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November 29, 2006

Mr. Jim Gouvallis
Charlotte Sun Herald
23170 Harborview Rd.
Port Charlotte, FL 33980

Dear Mr. Gouvallis:

The Charlotte Sun's view of the 2006 general election is very different from mine. The Sun gave kudos to SOE Horton without asking for public input. Many voters have no faith in the accuracy of the voting machines and usually doubt that their votes are being counted. That is why they don't bother registering their complaints. Let me be the first to report publicly that there were problems with the election. Let's ask the public to call or write to the newspaper so their complaints can be tallied.

On Election Day, I waited in line to vote at 7 AM. At 7:15, the clerk was on the phone to the SOE because I had been issued an absentee ballot. I had returned my unused absentee ballot to his office the previous week and advised the office staff that I was a candidate and did not want to be told at the polls that I could not vote. They assured me they knew my name and that would not happen. I had observed all rules about returning an unused absentee ballot. It was only after the call that I was allowed to vote.

When I voted on the machine and reached the final review, I was aware that "Skip Campbell" was not checked even though I had checked it during my vote. I went back and checked it again and this time it showed on the review. Did it really register or did it disappear again? We'll never know. The first person I spoke to had just voted at a different precinct and reported the same problem. We called in this problem. To my knowledge, the SOE office did not warn Precinct clerks about the problem or close down defective machines.

Skip Campbell had 11,647 under-votes in this important Attorney General race compared with Chief Financial Officer, 2,205 and Commissioner of Agriculture, 3,131. The problem was first evident following early voting when Skip Campbell's race had 4,173 under-votes while the CFO and COA had 595 and 904, respectively. Again, no action was taken by the SOE to advise Precinct clerks. Absentee ballots (9,742) told a different story. There were only 262 under-votes in the AG race compared with 506 and 509 in the CFO and COA races.

The SOE office does have an excellent staff. They are extremely knowledgeable and skilled. They know their job and do it well. No credit to Mr. Horton.

I observed the opening of Absentee ballots for two full days. A dull task, but necessary to our political process. At 4:30, the SOE called it a day and informed me and another observer that they would resume counting ballots in the morning. On a large table, there were thousands of ballots, opened and stacked. These should not have been opened if they were not going to be counted that day. I asked to speak to the SOE and then advised him that these ballots could not be left in an unsecured area overnight. He returned to the "observation room" and told staff to get boxes. No one looked happy. They got the boxes packed them with uncounted ballots, and closed the boxes with one strip of packing tape. A clerk wrote her name on the corner of a box. I shook my head to indicate, not acceptable! Now, they took out the real tape, taped the boxes, and each signed across the tape as is required. They were, SOE Horton, the election attorney, Judge Woodard, and Commissioner Moore. This was the best that could be done, considering none of these ballots should have been opened if they were not going to be processed the same day. I was told they would be put in the safe overnight. I did not observe this action. I was invited to return at 9 AM to observe the opening of the boxes. I arrived prior to 9 AM, some boxes were open and the process had begun.

The Sun Herald would be doing Charlotte County voters a great service by investigating actual reports from voters.

I would appreciate your participation.

Sincerely,

Joan Fischer

Letter to the Editor:

The November 7th general election in Charlotte County was not as smooth as some would like the public to believe. My vote for Skip Campbell in the important race for Attorney General was not recorded on my ballot. I reviewed the ballot and repeated the vote. Was it really counted? I'll never know. The same thing happened to my friend at another precinct, and to many more voters. These are called under-votes. Call or write to the newspaper to add your under-vote to the list. We must take action to prevent our votes from being stolen.

Skip Campbell's race had an under-vote on absentee ballots of 262 out of 9,742. That is not unusual. However, there were 4,173 under-votes on the early election touch-screen machines compared to 595 and 904 respectively for the Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Agriculture races. That indicates a serious problem. Likewise, on Election Day, the Attorney General race had 7,196 under-votes compared with 1,101 for CFO and 1,712 for COA. Again, indicating a serious problem with the machines. Please, call or write to draw attention to this problem. We deserve better in Charlotte County. Don't let Christine Jennings stolen votes in Sarasota County overshadow what happened here. We need an investigation here.

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