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Election Administration from the 80's until the present... and how it has changed!!!

In looking back just over 35 plus years, it is astonishing to consider all the changes that have occurred with election administration in Florida and particularly Pasco County. Let's discuss just a few aspects!

Supervisor of Elections' office... Staff for the Supervisor of Elections was housed in three locations. There was a full service office at the court house in Dade City and a smaller office offering less services in New Port Richey along with a one-man very small warehouse. Now there are three full service offices across the county with an Election Support Center that houses some staff as well as all election-related equipment and materials.

Voter Registration... prior to 2003, it was a county by county system. If you lived in Pasco and moved into Hillsborough, you had to reregister and do so prior to the books closing which was 30 days out from an election. In 2003, that changed to a statewide system which allowed voters moving from one county in Florida to another to simply make an address change, even on election day.

Statistics from 1982 to present... In 1982, there were approximately 124,000 registered voters in 89 precincts. In 2016, there were 112 precincts with over 336,000 registered voters. As of today, there are 109 precincts with over 337,000 registered voters. In 1982, there was a larger number of registered Democrats; today there are more registered Republicans.

It should be noted that through the years the number of precincts has fluctuated to as high as 154 precincts, based on the apportionment within districts. Every 10 years reapportionment occurs, and depending on the number of districts in which our county is split, the number of precincts is determined. As well, even back in the early 2000's, with early voting and mail ballots not playing such a major role in an election, more voters went to the polls. In 2016, 59% of those who voted in the general election had already voted early or by mail.

Absentee/Mail Ballots... In 1982, if a voter wanted an "absentee" ballot, they had to attest to a reason why they could not be at their polling place on election day and needed to cast their ballot other than at the polling place. Of the 80,559 voters who voted that year, 1,954 voted by mail (2.4%). In 2016, 68,178 of the 244,950 votes cast were by mail (30%) with no reason necessary.

Early Voting... Prior to 2004, there was no such thing as early voting as it is now. A voter could come to one of our offices and vote their ballot, seal it in an envelope and drop it in a ballot box. But there was not an 8-day period where you could go to one of multiple locations and cast a ballot in order to avoid going to a polling place on election day. In 2016, 76,680 (31%) of those who voted in the general election voted early. The statistics looked like this ... 59% voted early, either by mail or at an early voting site with an additional 41% voting at the polls on November 8, 2016. Going back to 1982 as an example, only 2.4% of the ballots were cast prior to election day compared to 59% in 2016. Quite a switch from the early 80's!

Second Primary... The year, 2000, was the last year a 2nd primary was held in the state of Florida. Until then, there was a 1st primary, usually right after Labor Day, followed by a 2nd Primary runoff 28 days later and then the general election in November, 35 days after that. The 2nd primary was withdrawn in 2002 for a "brief time" but ultimately removed from the law completely.

Solicitation... Through the years the solicitation law has changed several times from 50 to 75 to 100 feet. In the 80's there was no solicitation within 50 feet yet there were many reasons why a solicitor could be right up at the entrance of the polling location. At one point through the years, there was a designated solicitation zone where candidates and other solicitors had to stand in order to communicate with voters. All too often that spot was totally inaccessible to the voters so that did not work well. Currently, there is NO solicitation (with the exception of Exit Polling) within 100' of the polling place.

Voting Equipment/Tabulation... In the late 70's, Pasco County transitioned from the lever machines to the punch card system. That system was in place through the infamous 2000 election. The cards were eventually tabulated regionally, in New Port Richey and Dade City. Prior to that all ballot cards were transported to Dade City for tabulating on the card readers.

After the year 2000, the state was mandated to switch voting systems. Punch cards were no longer allowed so Pasco spent approximately \$5 million dollars for an electronic DRE system (direct recording device). The machines were known as iVotronic touchscreens. Results were modemed in on election night because there was not a ballot you could touch. It was all electronic. Following the 2006 election, the DRE system was decertified because there was no paper trail. So, in 2008 Pasco rolled out the optical scan system that is currently used. Voters receive a paper ballot. They mark it in a privacy booth then place it in a DS200 which reads/tabulates the results. At the close of the polls, those results are then modemed by each precinct to our collection site in Dade City at the support center. During the use of punch cards final results were usually not available till well after midnight due to the time of transporting them and putting the card through scanners. Now ballots have been tabulated throughout the day on the DS200 and results are modemed in after 7:00pm. Final results are now available as early as 8:00pm.

Universal Primary Contest... In the late 1990's, a constitution revision was adopted declaring that if a particular political party had no opposition outside of the primary election, all voters, regardless of party affiliation, would be allowed to vote on that contest. Until then, a single party could decide the next elected official for any given position if the opposing party did not have a qualified candidate.

In Summary... This is only a few of the changes that have occurred in the last 35 years as it relates to elections. In the 80's everything was recorded on paper...now as much as possible is computerized allowing for much more efficiency of administration. And, it will not stop here. Technology is constantly moving forward. As you can see election administration in Florida is a very fluid process. Election administrators in the state of Florida and across the country work year-round to comply with changes in law, technology and demographics.

We can only imagine where we might find election administration in the next 35 years. The one thing I am sure will not change is that election administration will remain fair, accurate and transparent in Pasco County!