



THE ISSUES

Provisional Ballots

"On Election Day, I went to my polling place and was told that my name wasn't on the register. [But] I voted here in the primary.

*And they said, 'Well you can sign a provisional ballot.'
Come to find out later, I followed up - my vote was never counted."*

Bobby Jackson
Ohio resident

Imagine you are a typical American voter, anxiously awaiting your chance to influence the course of our nation by casting your vote for President, Congress, and other local and state offices. You've worked hard to support your candidates and you've made arrangements to get to your polling place to join your neighbors in this periodic renewal of our government's vitality and legitimacy. Only this time, when you arrive at your regular polling place, you find that your name is no longer on the rolls of eligible voters, despite your having voted there for years. How would you feel and what would you do? Well, all you could do - if you wanted a chance to influence the course of our country's future - would be to cast a provisional ballot.

If a person shows up to vote and is not listed on a precinct voting roll, the only way that person can vote is to cast a provisional ballot. Nearly 2 million provisional ballots were distributed in the 2004 election - and of that number, nearly one-third were rejected and never counted.

In 2004 and 2006, many Americans found themselves receiving provisional ballots, even though they were indeed eligible to vote. This happened because of improper voter registration purges, last-minute precinct changes and other dirty tricks intended to influence the outcome of those vitally important elections. As voter Bobby Jackson says in UNCOUNTED, "Everyone who has the right to vote [should be] able to determine the direction of this country. When you take that away, we're no better than any other country in the world."

Here is a report prepared by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) showing how large a role provisional ballots played in the 2004 presidential election.

http://www.eac.gov/election_survey_2004/html/EDS-chap%206%20prov%20ballots2.htm