



NEW YORK STATE SENATE NEWS

Senator 47th Senate District
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Griffo Calls for Urgent Action to Fix Voting Flaws by Election Day

(Utica) - Calling it a test of New York state's commitment to democracy, Senator Joseph A. Griffo (R-IP-C, Rome) today called for the New York State Board of Elections to lead the way to address the shortcomings noted in this year's primary elections and to form partnerships with County Boards of Election and the private sector to ensure that voting goes smoothly on November 2nd.

"Nothing in our American democracy is more important than our elections. This year's balloting in New York State can be a time of confusion, or it can be a time when the state finally demonstrates that it has recognized the value of democracy and works with all the partners necessary to ensure that there are no questions about the results or the procedures used in this year's elections.

The Senate Elections Committee had met in Manhattan ten days ago to discuss reports of voting problems during Primary Day in New York City. Senator Griffo had made a request to convene at least one hearing upstate.

Griffo noted that New York State is making a major transition this year, converting from traditional lever voting machines to a new voting system of paper ballots and scanners. This has led to many problems at the polls. In fact, New York State's Comptroller recently reported that 44 of 57 county boards of election outside New York City reported they had problems with the on primary day last month.

Griffo was joined by Oneida County Board of Elections Co-Commissioner, Pamela Mandryck, "This year's Primary election enabled us to determine the aspects of the process that required modification and we have designed those alterations and implemented them," she added. "Both inspector responsibilities as well as the voting process itself have been modified. The changes being implemented should resolve the issues we experienced at the Primary."

Although local County Boards of Election, which have jurisdiction over elections, are working to revise procedures, Griffo said that the best way to make this new process work is to help educate voters before they get to the polling place.

Griffo called for a four-part action plan:

How-To Voter Video: Most voters have never used the new system of paper ballots and scanners. They need to see a 30-second demonstration so that they can go to the polls with confidence and a greater understanding of what to do. Ideally, Griffo said, the state could make a video that could be run by local cable systems as a Public Service announcement. Candidates could be encouraged to run the video on their campaign web sites, he said.

Poll Worker Reporting: The new system puts new importance on poll workers. They all need to know ahead of time where to go, what to do, and when to report. Training sessions are mandatory, and staff should be mailed instructions so that there are not cases where poll workers, intimidated by technology, simply don't show up.

Voting Procedure: After years with the old-style voting machines, voters were unfamiliar with the new machines and new process. A need exists for a standard operating procedure to make the voter comfortable and the pollworker knowledgeable.

Results reporting: Using a bank of phones with voice mail and teaching poll workers a standard way to report results should be used to end the situation where voters don't know who won elections solely because an election district did not call in results. The people expect to know what happened that day; their expectations need to be met.

"Democracy thrives on fair elections that encourage voter participation," Griffo said. "With the change in technology taking place in New York State this year, we need to make an aggressive, all-out effort to ensure that voters receive the education they want before they get to the polls, and that when they do arrive, poll workers have the training needed to address the question they will encounter. We only have one chance to get this right. I strongly urge action now to prevent complications from marring this year's elections."