the recruitment and selection of polling place workers. Felisa Evans, the Election Board Coordinator, just joined the Election Commission staff in January, but has already hit the ground running.



“It’s a big job,” Evans said. “There are so many locations and so many people to keep track of, but I also understand just how vital this area is.”

The Douglas County Election Commission utilizes over 2,000 people on Election Day in 354 precincts throughout the County and at the Election Commission office. We have workers that answer thousands of phone calls on Election Day, workers at the polls, workers receiving ballots at our office, workers traveling from polling place to polling place, and workers counting ballots.

The biggest challenge, according to Evans, isn’t finding the workers, it’s keeping track of them and assigning them to an appropriate location. “We have people who may have moved, but want to work in the polling place they’ve always worked in. It’s getting to know the preferences

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## 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY ELECTIONS REQUIRE NEW TECHNOLOGY

The problems Florida experienced in the 2000 Presidential Elections led the Federal Government to become involved in the election business. So, in 2002, Congress passed and the President signed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

HAVA led to several changes for states and local jurisdictions. Most notably, HAVA required local jurisdictions to move to a state-wide centralized voter registration system and to provide a means for disabled voters to mark their own ballots without assistance from others.

The State of Nebraska, under the direction of Secretary of State John Gale, has done a phenomenal job in completing these requirements on time and on budget. In fact, Nebraska will be among the first states in complete HAVA compliance.

Most voters will not notice a difference when it comes to voter registration systems, however, most voters will probably notice a new piece of equipment at their polling place.

This new piece of equipment is the Secretary of State’s solution to fulfill HAVA’s disabled voter requirement. The device is called an AutoMARK and is manufactured by the Omaha based company Election Systems & Software.

The AutoMARK, which any voter may use, scans

a voter’s paper ballot, and then shows the races on a touch-screen and also “reads” the ballot contents to the voter via headphones. After the voter makes his or her selections, the AutoMARK marks the ovals for the choices the voter made. Because the AutoMARK reads a paper ballot and marks the ballot according to the voter’s selections, it allows disabled voters to use the same paper ballot that all voters have become accustomed to.

A voter can have the machine scan and “check” their ballot to ensure that all the races were marked properly. The AutoMARK also helps to prevent voter mistakes by not allowing over-votes (voting for more candidates than allowed) and questioning under-votes (voting for fewer candidates than allowed). This ensures that the person votes the way he or she truly intends.

This new technology will allow for a freedom that, up to this point, has never been attainable for disabled voters. Never again will they have to rely on a friend, relative, or poll worker to assist them in marking their ballot. It is just one more way for the voting experience to be shared by one and all equally.



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### Don't Forget...

- Election Day is May 9, 2006
- Polls are open from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

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## ELECTIONS IN THE NEWS

Recently, an Atlantic City, New Jersey City Councilman was charged with 10 counts of tampering with public records by New Jersey's Attorney General. The charges assert that the accused city councilman requested 10 absentee ballots on behalf of voters, who in fact, did not authorize him to do so.

Election fraud and tampering are serious crimes and certainly require vigilance on behalf of election officials everywhere. Here in Douglas County, we work very hard each day to make sure people are not abusing the system.

So, could a similar crime happen here in Douglas County? Let's take a look at what we do to prevent such crimes. First, Nebraska Law prohibits candidates and campaign workers from requesting early voting ballots on

behalf of anyone other than family members. Nebraska's lawmakers thought it would not be wise to let candidates be tempted to obtain ballots for people in their district, so they placed this particular restriction on them.

Most election fraud is considered a Class IV Felony which carries a maximum sentence of a \$10,000 fine and/or five years in prison.

Second, Nebraska Law states that agents (voters requesting ballots on behalf of someone else) may request early voting ballots for no more than two other individual voters in any given election.

So in Douglas County, we track each agent and the number of ballots they request. The agent is also responsible for providing certain personal information on the voters for whom they are requesting ballots. This helps to prevent people from requesting ballots on behalf of someone they shouldn't.

Finally, all returned early voting ballots must be signed by the voter. If there is any dispute regarding the signature, it can be verified against the signature on record on their latest voter registration card. If the signatures do not match, the ballot cannot be counted. This prevents agents from requesting a ballot for someone, then voting the ballot themselves.

So, is it possible to commit election fraud? Unfortunately the answer is yes, however, the State of Nebraska and Douglas County take every precaution possible to prevent it. Additionally, Nebraska Law provides stiff penalties for most cases of election crime. Most election fraud is considered a Class IV Felony which carries a maximum sentence of a \$10,000 fine and/or five years in prison. Constant vigilance is a must in Elections, and here in Douglas County it is something we strive to improve every single day.



## Commissioner's Corner...

A Message from Election Commissioner Dave Phipps



Dave Phipps  
Election Commissioner

It's that time of year here at the Election Commission. Candidates are arriving to file for office, citizens are coming in to register to vote, and campaigns are requesting information and services. This is our busiest, and yet most exciting, time of year. **It's election season!**

As someone who has been involved in the political process and government for over 12 years, I never quite fathomed exactly how much work and effort went into preparing for an election. Like many people, I just assumed you turned up in your polling place and the

people working there just somehow showed up ready to help. How very wrong I was! There are literally thousands of tasks and dozens of deadlines that must be met for an election to become reality.

I began working in the Election Commission in October of 2003, and was then appointed as the Douglas County Election Commissioner in July of 2005. Since then, I have experienced (some might say endured) nine separate elections. I can tell you, that until you work in this office, you have no idea just how many tasks need to be completed in order to ensure voters can carry out their most basic right and freedom.

As an employee and as the Election Commis-

sioner, I have been blessed with working with some wonderful people. There are staff who have been here only a few months and some that are in their second decade of service, but during this time of year, they all work toward one goal – making sure each election is as transparent, fair, and flawless as possible.

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There are no perfect elections because elections are carried out by people, but we here at the Election Commission strive each and every day to come as close as possible to that idea of perfection.

I want to invite you to become a part of this process. You can volunteer to work as a poll worker, or you can simply observe during the election, ensuring once again that the dream laid out 230 years ago continues to flourish and thrive in this incredible country of ours.



## ELECTION CALENDAR: MARK IT DOWN!

### February 2006

**1st** - Deadline for new political party to submit petitions with the Secretary of State to qualify for primary election.

**1st** - Deadline for political parties to fix precinct representation to county convention.

**11th** - Deadline for the Secretary of State to determine if there are sufficient signatures for a new party.

**15th** - Deadline for incumbents to file for office for primary.

### March 2006

**1st** - Deadline for non-incumbents to file for office for primary.

**1st** - Deadline for political subdivision to submit special issue for primary ballot.

**1st** - Deadline to withdraw filing for office for primary.

**9th** - Deadline for political parties to submit a letter to the Secretary of State regarding non-partisan voters voting in primary election.

**24th** - Deadline to have Early Voting ballots ready and sent to overseas and military voters with requests on file.

### April 2006

**21st** - Deadline for mailed voter registrations to be postmarked.

**21st** - Last day to register at DMV, agencies, libraries, or with Deputy Registrars.

**27th** - Deadline for write-in candidate to file notarized affidavit and filing fee.

### May 2006

**1st** - Deadline for in-person voter registration at Election Commission, 6:00 p.m.

**3rd** - Deadline for early voting ballots to be requested and mailed to a specific address, 4:00 p.m.

**8th** - Deadline for in-person early voting at election commissioner's office.

**9th** - Election Day. All early voting ballots must be returned to Election Commission by 8:00 p.m.



## Question & Answer

**Q.** How do I register to vote?

**A.** You can register to vote in a number of different ways:

- Visit the Douglas County Election Commission Office located at 225 North 115th Street in Omaha;
- Visit any Omaha or Elkhorn Public Library;
- Visit the County Treasurer's Offices when you get your driver's license;
- Visit your City Clerk's Office (except in Omaha); or
- Print, complete, and mail the form posted on our website located at [www.votedouglascounty.com](http://www.votedouglascounty.com).

**Q.** How old do I have to be to register?

**A.** Voter registration requires you to be 18 years old before the first Tuesday after the first Monday, in November, of the election year in question.

**Q.** Can I register if I have been convicted of a felony?

**A.** You can register if you have served your sentence, completed any parole terms, and have then waited a two-year period.

**Q.** Where do I vote?

**A.** A Voter Information Card containing polling place information is sent to you after you register for the first time or if your registration information changes. You can also check our website located at [www.votedouglascounty.com](http://www.votedouglascounty.com). Remember to re-register every time you move.

**Q.** Can I change my name, address, or party affiliation over the phone or online?

**A.** No. Any change to your voter registration record must be done by completing a new Voter Registration Application form that will contain an original signature.

**Q.** How do I volunteer to work as a poll worker on election day?

**A.** You can call 402.444.VOTE (8683) to volunteer to work as an election board member or sign up on our website.



### Did you know?

*On November 2, 2004, the Douglas County Election Commission fielded over 11,000 phone calls on Election Day.*



Felisa Evans  
Election Board  
Coordinator

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of these thousands of people that makes this job so challenging and yet so exciting.”

Douglas County is unique in the way it finds its poll workers. Approximately half of

all poll workers are volunteers, people who are paid minimum wage to serve as an election official. The rest are “draftees.” These workers are required by Nebraska Law to serve four elections once they have been randomly selected.

“It’s very similar to jury duty,” says Evans. “Lawmakers understand that part of the responsibility of living in a democracy is that people need to help make the democratic tradition continue. That’s what election service is – a way to preserve our basic freedoms.”

Poll workers, whether they have served twenty elections or have never served before, are required to attend a training session prior to each election. The training session gives the

Election Commission a chance to inform poll workers of any changes in election law or new procedures that may be required.

“Even if workers have served several times in the past, they generally need a refresher course,” according to Evans. “When you only perform this duty twice a year, every other year, you’re bound to be a little rusty. Training is a big help.”

This year’s training sessions will focus on new equipment that will be in place at all polling locations. Poll workers have yet to see the new equipment. Evans predicted there will be some anxiety among poll workers, especially those who have not had previous technology experience. However, the simplicity of the machine will allow anyone to set up and use the machine properly said Evans.

Dale Baker, Hall County Election Commissioner, conducted a special election this past summer and mentioned that once her workers were trained on the new equip-

ment, their apprehensiveness passed quickly.

The other change some workers will see won’t be apparent to the voters. In November of 2005, the Douglas County Election Commission became the 92nd Nebraska County to convert to the new Statewide Voter Registration System developed by Election Systems & Software and maintained by the Secretary of State’s Office.

“Most poll workers won’t notice any changes,” Evans said. “But election day workers answering the phones in our office will definitely notice they are using a new system. It should be faster and easier to use than the old system.”

Evans says it has been wonderful to start just as these changes take place. “It would have been more difficult, I think, to learn the old system, and then have to change my thinking completely. This way, I started on day one using a system and technology that will be in place for a number of years.”



### Douglas County

482,000  
Population

298,000  
Registered Voters

2,000  
Poll Workers



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