



For Immediate Release - April 17, 2012

Military/Overseas Ballots Returned at Higher Rate

Using a new online ballot-marking system, Chicago's military/overseas voters returned ballots for the 2012 Primary at a rate that was 14.43 percent higher than the 2008 Primary, Chicago Election Board Chairman Langdon D. Neal announced Tuesday.

The military/overseas ballot-return rate was 65.17 percent for the 2012 Primary, up significantly from the ballot-return rate of 50.74 percent for the 2008 Primary Election.

"We believe our new systems, which included an online system that emulates the touchscreen and a new set of pre-deadline reminders, are the reasons we saw a higher return rate from military and overseas voters," Neal said. "The higher return rate was noteworthy, because this 2012 Primary had fewer high-profile contests at the top of the ballot, and overall, much lower turnout than 2008."

Neal said the Election Board received a number of messages from military/overseas voters who expressed appreciation for the pre-deadline email reminders.

A \$375,300 grant from the U.S. Department of Defense financed the purchase of new online ballot-marking systems from Everyone Counts and counting equipment from Runbeck. The online system presents the ballot to the user like a touchscreen. The voter may correct selections before printing the ballot, or even re-enter the system and correct selections again and then re-print the ballot before mailing the ballot with a hand-signed certification form.

The system also allows the military/overseas voter to print out the certification form and the mailing label to return the ballot and related materials by mail to the Election Board. The Illinois Election Code and the Department of Defense grant do not allow using email to return voted ballots.

Neal noted that the Chicago Election Board continues to support changing the Illinois Election Code so that military/overseas voters could return their ballots and the signed certification form on a secured fax line. "With a signed certification that we can compare to the voter registration, voting by fax provides the same level of security as a ballot sent by mail," Neal said.

Chicago and several suburban jurisdictions have provided military/overseas voters the ability to vote by fax under court order. With the support of the Justice Department and military officials, area election authorities secured federal consent decrees to allow military and overseas voters to return ballots by fax in the special primaries and special elections for the Fifth Congressional District in 2009 and for the Fourteenth Congressional District in 2008.

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