

# Democracy in ACTION

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## IN THE PUBLIC EYE

### Department Profile: Public Relations and Outreach

With the 2008 Statewide Presidential Election just around the corner, the Douglas County Election Commission has been working together to make the transition for its new Public Relations Coordinator, Maria Ulanday, smooth and easy.

Before joining the Election Commission, Ulanday received her Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism with an emphasis in Public Relations and Advertising, and participated in the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) Chapter.

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She continues to serve and participate in Nebraska's Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) chapter for professional public relations practitioners.

“Helping all the people who interact with the Election Commission is very exciting,” said Ulanday. “There are so many things that voters and candidates need, and it's been great using my skills to help them.”

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## ELECTION COMMISSION OR CONSTRUCTION ZONE?

We haven't heard those sleigh bells ringing in the Election Commission; perhaps it's because we can't hear over the noise of hammers and saws. The Election Commission has been doing a little renovating in anticipation of a busy year.



Because of our limited space, and the increasingly large number of voters who take advantage of their opportunity to vote early in-person, the Election Commission has had to work to find more room for voters.

This expansion has included increasing the size of our lobby, as well as shifting some equipment and supplies to other areas around the county. While this is an inconvenience for our staff, it should help to relieve some of the pressure for voters who want to cast their ballot prior to election day.



Unfortunately, there is only so much we can accomplish with the current building. We have too few parking spaces, too little room for the equipment and supplies we need, and not enough space for all the workers we need for a presidential election.



It's really early voting that has been the reason we need more space. For example, in the 2004 Presidential General Election, we had a record-breaking 29,240 voters vote early, both in-person, and by-mail. In 2006's Gubernatorial General Election, we approached that record with an astounding 28,641 voters voting early.

The problem is, with an open White House, an open Senate Seat, and several hot races throughout the state and county, we're expecting even bigger things in 2008.



“We may see nearly half our voters doing their voting early,” said Dave Phipps, Douglas County Election Commissioner. “This will be the year we see people vote who don't always make it to the polls. And my bet is that they're probably going to vote an early voting ballot.”



This will cause quite a strain on our current facilities, however, we will continue to work to find solutions to these obstacles, and rest-assured, we will do all in our power to make the voting experience as painless as possible for everyone.

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## ELECTIONS IN THE NEWS

The Douglas County Election Commission conducted its last special election in 2007 for Westside Community Schools on November 13th. District 66's voters decided whether they wished to pass a levy override.

Like any polling place election, the Election Commission prepared its supplies and equipment and trained its poll workers. More than 125 poll workers were trained and assigned to more than 25 polling places within the Westside Community School District. The Election Commission received a few calls from the community regarding the date and place for the election, however, everything went smoothly throughout the day.

The voter turnout for the election was low, which is common in most special elections held by polling place. With over 20,000 registered voters within the Westside Community School District, only 14 percent participated in the election, and at least 5 percent of those voters voted using an Early Voting Ballot. Turnout has decreased since Westside's last special levy override election in 2002 when more than 6,000 registered voters within the district voted.

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The results of the election are as follows:

For the Levy Override 1,685  
Against the Levy Override 1,268

More information can be found on our website at [www.votedouglascounty.com](http://www.votedouglascounty.com).

## Commissioner's Corner...

A Message from Election Commissioner Dave Phipps



Dave Phipps  
Election Commissioner

It's that time of year again, when the snow stays on the ground, the wind comes in from the north, and candidates start flocking to the Election Commission. It's election season, the most "wonderful" time of the year!

I'm sure many of you have noticed (you've probably waited anxiously by your mailboxes) that you haven't received a copy of our newsletter lately. Well, we decided with no major elections, it was a little too difficult to actually come up with intriguing content, so we decided to wait.

But we can wait no longer. The Presidential Primary and General Elections are just a few months away, followed by the City of Omaha Elections, and then the Gubernatorial Elections in 2010! Three years of craziness, but that's what we live for at the Election Commission.

We've been going through some changes in the office. If you're in the neighborhood, stop in and check out the progress. We've also lost some staff and gained some new ones. It's been an interesting year, but the real fun begins now.

A presidential election is the one election that

officials like me get geared up for. They're the most pressure packed, anxiety ridden, and exciting times you will ever see.

This will be my first presidential election as the election commissioner, however,

it won't be the first time I've experienced one in this office. I was a fresh-faced newcomer during the 2004 election, and boy, was it an eye-opener!

I look forward to seeing many of you over the next year. I know this will be another record-breaking year for voting in Douglas County, and I can't wait to see how it all turns out.

We've been going through some changes in the office. If you're in the neighborhood, stop in and check out the progress.

# ELECTION CALENDAR

## February

**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 political party.

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

## March

**3rd** - Deadline for non-incumbents to file for office for primary.

**3rd** - Deadline for political subdivision to submit special issue for primary ballot.

**3rd** - Deadline to withdraw filing for office for primary.

**13th** - Deadline for political parties to submit a letter to the Secretary of State regarding non-partisan voters voting in primary election.

**28th** - Deadline to have Early Voting ballots ready and sent to overseas and military voters with requests on file.

## April

**25th** - Deadline for mailed voter registrations to be postmarked.

**25th** - Last day to register at DMV, agencies, libraries or with Deputy Registrars.

**25th** - Deadline for voter registration form to be delivered to election office by someone other than person registering.

## May

**2nd** - Deadline for in-person voter registration at Election Commission, 6:00 p.m.

**2nd** - Deadline for write-in candidate to file notarized affidavit and filing fee.

**7th** - Deadline for early voting ballots to be requested and mailed to a specific address, 4:00 p.m.

**12th** - Deadline for in-person early voting at election commissioner's office.

**13th** - Election Day. Polls are open from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. All early voting ballots must be returned to Election Commission by 8:00 p.m.



**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 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.** Nebraska law requires you to be 18 years old on or 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 Acknowledgment 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.

**Q.** How can I file for an elected office?

**A.** You can visit the Douglas County Election Commission office located at 225 North 115th Street in Omaha.



Maria Ulanday  
Public Relations Coordinator

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In 2004, before completing her bachelor's degree, she participated in Walt Disney World Resort's College Program. During this internship program, Ulanday learned the skills needed

to deal with hundreds of people everyday during busy times, including the holiday season.

After her graduation, Ulanday worked for a public affairs firm assisting clients with developing and writing newsletters, preparing public meetings and events, and developing in-house databases.

As the election season approaches, Ulanday understands there are many responsibilities and tasks that each department needs to complete. It helps, however, to have the former Public Relations Coordinator as her boss.

"This was Justine Kessler's job before she was

promoted to Elections Manager," said Ulanday. "It really helps when the person directing you used to have your job. They know exactly how to approach different tasks, and it makes my transition much simpler."

Since starting at the end of September, she has been busy learning the laws and the procedures involved in preparing for the upcoming election. In November, she experienced her first election as she assisted with Westside Community Schools' Special Levy Override Election. (See article in this newsletter.)

"No one ever seems to understand just how many things have to happen in order for an election to occur until you see the process up close. It was very enlightening."

"It was very exciting to see my first election," Ulanday said. "No one ever seems to understand just how many things have to happen in order for an election to occur until you see the process up close. It was very enlightening."

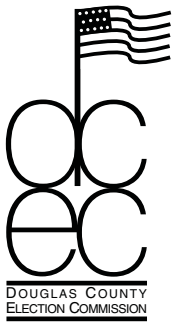
"Maria did a fantastic job in her first election," said Justine Kessler, Elections Manager. "She had absolutely no experience in elections, but dove right in to get the job done. I'm very proud of her."

The 2008 Statewide Presidential Election will certainly be a bigger challenge than last month's special election. Ulanday, however, is prepared to take on the task. She hopes to continue providing a positive experience for the candidates and the voters of Douglas County.

Luckily, she won't be alone. She works directly with the Election Commissioner, and Chief Deputy Election Commissioner in the Public Relations Department.

"Maria works with my Deputy and me to help candidates with their questions, and to ensure the public is aware of our efforts," said Dave Phipps, Douglas County Election Commissioner. "It's a huge job considering we have three people trying to service over 300,000 citizens across the county, but I know with her help, we'll get the job done."

"Making sure all of our customers are taken care of is the biggest part of my job. For me, serving the people of Douglas County is a wonderful honor."



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