

OFFICE OF HANDICAPPED CONCERNS

WILL'S CORNER, OKLAHOMA



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(Serving the Disability Community of Oklahoma)

From the Director's Desk

In the near future, citizens of the State of Oklahoma who are registered voters will again have an opportunity to select representatives of local, state, and federal government. We can all too easily dismiss our responsibility saying that our vote does not count. The presidential election of 2000 demonstrates the fallacy of this kind of thinking.

I suggested to Will that we dedicate an entire issue of *Will's Corner, Oklahoma* to the voting process because I believe in the importance of each voter expressing his or her political opinion on the issues and the candidates involved.

There is no doubt that people with disabilities are heavily impacted by services funded through federal and state government. It is important that we have a voice in the government which serves us. We at the Office of Handicapped Concerns want to provide you the information you will need to participate in the election process.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL CLINGMAN STATE ELECTION BOARD CHAIRMAN

It was way back in October, 2003 that we first spoke with Michael Clingman in his office at the State Election Board in the basement of the Oklahoma State Capitol. Mr. Clingman gave *Will's Corner, Oklahoma* some insider tips on voting at that time, and it seems there have been some new developments that you might be interested in.

Michael Clingman

I would like to recap a few of the things I told you back in 2003 which are still true for Oklahomans with disabilities who desire to vote in federal, state, and local elections. You as a person with disabilities have a choice on how you vote. I know that accessibility is an issue for many of you regardless of what your disability may be. I would like to remind all people that it is possible to vote absentee in Oklahoma, and this method of voting can avoid inconvenience to people with disabilities.

For a person to vote absentee, they must be a registered voter. The person who desires to vote absentee must either write a letter requesting this form of voting or that person may fill out a form we have requesting this service. (This form is on the internet at www.elections.state.ok.us under Absentee Application.) This written request must be received at your local County Election Board on the Wednesday before the Tuesday of the election. Mail the written request and allow time for it to be received.

You will be sent a ballot to your address, and your completed ballot must be received at the County Election Board no later than 7 p.m. at the closing of the polls for the Tuesday election.

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**OHC web site:
www.ohc.state.ok.us**

GENERAL ELECTION INFORMATION

Elections are governed by laws and are conducted in pre-ordained ways. We are including some information directly from the Oklahoma State Election Board here to give you some pointers if you are interested in voting in upcoming statewide elections.

ELECTION DATES

Primary Election: Tuesday, July 25, 2006
Runoff Primary Election: Tuesday, August 22, 2006
General Election: Tuesday, November 7, 2006

VOTER REGISTRATION TRANSACTIONS

Voter registration applications may be submitted at any time. However, a valid application must be received at a motor license agency or designated voter registration agency, or postmarked (if submitted by mail), **more than 24 days prior to an election in order for the applicant to participate in that election.** Deadlines for submitting valid voter registration applications prior to the 2006 statewide elections are as follows:

For Primary Election For General Election
Friday, June 30, 2006 Friday, October 13, 2006

For Runoff Primary Election
Friday, July 28, 2006

CHANGES IN POLITICAL AFFILIATION

Changes in political affiliation (political party) may not be made during the period from June 1 through August 31, inclusive, in any even-numbered year. The last day on which a change in political affiliation can be made before the closed period is May 31; the first day on which a change in political affiliation can be made after the closed period is September 1.

If you are a voter you will be interested in the above dates which affect statewide elections coming up in the near future. If you are a voter or a **candidate running for election**, you will be interested in the following information on upcoming statewide elections.

CANDIDACY FILING PERIOD

Filing period for federal, state, legislative, judicial and county offices is:

Monday, June 5, 2006—8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Tuesday, June 6, 2006—8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Wednesday, June 7, 2006—8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

CANDIDACY WITHDRAWAL PERIODS

Withdrawal period after filing for federal, state, legislative, judicial and county offices:
Closes 5 p.m. Friday, June 9, 2006

Withdrawal period after Primary Election:
Closes 5 p.m. July 28, 2006

Withdrawal period after Runoff Primary Election
Closes 5 p.m. Friday, August 25, 2006

CONTESTS OF CANDIDACY

Any candidate may contest the candidacy of any other candidate for the same office by filing a written petition with the Secretary of the Election Board where he filed his Declaration of Candidacy, before 5 p.m. Friday following the close of the filing period.

CONTESTS OF ELECTION

Any candidate may contest an election in which he was a candidate by filing a written petition with the Secretary of the Election Board where he filed his Declaration of Candidacy, before 5 p.m. Friday following the election.

State of Oklahoma
www.ok.gov

How to Make a Difference

(This is a reprint of an article by Gary E. Payne, the External Relations Coordinator of the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services.)

Most members of the Legislature, whether in the House or Senate, pay little heed to issues they think their constituents are not interested in. All it takes are a few personal visits, telephone calls and letters to bring to the member's attention.

Letters can, among other things, (1) alert the Member to new issues, (2) ensure that the member's legislative assistant is aware of and researches the issue, (3) prompt a Member to co-sponsor a bill or communicate for you with key legislative leaders, and (4) urge a Member to vote for or against legislation in committee and on the full House or Senate floor. (Legislators now have email and it should be used in matters of expediency.)

Outlined below is a letter format. Some elementary, but frequently overlooked tips are:

Include (in readable print), your name, address and telephone number. Better yet, use your personal, professional or organizational letterhead stationary. Without an address, the Member has no way of knowing whether you are a constituent. Do not, however, use an organization's letterhead or appear to represent that organization's view without permission.

Be polite. Don't alienate the Member and the Member's staff. Even if they disagree with you on this issue, they may be more friendly on the next. You always want to keep the door open. Never make a threat—take the high ground!

Be brief, to the point, and try to discuss one issue only. If you write on too many topics, your message is diluted. State in the first sentence why you are writing. If the subject is complex or technical, include a separate fact sheet rather than include all the information in the letter itself.

Ask for the member's position on the issue. This

will force the Member to research the issue and ensure that you receive a response. Most importantly, it lets the Member know you are taking his or her actions seriously. Always clearly state what action you want your member to take. Underline your request.

Follow up! Send another letter or make a phone call to the member or appropriate staff person, if you do not get a response within a reasonable time period, or if you do not like the response you get. (Note: the Oklahoma legislature moves very quickly due to the 90-day limitation on sessions.) Remember to send thank-you notes when appropriate and to thank, by name, the staff members who helped you.

Form letters and petitions are not generally effective.

Remember, always reference your subject, preferably by bill number, at the top of your letter!

Vote as if your life depends on it. Because it does.

**Justin Dart,
Father of the ADA**



CURTIS PATRICK: ON WHY I VOTE

Curtis Patrick is a member of the Advisory Board of the Office of Handicapped Concerns. He is a person with disabilities, and he votes.

Curtis Patrick

“I am a person with disabilities, and I vote. I have to admit that I miss an election now and then, but I vote often. I believe in voting, and I think it is important.

I started voting when I was a young man—maybe in my late twenties. When I look back, I think I vote more often now than I did back then. Some people say that their vote does not make a difference, but I do not believe that. I believe that my vote is my say in what happens to all of us. I am aware I am only one person, but then so is everyone else only one person.

I learn about issues and candidates running for office in the newspaper, radio, and television. I get the Sunday newspaper and lots of times they will print state questions in that paper before the election on Tuesday. I used to work at the State Capitol and actually knew some of the judges who were running for office.

My polling place is actually only about three blocks from my house. My wife and I generally walk to the polls. We vote at a church, and that church is accessible. The entrance is marked as a polling place, and there are no steps. There is not an automatic door opener, but polling workers are where they could see a person who needed help getting in the door.

We used to vote at a school, and there were steps to get into the school. I don't know if there was a special entrance at the back or not, but I think it would have been harder for a person in a wheelchair to get into that school than into the church where I vote now.

I'll be honest with you. I've never seen another person with visible disabilities voting at our polling place. That is not to say that they did not vote, just

“...If you don't vote, you don't have a voice.”

Curtis Patrick

that I did not see them. Generally I get right in and right out and don't see many other people anyway.

Our polling place has cardboard cubicles to vote in which give a little privacy. The cubicles may be a little high for a person in a wheelchair. I'm just not sure. But there is a long table that I think a person in a wheelchair could mark their ballot if they were not able to mark their ballot in the cubicle.

I vote on a long paper ballot. It is generally a few inches wide and maybe twelve inches long with state questions and candidates marked clearly. Marking my ballot is fairly simple. I do not need assistance in marking my ballot or in putting the ballot in the machine to register my vote. If I did need assistance, I think one of the polling workers would help me. There are three of them at our voting place.

I am registered to vote in a particular party although I do not always vote strict party line. I like to make up my own mind. I haven't decided who I am going to vote for in November for governor. I'm not even sure I know who's running now. I'll have to think about that awhile.

I do believe I have a say in government. If I didn't, I wouldn't vote. If you don't vote, you don't have a voice.”

Curtis Patrick has a disability, but he is able to walk to his polling station. He is able to read his ballot and put it into the machine to count it. Many people with disabilities are not able to do these things. Never hesitate to ask for help if you need it. Call your local County Election Board if you have questions. Their number will be in your telephone directory in the blue pages under County Government.

VOTER REGISTRATION IN OKLAHOMA

ELIGIBILITY

A person who is eligible to register to vote must be:

- at least 18 years old
- a United States citizen
- a resident of Oklahoma

However, a person who has been:

- convicted of a felony may not register until a period of time equal to the original judgment and sentence has expired.
- adjudged to be an incapacitated person may not register.
- adjudged to be a partially incapacitated person prohibited from voting may not register.

HOW TO REGISTER

You must fill out a voter registration application form. Voter registration applications are available at your County Election Board, post offices, tag agencies, libraries and many other public locations. You will be offered a voter registration application when you get your driver's license and when you apply for assistance at some government agencies. You also may download an application form or send a request to receive a form by U.S. Mail.

The application form asks for:

- your name and address
- your political affiliation
- your birth date
- your driver's license number
- the last four digits of your Social Security number (required if no driver's license)

You must sign and date the oath printed on the form. When you sign the voter registration application form, you swear that you are eligible to register to vote.

CHANGING YOUR REGISTRATION

You may need to change your voter registration.

Changes you may need to make are:

- your address
- your name
- your political affiliation

You must fill out another voter registration application form to change your voter registration. You may change your registration at any time with one exception. You may not change your political affiliation during the period from June 1 through August 31, inclusive, in any even-numbered year. The last day on which you may change your political affiliation before the closed period is May 31; the first day on which you may change your political affiliation after the closed period is September 1.

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

You may mail your voter registration application to the State Election Board. The card is already addressed, but you must add a first-class postage stamp. If you fill out your voter registration application form at a tag agency when you get your driver's license or when you apply for assistance at a government agency, the agency will mail the form to the State Election Board for you.

VOTER IDENTIFICATION CARD

You do not become a registered voter until the county election board in the county where you reside has approved your application. When your application is approved, the county election board will mail a voter identification card to you. Your voter identification card lists your name, address, political affiliation and the polling place for your voting precinct. When you receive your voter identification card, look at it carefully and report any errors to the county election board immediately. Keep your voter identification card in a safe place and always take it with you when you go to vote.

If your voter registration application cannot be approved, you will receive a letter from the county election board. The letter will tell you why your application was not approved and explain the steps you need to take to become registered. You may be

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**AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL CLINGMAN
STATE ELECTION BOARD CHAIRMAN (continued)**

It is wise to request to vote absentee well in advance of an election to make sure that you meet the deadlines.

Here is a tip for those of you who would like to vote absentee. You may make application to vote absentee for an entire calendar year in which case your ballots will automatically be mailed to you about 30 days before each election you are eligible to vote in.

Another method of voting is early voting at the local County Election Board. Any person who is registered to vote may vote early on a Friday, Saturday, or Monday before the scheduled Tuesday election. In this case, you vote at your local County Election Board rather than voting at your precinct.

When you go to the County Election Board for early voting, you will be asked to sign an affidavit that you will not vote at your precinct on the day of the election. Early voting is convenient because in many cases the crowds are not present like at the precinct. Also even though the precincts are self-reporting that they are 92% accessible to people with disabilities, the local County Election Board is more likely to have full accessibility.

Another option for voting for people with disabilities would be curbside voting at the local precinct. If you want to vote curbside, this will take some in-advance arrangements. Call your local County Election Board and tell them you will be near the entrance of precinct X at 2 p.m. on the day of the election (hypothetical scenario). Tell them where you will be so they can inform the precinct workers.

Two precinct workers of differing parties will bring a ballot to your vehicle. They will present you with a ballot and an envelope to maintain the privacy of your vote. It is important that you be where you say you will be at the time you have agreed upon because it will be necessary to stop the voting during the time that precinct workers leave the polls to work with the person voting curbside.

“Beginning in July of 2006, we will have telephone voting across Oklahoma.”

To vote curbside, you will need to complete a voter assistance form at the time of your voting which includes an oath that you need this assistance in voting. Another option for voting for people with disabilities is to bring someone with them to the polling place to assist them in whatever way they need. A person with a disability may also ask the assistance of one of the three polling workers at their precinct. We want to make sure that people with disabilities are able to vote their conscience, and we will work with them in these ways to make this happen for them.

Now for something new. Beginning in July of 2006, we will have telephone voting across Oklahoma. Telephone voting is *not* from the voter's home. Telephone voting will be available both at the precinct and the County Election Board. Any person may choose to vote by telephone. Voters will be connected with an automated response system in which the ballot will be read to them and they will have the opportunity to register their vote on each item by using the touchpad of their telephone.

The voter's selections will be registered on a hard copy which will permit this voter's wishes to be counted just like a traditional ballot should the need arise to verify election results. If you are a voter who chooses to vote on the telephone, be prepared to spend a little more time. It could take you 25 or 30 minutes to complete your ballot on the telephone.

We are spending \$2 million which has come to Oklahoma through the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 just to bring telephone voting to our state. We have allocated \$340 thousand dollars this year to be available to make polling places more accessible to people with disabilities. If your polling place is inaccessible to you, call your County Election Board to report this and request they make your precinct accessible. We need your

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VOTER REGISTRATION IN OKLAHOMA (continued)

able to return the letter with some additional information, or you may need to fill out and send in another voter registration application form.

CLOSED PRIMARY SYSTEM

Oklahoma has a closed primary system. Only voters who are registered members of a recognized political party may vote for the party's candidates in primary and runoff primary elections. Registered Independent voters may be eligible to vote in party's primaries and runoff primaries if authorized by the party.

However, nonpartisan judicial offices, state questions and county questions often are included in primary elections. All registered voters, including Independents, are entitled to receive those ballots. At general elections, all voters receive the same ballot and may vote for any candidate or question on the ballot.

CANCELLED REGISTRATION

In most cases, voter registration is permanent. However, some voter registrations are canceled.

The county election board may cancel a registration:

- if the voter dies
- if the voter is convicted of a felony
- If the voter is adjudged to be an incapacitated person
- if the voter moves and registers again in another county or in another state
- if the voter asks the county election board in a written, notarized statement to cancel the registration
- if the voter does not respond to correspondence from the county election board and does not vote for more than four years

WHEN TO REGISTER

You may submit your voter registration application form at any time. However, voter identification cards cannot be issued during the 24 days prior to an election. If your registration application is re-

VOTER REGISTRATION IN OKLAHOMA (continued)

ceived by the county election board during the 24 days before an election, you will not receive your voter identification card until after the election.

If you will become 18 during the 60 days before an election, you may apply for voter registration between 25 and 60 days before the election.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information about voting in Oklahoma, contact your local county election board or the State Election Board.

Oklahoma State Election Board
PO Box 53156
Oklahoma City, OK 73152
(405) 521-2391

From: <http://www.elections.state.ok.us/voterreg.html>

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL CLINGMAN STATE ELECTION BOARD CHAIRMAN (continued)

comments in order to serve you better.

My hope is that at some date in the future, the manufacturers of our voting machines may offer a product which will permit a paper ballot for all people regardless of ability on one machine. Right now we just don't have that. That's the reason we will be using telephone voting which should be of benefit to people with disabilities. We are going to offer people an opportunity to practice using the telephone system sometime probably in July before the election. You may contact the State Election Board at 405-521-2391 for more information on this.

I asked Michael Clingman about people who have mental retardation. I specifically wanted to know if people with this disability could vote. The answer to that question was "yes" with some qualification. Occasionally an adult with developmental disabilities has a legal guardian. This person would not be eligible to vote in this specific case. Most people with developmental disabilities are eligible to vote. They must register to vote just like anyone else.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August 4-5, 2006

Couples retreat for couples with one member having multiple sclerosis. The retreat will be in Tulsa at a location to be disclosed. Contact Sharleen Dupee for more information at 800-344-4867.

August 21, 2006

Film festival in Enid, Oklahoma with educational videos on multiple sclerosis. Contact Sharleen Dupee for more information at 800-344-4867.

September 28-29, 2006

Zarrow Mental Health Symposium at the Tulsa Marriott Southern Hills Hotel. Contact Karen LaPlante at 918-585-1213 for more information.

September 29, 2006

Excelling with Asperger's Syndrome daylong training at the O.U. Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City. Contact Pat Diaz at 405-271-1836 for information.

October 10, 2006

Training on the IDEA which governs the delivery of special education services in the United States. Contact Pat Diaz at 405-271-1836 for more information.

Summer Camps: See 2006 calendar for Make Promises Happen Camps for people with disabilities at www.centralchristiancamp.org. Get national information on camps for kids with special needs at <http://camping.about.com/library/weekly/aa00204d.htm>

If you have an event coming up relating to disability, let us know at 800-522-8224 and we'll help you publicize.

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