SEVEN STEPS TO MAKE SURE YOUR VOTE IS COUNTED

A GUIDE FOR AMERICAN VOTERS

CALTECH/MIT

VOTING TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

SEPTEMBER 2004

After studying elections across the county for the past four years, we have found that there are seven simple steps that voters themselves should take to help insure that things go smoothly when they vote on November 2, and to help make sure that all votes get counted as intended.

The study that we conducted in the wake of the 2000 presidential election found that between 4 and 6 million votes were lost due to a variety of problems:

- 3 million votes may have been lost due to voter registration mix ups
- 2 million votes may have been lost due to faulty voting equipment and confusing ballots
- 1 million votes may have been lost as the result of polling place problems

Luckily, there are simple steps that voters can take to help insure that their vote does not get lost due to the same problems that arose in the 2000 presidential election. These seven simple steps are:

1. Call to make sure you are on your precinct's list of registered voters — CALL TODAY IF IN DOUBT!

If you have moved, changed your name, or have submitted a new voter registration form since the last time you voted, you should contact your local election office (typically the county election office) to check that you are correctly registered. You can look your local election official up in the government pages of your phone book, or find them online.
CALL TODAY IF IN DOUBT!

One of the most significant changes that has occurred in many states since 2000 is the new requirements for voter identification. Some states will require voter identification from all voters. Other states will require voter identification from only first-time voters who registered by mail and who did not include verification of their identification with their registration form. Check with your state or local election official to see if you will be required to show identification to vote, and find out what the appropriate forms of identification are. If in doubt, bring a government-issued photo identification with you when you go to vote.

2. Get a sample ballot and read it carefully.

Registered voters who receive a sample ballot should read it carefully:

- Make sure that your name and address are correct.
- Check the location of your polling place.

- Check what voting system you will use. Many counties have switched to touch screen voting or optical scanning. If you will be using a new voting system, learn more from your sample ballot (or other sources) about how it works.

If you do not receive a sample ballot in the mail, you should look in your local newspaper for information about what will be on the ballot in your area. You can also contact organizations like the League of Women Voters (http://www.lwv.org) or Project Vote Smart (http://vote-smart.org) to help you get information about what will be on your ballot in your area.

3. Bring your sample ballot to help you in the voting booth.

Your sample ballot contains a wealth of information, including details about where and when you can vote, how your voting system works in your area, and the choices you will have to make on your ballot. When you go to vote, it is a good idea to bring with you all of the information you can, and to take advantage of your sample ballot.

Specifically, you should:

- Mark your choices in your sample ballot and bring it with you when you cast your ballot for reference.
- Bring the sample ballot with you to the polls as it has your registration information on it.

4. Try to vote between 10 AM and 4 PM on election day, or allow extra time for long lines.

The busiest periods at polling places are in the morning after the polling places open, during the lunch hour, and in the evening as people are heading home from work. If it is possible for you to vote in the middle of the morning or afternoon, polling places may not be as crowded. If you have to vote during a busy time, allow for extra time when you go to vote as polling places are likely to be crowded early in the morning and in the evening.

If you cannot vote on November 2, you should examine your sample ballot or ask at your local election office if you can take advantage of "early voting" opportunities where you live. Many states have made it easier for citizens to vote before election day, especially by opening special poll sites before the day of the election for "early voting." By taking advantage of "early voting" opportunities where you live, you may avoid long lines on election day.

5. Know your rights and ask for help if you need it.

Every polling place should have a complete "Voter's Bill of Rights" posted explaining your rights. If any questions come up, ask for help from the poll workers, refer to the "Bill of Rights" posted in your precinct, or look at your sample ballot for assistance. If you have any questions or problems with your voting system in your polling place, ask for help from a poll worker. If you have not used the voting system in your polling place before, ask a poll worker to demonstrate how it works before you vote. If you make any mistakes on your ballot, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.

If you have trouble in the polling place and the problem cannot easily be resolved there, try to avoid causing a disturbance --- leave and call the local election official, your Secretary of State's office, or any other voting assistance group for help. We have contact information on our website at http://vote.caltech.edu/yourvotecounts.html if you need to get in touch with the Secretary of State or the head election official in your area.

6. You have a right to vote if you are registered in your precinct even if your name does not appear on the list of registered voters in your precinct.

You are guaranteed the right to vote if you are registered in your precinct, even if your name is not on the list of registered voters. Rules vary across the nation, so ask the poll workers in your precinct what you can do if your name does not appear on the list of registered voters. Casting a vote when your name mistakenly does not appear on the list of registered voters is often called "provisional" of "fail-safe" voting. In some parts of the country, if you cast a provisional ballot in the wrong precinct, your votes may not get counted. Be certain you vote in the precinct you are registered in.

7. Stop and double check that your ballot reflects how you want to vote before you cast your ballot.

Common problems with voted ballots include:

- Unintentionally voting for more candidates than you are allowed.
- Accidentally not voting for a candidate or measure.
- Forgetting to vote both the front and back of two-sided ballot.
- Voting for the wrong candidate (especially one right next to your intended choice).
- Making a mistake in the "write-in" section (a common mistake many voters who use optical scan ballots have made in the past occurs when they choose one listed candidate and also write that same candidate's name in the "write-in" section).

If you make any of these errors, ask a poll worker for a new ballot.

WHO WE ARE

The furor over the 2000 presidential election in Florida brought this group together. David Baltimore, the president of the California Institute of Technology, and Charles Vest, the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, assembled our original team of computer scientists, mechanical engineers, and social scientists to consider what is and what could be. We produced our original report in June 2001.

Our ultimate goal is to develop ideas about what could be. The United States is in the midst of a revolution in communication and computing technology. That revolution is and will transform voting in the future. These technologies hold enormous promise --- to make voting easy, convenient, and accessible, and to allow voters to see that their votes are counted. The current VTP faculty research group who assisted in the production of this report are:

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A special thanks to Issac Garcia-Muñoz, a Caltech undergraduate student, and Lisa García Bedolla, Assistant Professor of Political Science at UC Irvine, for their assistance in the translation of this document to Spanish.

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