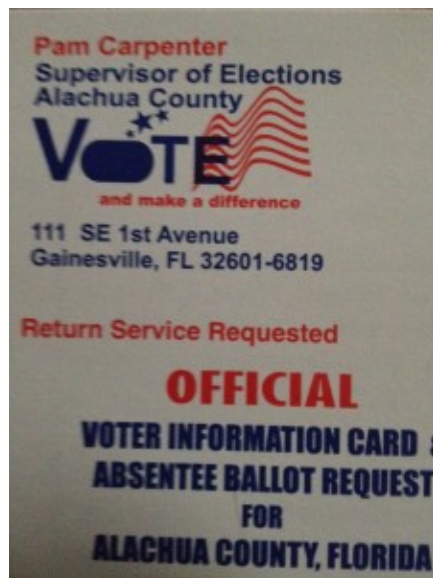


CHANGING VOTERS TO NEW PRECINCTS WITH POOR NOTIFICATION: NEW VOTE SUPPRESSION TACTIC IN FLORIDA?



This is the mailer in which my new voter ID card arrived. Nowhere does it point out that I have been changed from one precinct to another so that I vote at a new site.

Today is primary day in Florida. It is being held on the earliest date in the past 40 years since Florida is hosting the Republican National Convention later this month. While there has been much attention paid to Rick Scott's infamous voter purge that has prompted legal action from the Justice Department, today I encountered a much more insidious situation that could lead to many more people not voting in November.

I have resided at my current address since 2004 and have voted at a wonderful little country

church whose building dates back to 1886 (there is music on autoplay at this link). But when my wife and I stopped by to vote on our way to lunch today, we got quite a surprise. The poll workers could not find either one of us on the voter list. After we joked a bit about being included in the purge because of my left wing blogging, the clerk picked up the phone to speak with the Alachua County Supervisor of Elections office to seek an answer for us. While she was still on the phone seeking information, another voter who came in after us also found that he was not listed on the voter roll.

It turns out that we have been switched to another polling place that is only a few blocks away from where we have voted for the past eight years. In order to drive from our house to our new polling place, we must drive past the old one. The election workers insisted that voters who were moved from one precinct to another were informed, but neither my wife nor I could recall seeing any such notification.

We dutifully went to the new polling place and voted. When I got back from lunch, I went through the spots in our house where mail might have accumulated and found the "notification" that had been sent. From the photo above, it is very easy to see how these notifications (there was one for each of the three registered voters in our household) had been set aside for holding since on first glance it looks only like a standard form for ordering an absentee ballot. Our travel plans did not call for us to be away today, so these forms had been set aside in case our plans changed.

Opening my mailer today, I found that the "Voter Information Card" referenced on the outside of the mailer was actually a new version of what I call my voter registration card. Nowhere on this mailer, either on the outside or inside, does it mention for voters to look carefully to determine whether their precincts have changed. My wife and I inexplicably have been moved from precinct 18 to precinct 58 and the only way to

know that is to look at the small entry on the Voter Information Card.

Because I have a car and I don't work on a time clock, I was able to work my way through this mix-up with only a few minutes lost and minor aggravation. Well, I also did stop to fill out a satisfaction survey to let the Supervisor of Elections know that I felt they handled this transition very poorly. It also helped that I did this during the low-turnout primary rather than November's general election.

How many people will be disenfranchised in Florida this November because their precincts have changed? How will people who rely on bus transportation to their polling places deal with such a change? Will they have time to go to a new site if they are working on Election Day? The early voting period was shortened from two weeks to eight days this year in another move by Florida Republicans to make it harder for working people to vote and is another factor in today's expected low turnout.

Oh, and just in case you clicked on the link to the Alachua County Supervisor of Elections, their link for "Information on Polling Place Changes" is not about people moving from one precinct to another. It is about changes to the voting sites themselves.

Update: Oh my. Look what I missed in the local paper while I was on vacation last week. The article bears the headline "Redrawn precincts could create confusion, groups say" and reads in part:

Leaders of the local NAACP and other organizations said Wednesday that new voting precincts could lead to confusion on election day and urged residents to learn their new polling place or to cast ballots early.

About six precincts in areas with a predominately black population are affected. In some cases, precincts have

been eliminated entirely. In others, the redrawn lines have placed voters in new precincts.

Leaders believe the changes could lead to frustration on Aug. 14 if voters show up at their former polling place.

“This could be very dispiriting,” said Cynthia Chestnut, a former state representative and former Alachua County commissioner. “It’s incumbent on the supervisor of elections to mount a very spirited public education campaign from this day forward.”

The changes were made as part of redistricting that occurs every 10 years with new census data. Deputy election supervisor Will Boyett said the local changes were made based on new boundaries set by the state.

This would seem to confirm my worst fears about what is going on. It is especially troubling the boundaries were set by the state. That implies to me that the changes were indeed enacted in a way to suppress minority voting as much as possible.