

Did Your Vote Really Count?

...or were you even allowed to vote....



Sadly, a question we need to ask in Texas!

One thing we don't think about often, if ever, is whether our vote counted or not. Nor do we worry if we will be allowed to vote or not. But maybe we should!

This isn't a topic I was looking for, but one that hunted me down. When I was informed that voters in Bell County were turned away from the polls and not allowed to vote, that they had a massive shortage of paper ballots, and that highly unexpected results occurred, I decided I needed to go to Bell County and interview folks to understand what had happened.

Bell County is a 100% paper ballot county. I live in a county that has embraced electronic voting and only gives the option of paper ballots during early voting. I have worked the last two elections as a clerk and lastly as an election co-judge. Electronic voting appears to be the best way to go, or so I thought. In less than a week, I would learn of problems with paper ballots and then learn of voter fraud happening with electronic voting. Texas seems to be having issues with running elections with integrity.

Because of the breadth of this issue, I am going to break this into a two-part report. Let's first look at what just occurred in Bell County, where the race for State Representative was the HOT race locally. Representative Molly White was being challenged by Hugh Shine for District 55 House seat. This district encompasses only half of Bell County - that's it. Yes - it's a local race.

I had noticed postings on Facebook along the way during the campaign that this race might not have been the friendliest. One of the last posts I had noticed was a blurb about Rep. White's campaign manager. It appeared that her opponent had attacked her campaign manager, though I hadn't slowed down enough to play the video. The day after the election, I heard Molly White lost her race by 118 votes.

Through a sequence of more private messages, I was beginning to hear a story that didn't seem possible. Voter issues in Texas! People being denied the right to vote here in America - that doesn't happen! ...or so I thought. We have

issues of getting people to get out and vote - not being turned away. What on earth was going on in Bell County - the Belton/Temple area?

I got there as quickly as I could. I wanted to talk to people while this was still fresh on their minds. I only had two days, but could have used at least four. I crammed twelve interviews into that time.

All twelve interviews were videoed and are available in full on the ChristianReporterNews.com website. They include a young man, a registered voter who stood in line for an hour and a half before being turned away and not allowed to vote; a conservative who had to demand an election worker find his name on the rolls so he could vote; and a retired couple never received their mail-in ballots and struggled to get to vote during early voting.

A campaign worker in charge of canvassing neighborhoods, was so distraught to learn her candidate "supposedly" had lost. Her personal work gave her the complete opposite impression. A campaign manager who was attacked by the opposing candidate at an election site. The candidate who lost by 118 votes before the recount - and the tally changed then to a loss of 104 votes when they discovered a box that was never counted during the recount.

I also interviewed 5 election judges/clerks and a precinct chair who stepped up to help. Virtually everyone reported people left without voting because of an unreal ballot shortage and extremely slow response from the election office. Many felt a re-vote was/is necessary, at least for the local race between Rep. Molly White and her opponent, Hugh Shine.

This sounded more like a plot for a movie than a situation that had actually happened in Texas. You can hear in the voices their pain, their disbelief, and at times their anger. Was there someone behind all of this chaos? Was it simply a local ugly race, or did it have roots that ran to the Capitol?

I was at a local meeting the first evening, and let everyone know the reason I was in town when they asked me to introduce myself to the group. Immediately after the meeting adjourned, a County Commissioner came flying my way. He surely made me feel unwelcomed, but more importantly, he sent red flags a flying in my spirit. Without inquiring anything of me and what I was discovering, he immediately began insisting that the Election Office had done everything above board. Seriously?

Why did he not express concern that there had been a problem? Why was he so defensive? Was the fact he was in a runoff himself part of the equation? Who knows! All I can say, it didn't speak well of him or the situation.

So what happened in Bell County, specifically district 55, on March 1, 2016?

I had never really given any thought to voter fraud happening anywhere near me. Yes, we have all heard of dead people who voted, or people who voted more than once, and other fraudulent things - but that only happens somewhere else - not in TEXAS! I was about to walk into a situation and face firsthand the pain of voters who deeply believe their rights have/had been violated. They want that race re-voted. They want to see a fair vote where everyone who makes an effort to vote in the election can vote and that their votes are properly counted.

My journey began with an interview with Diane, pronounced Dee Ann, who had been an election judge for the Republican side, in Heidenheimer, a rural community. They had called in for additional ballots to be sure they did not run out and ended up receiving more than ample supplies. Today she wonders if the second batch that got delivered to them may have been ballots intended for the Rogers precinct area that had run out. She never checked that second batch that got dropped off to see what precinct number was on them.

<https://youtu.be/8BX4HyXNJZo>

Next to tell their story was Ryan, who was turned away and not allowed to vote. His wife wasn't able to vote either. When they arrived at the voting poll in Troy, they decided they would take turns waiting in the car with their four children while the other voted. Ryan was first to go vote. As he was walking up to vote, people were walking away announcing they had run out of Republican ballots trying to discourage folks from wasting their time standing in line.

Ryan thought that must be a scam or joke and proceeded to get into the line which was already stretched outside of the building. After about twenty minutes, around 5:30, a worker from inside came out and did announce that they were out of Republican ballots and you were welcomed to come in and vote Democratic if you'd like. One person stepped forward and went inside to vote. The rest remained in line and continued to wait. Throughout the wait, people would give up and walk away while others joined in the line.

At seven p.m. the reality hit that he was going to be denied his right to vote. One of the election workers announced that anyone that was not inside the building at seven p.m. when they locked the doors would not be able to vote. Somewhere between 24-36 people who had been standing in line for hours waiting on ballots, were turned away without voting, along with their partners who may have been waiting in cars with children all of that time. There is no accurate count of the people who gave up and left the long waiting line throughout the day at that poll, nor those who joined the ranks at seven p.m. because their body would not fit into the building with the others who were still waiting on ballots. Did those ballots ever arrive? Good question. I don't have an answer. <https://youtu.be/sxCE9L8or9Y>

That election worker had incorrectly stated the seven o'clock cut off rule. It has nothing to do with physically being inside a building. It states that the end of the line at that moment is marked and anyone in line will be able to vote before the poll is shut down. If you walk up after that point, you will not be able to vote because you were not already in line when it was marked. There is no way to know how many people in Troy did not vote that day that had made an effort and showed up at the poll.

While David, Molly White's campaign manager, has a video of and souvenir tent pole leg from Molly's opponent to remember the race by, he did witness the fact that people entered the voting center in Rogers, but seemingly never came out. They ran out of ballots. Some people had to leave because they just couldn't wait. He did see a few of those return later to try again. But once again, how many people never got to cast their vote. <https://youtu.be/UKwm1ZUoy6k>

When I interviewed "Jane Doe" who worked the election, she brought up an interesting point. She was informed by at least two friends who voted, each at a different poll, that they were told to put their ballots into the transfer box (which would never be opened again), instead of the auxiliary box which would be counted at the tank. (The tank is the term used by the election office and workers to describe the place the operations run out of on election day.) How many votes may not have been counted because the additional paper ballots were wrongly dropped into a sealed container?
<https://youtu.be/LCl103m0gcA>

Tony, an election judge, reported that another precinct close to his, tried to borrow ballots from him, but that wouldn't work since they are precinct specific ballots. He heard that poll ended up only voting about half of their usual amount, potentially down maybe as many as a hundred ballots. This greatly concerned him, because his precinct, and that one, virtually always vote about the same number. He was also told by the elections office that all but 4 or 5 polls did run out of ballots. <https://youtu.be/c0sooXzEarQ>

In finishing our first day of interviews, we caught up with Rep. Molly White. Due to the potential number of voters who were not able to vote, were turned away from voting, or maybe their ballots were put in the wrong place and not counted, Rep. White lost her bid for re-election. She has worked elections for years, until she became a candidate on the ballot, and in all of her years has never seen nor heard of the type of fiasco that occurred on March 1 in Bell County, Texas.

She commented that her phone began to light up early that evening with people reporting about the issues they had in trying to vote. She was floored. It ended up being six a.m. the next morning before results were in. Fourteen days after

the election while I was with her, she was still receiving calls, texts, and emails concerning this vote, or lack of ability to do so. She hopes the Republican Party will look into this situation. <https://youtu.be/067uc34miNk>

What an eye-opening experience that first day. Six interviews down, six more to go. We truly realized we needed more time on the ground there, but the calendar just wouldn't allow it at that time.

We were invited to attend the local TEA Party meeting that evening. Yes, we were the unknown faces in the room and they asked us to introduce ourselves and share where we were from. So...I did full disclosure of who we were and why we were in Belton. It was out of this meeting that several new appointments for interviews developed.

So my phone lit up after the meeting and I was busy coordinating and planning the appointments for the next day - covering lots of Bell County. Oh, how I wish we had a few more days. The more we were learning about the situation, the more I wanted to visit with the Republican chair and Election Administrator of Bell County. I am still considering dropping in on them next week when I will be traveling through that area. There are questions still to be asked.

Early the next morning we drove over to Temple to visit with Emily, one of Rep. Molly White's campaign workers. Her experience from working in the field showed her, without question, that the constituents supported Molly passionately and she had a strong margin in her favor. She is so frustrated with the outcome because the election did not give everyone an opportunity to vote. Too many were turned away, ballots were scarce, and the results did not line up with stats that they had in hand. Something was wrong.

https://youtu.be/MNLSu__vaR0

We drove back to Belton to meet with Donna who is a Precinct Chair. She ended up helping out at her poll when they ran out of ballots. She went to the "tank" to pick up ballots. She has such a story to tell of the chaos happening at the tank and why the ballots were not being pumped out quickly enough to meet the demand. She was left with so many questions as to the validity of the results that were given. <https://youtu.be/CRIFpaUNZrg>

Next we traveled north of Temple to visit with David and Jan. David was an election judge that day and his wife was a clerk with him. They had at least four people who could not wait for ballots and left without voting. While they feel the county prepared the best they could, he still feels like they need to re-vote that election. He pointed out that the areas where Molly White was strongest, were the areas that had the ballot shortages. Hugh Shine's strength was in the cities, not the rural areas. <https://youtu.be/uaRmkSmtlsM>

Larry & Dorothy had an issue with their mail-in ballots. They never received them. When they went to vote early, since their ballots never came, they were told that they had already voted. Long story short - after being encouraged to call the elections office and inquiring about their votes, the elections office informed them that they never received those ballots and their provisional votes were counted. That was good news! <https://youtu.be/7ywJJA1Ry-Y>

Crystal and Nancy worked the largest poll in Bell County. They reported that the Democrats ran out of ballots. That was a first that they could remember that happening. Not only was there a run on Democratic ballots, but many people who would have traditionally voted Democratic, crossed over to vote because of the local/state race between Rep. Molly White and High Shine which was on the Republican ballot. https://youtu.be/iTyMjwet_RM

Our last stop as we headed back home, was to meet with Ralph and Betty who personally had a hard time being allowed to vote. Betty had the experience earlier that day that Ralph would have later. The lady could not find their names on the voters roll. They finally assisted her, determined that their names would be there and it was found so they could vote. Then their son was turned away later and it was through that experience that someone spoke up and told the lady that there was a book folks could sign if they couldn't find their names and then they could vote. The election clerk commented "oh no, I've already turned away four or five." https://youtu.be/rdbd_CuS0CM

There is no question that Bell County had numerous issues on March 1st during their primary election throughout the county. The key race of interest that brought out the huge crowd was the local race between Rep. Molly White and Hugh Shine who were running for State Representative District 55. Whether it was registered voters being turned away, ballot shortages that caused excessive waits, or the alluded to voter tampering - when asked, everyone thought that race should be re-voted.

Personally, I agree. If the results come out the same again, fine. But it appears that the polls that ran out of ballots the most and received the fewest to start with were out in the county where it would take the longest to correct the issue. I understand this is the area that Rep. Molly White had her greatest strength. If the ballot shortage was purposefully done to throw the race, that's horrible. If it happened accidentally, it still caused many voters to be unable to vote. I hope this race gets a re-vote.

I will keep you posted as I learn additional information on this situation. Later this week, you will receive a Kat Notes dealing with problems that can occur with electronic voting. To me, it sounds like we need to hit "pause" and genuinely figure out what is going on and what actions we need to take to put INTEGRITY back into the voting process across Texas.

Until next time...

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