

# **Thirty Days too Early?**

**Election Inspector Scholarship Essay**

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It was dark. The stoplights were flashing red and the Michigan Union looked ominous. Walking up those steps, the only thing I could think was "If you mess this up, you could go to jail." During the four-hour election inspector class, Mr. Scheps had stressed precision and the importance of our task. To make sure everything ran smoothly, administer ballots, and, above all, get voters into the booths. This turned out to be much harder than I had thought.

I spent the day, sitting at a gray plastic table, handing out ballots and fielding countless questions from first time voters. "What bubble do I fill in if I only want to vote Democratic?" "Is this anonymous?" "Can I use my own pen or does it matter?"

That was the easy part. When an I.D didn't match up or the precinct was wrong, the real work began. It was hard enough to get voters to come to the polls, but when they had been waiting in line for an hour and had a class to get to, they were in no mood to switch precincts. The saddest situation I encountered was a young woman. She was eighteen and just old enough to vote. I remember her because everyone was so crabby, snatching ballots out of my hand and shouldering ahead to get to the booths. They just wanted to leave. She actually asked us how we were. All morning no one had said even a "How are you?" The election inspectors and I were playing a game; the voter that asked, "How are you?" first, got one of the jelly donuts that had been served to us that morning.

When I asked for her identification card because her name wasn't in the book, she smiled and told me she had missed the voter registration by a few days. In her hands were envelopes with her address, passport, I.D, birth certificate, everything to prove she was who she was, but that small card. She explained how important it was that she vote, and how this election was life changing, but I still couldn't give her a ballot. I couldn't give this woman who had waited in line for over an hour, had complete proof of her place in the precinct, her age, everything necessary to vote because she hadn't registered in Michigan a month before.

Under qualifications for registration as an elector, Michigan Election law, chapter 168 section 492 states "The person shall be a citizen of the United States; not less than 18 years of age; a resident of the state for not less than 30 days". The woman, on November 4th, had proof of all these things. Her passport, birth certificate and M-card showed that she had resided in Ann Arbor for more than thirty days, was a resident of the United States and over eighteen years old. Despite this, she still did not get a ballot.

The law goes on to say "and a resident of the township, city, or village on or before the thirtieth day before the next regular or special election or primary election." This basically means that the voter has to register thirty days in advance or they will not be allowed to vote. On the Secretary of State website, Ms. Land explains that this is necessary in order to "give the clerks time to process forms."

In the thirty days before the election, campaign ads increase and voting is encouraged more than ever. Candidates pullout all the stops in an effort to swing the undecided and gain the last few states they need to win. During this period, election fervor is at an all time high and voter registration is closed. The latter is counter productive. A month is an extremely long time in which people can change their minds and decide to vote. In the United States we have the privilege of living in a democratic country, but by having such an early registration deadline, the state of Michigan is limiting the number of people who may want to exercise their right to vote.

Even though the streets of Ann Arbor were clogged with clipboard-carrying citizens who tried to register people at every turn, a few still got away. Whether they thought the process was hard or didn't have time, it doesn't matter they probably ended up like that girl. Too late to register and unable to vote. While on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the precincts began to slow down, too many election inspectors, not enough to do, all loading empty ballots back into their boxes.

I believe the thirty-day deadline should be removed. I was stationed at the Michigan Union and we had people to spare. Those people could have staffed a table and registered voters, on that day. The voters would not need their voter identification card and the clerk's office would not be as overwhelmed. Everyone could vote. The potential elector would have to bring proof of age, citizenship and residence for over 30 days in that precinct. A sticker would be given to the newly registered voter for the election inspector to place in a separate registry book in order to record the number of ballots.

The polling places would run just as smoothly. The table would be located before the line of voters, providing a first line of defense as they weed out potential problems that could back up the entire line.

Elections are a difficult process. Ballots must be counted precisely and order maintained on a day that is filled with chaos. In the State's attempt to simplify the process and ease the load on the many workers who make this event possible, they forgot the main goal - to ensure that everyone has a chance to vote.

## **Bibliography**

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