February 3, 2025

The Grady County Board of Elections and Registration (BOE&R) held their February monthly meeting at 5:30 PM at the Grady County Courthouse located at 250 North Broad Street, Cairo, Ga 39828 with the following board members present:

Sam Carnline: Vice-Chair
Kathy Mills: Secretary
Sandy Reagan: Board Member
Bobby Gwaltney: Board Member

Staff present:
Jason Tate, Melinda Butler

Cairo Messenger:
Laura Cassels

Vice Chair Sam Carnline, in the absence of Chair Theophille, opened the meeting with prayer. Carnline presented the agenda and asked for a motion to accept as presented, Sandy Reagan made a motion to approve the agenda, 2nd by Bobby Gwaltney, and unanimously agreed upon by all present.

Secretary Kathy Mills informed members that the minutes were mailed out, and no feedback was received, indicating no concerns. Sam noted not receiving the minutes, possibly due to email issues discussed with Jason. Jason offered to print a copy for review at the end of the meeting, and it was agreed to postpone the approval of the minutes.

The meeting was then turned over to Elections Supervisor Jason Tate.

Office and Equipment Updates

- **Introduction of New Clerk**
    - Melinda was introduced as the new clerk, with her office setup completed.
    - Jason mentioned acquiring a new desk through the remaining operating budget.
- **Reorganization and Equipment Setup**
    - The EMS (Election Management System) was moved to a new location, with plans to reorganize the room for better functionality.
    - Plans include moving the table, installing a screen for meetings and training, and creating a customer service area with Melinda's old computer and a phone setup.
    - Jason emphasized keeping the EMS isolated from internet and phone connections to avoid confusion.

- **Technical Setup and Testing**
    - All phone lines and internet connections were tested and adjusted.
    - The EMS is plugged in but requires certification from the Secretary of State's office before use.

Scheduling and Training

- **Election Schedule for 2025**
    - Primary for the Public Service Commission is scheduled for June 17, with a potential runoff on July 15.
    - General election is set for November 4, with a very unlikely runoff on December 5.

- **Training Sessions**
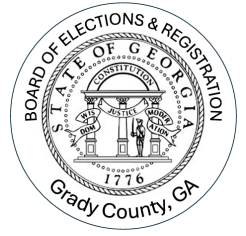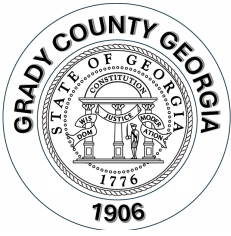
- State-directed training for Melinda and Jason is scheduled in Dallas, Georgia, from April 28-30.
- The Gabrielle Conference in Savannah is planned for August, with exact dates to be confirmed.

Training and Conferences

- **Election Training and Board Member Involvement**
  - Previously, election supervisors and registrars attended separate trainings, but these have now been combined.
  - There was a discussion about the necessity of board members attending certain trainings. It was clarified that the training in Dallas is primarily for day-to-day election office workers, though some board members who are actively involved may attend.
  - Only two free slots are available for the training, with additional classes costing $200 each. The Gabrielle Conference has a $600 registration fee per person.

- **Budgeting for Training**
  - The budget for training and conferences was discussed, with a focus on covering costs for board members who wish to attend.
  - A board member expressed willingness to personally cover the cost of attending both the training and the conference.

Vendor Meetings and Scheduling

- **Vendor Presentations**
  - There was a proposal to set up meetings with representatives from Dominion and Know Inc. to provide an overview of their services and products.
  - The possibility of scheduling these meetings during business hours was discussed, with a preference for holding them on the same day to maximize efficiency.

- **Election Scheduling**
  - Important election dates were highlighted, including the primary, runoff, and general elections.
  - Attendees were encouraged to access the shared calendar for up-to-date scheduling information.

Budget and Resource Management

- **Election Budget Shortfall**
  - The budget is approximately $4,000 in the red for the primary runoff, with a potential shortfall of $13,000 if additional elections are required.
  - Discussions are underway with local high schools and the junior ROTC to involve students as poll workers, which could help reduce costs.

- **Postage and Mailing**
  - No Ink handles the mailing of registration updates and other election-related materials, offering a cost-effective solution compared to in-house mailing.
  - The current arrangement with No Ink saves on postage costs and reduces the workload for the election office staff.

- **Data Management and Best Practices**
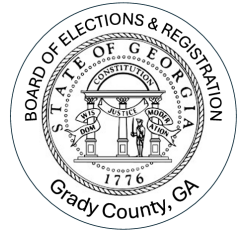
- Concerns were raised about the centralization of voter data with No Ink. It was clarified that No Ink already has access to the same database used by the election office.
- There is an option to review and approve the list of names before No Ink sends out notifications.

Voter Roll Management and Verification

- **Centralized Mailing and Approval Process**
  - Jarvis is used as the central location for sending out voter information.
  - Concerns were raised about the ability to review and approve mailings before they are sent out. Currently, there is a spreadsheet available, but it is not actively used for verification.
  - There is a need to ensure that voter information is accurate, especially in smaller precincts where local elections are significant.

- **Issues with Voter Rolls**
  - Concerns were expressed about inaccuracies in voter rolls, such as deceased individuals remaining on the rolls or individuals receiving voter registration from previous states.
  - Voter information is pulled from various sources, including DDS and voter registration pages, but there are issues with outdated or incorrect data.
  - Confirmation notices are sent to inactive voters who have not voted in five years, potentially leading to their removal from the rolls if they do not respond.

- **Concerns About Fraud and Data Integrity**
  - There are reports and studies indicating that deceased individuals have been recorded as voting, raising concerns about data integrity.
  - Specific data from 2024 in Georgia was mentioned, highlighting instances where deceased individuals were recorded as having voted.
  - The process for verifying voter data involves multiple steps, including local reporting of deceased individuals to the Secretary of State.

Budget and Financial Planning

- **Travel and Training Expenses**
  - Current projections indicate a potential shortfall of $3,500 for travel expenses. This includes trips to Savannah and Dallas.
  - These are the two main trips contributing to the shortfall.
 - Includes a $1,300 conference fee for mandatory 12 hours of annual continuing education training.

- **Poll Workers and Election Costs**
  - Estimated to be $13,000 short if three elections occur; $10,000 short for two elections.
  - These are static estimates.
  - High school students may assist to mitigate costs.

- **Budget Constraints and Unknowns**
  - A significant portion of the budget is allocated to utilities and workers' compensation, which are beyond control.
  - The county is mostly self-insured, affecting budget planning.

Recruitment and Volunteer Strategies
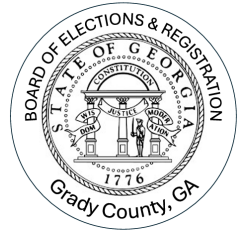
- **Volunteer Recruitment**
  - Retirees and teachers are considered potential volunteers.
  - Engaging with retired teachers' clubs could be beneficial.
  - These groups could be approached, but compensation optics need consideration.

- **Poll Worker Roles and Compensation**
  - There are three roles—manager, assistant manager, and poll worker/clerk—with established pay scales.
  - Volunteers are welcome, but the optics of unpaid volunteers alongside paid workers need careful handling.

Future Planning

- **Spring Recruitment**
  - Aiming to expand the pool of poll workers for future elections.

Election Runoff Scenarios

- Jason mentioned that a runoff is very likely, but a December runoff after the general election is unlikely. The most probable scenario currently is a runoff occurring shortly after the general election.

Calendar and Email Management

- **Calendar Sharing and Usage**
  - Jason demonstrated how to use the calendar, specifically in Outlook on a computer, noting differences between desktop and mobile versions.
  - Important deadlines are color-coded: red for deadlines, blue for advance in-person voting, and green for election day.
  - The calendar includes references to laws and guidelines from the Secretary of State, which are crucial for understanding deadlines and requirements.

- **Technical Challenges and Solutions**
  - Kathy expressed difficulty in accessing the shared calendar on different devices.
  - Jason suggested ensuring Outlook is installed on computers for better access and using the share function to view the calendar.
  - There was a discussion about potentially needing to visit Blough Tech for technical assistance if issues persist.

Election Preparation and Compliance

- **Deadline Management**
  - Jason emphasized the importance of meeting deadlines, noting that some are flexible while others require advance planning.
  - Automatic reminders are set up to prevent missing critical deadlines.

- **Handling Mistakes and Compliance**
  - Acknowledgment that mistakes may occur, especially in a "golden year" where new processes are being learned.
  - Commitment to addressing and rectifying mistakes promptly to avoid repeated errors, which could lead to compliance issues.

- **Personal Experiences with Compliance**
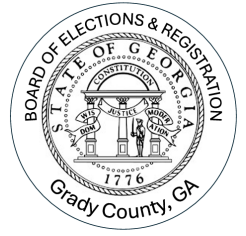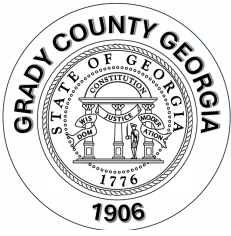
- o Speakers shared personal anecdotes about past experiences with compliance and the consequences of not adhering to deadlines.

Budget Discussion with County

- **Communication Strategy**
  - o Discuss the approach to inform the county about the probable budget issues.
  - o Jason emphasized the need to decide whether the request should be made board-to-board or wait for a new administrator.
  - o Sam suggested avoiding surprises and supporting the request, indicating that transparency is crucial.
  - o Jason proposed that a board-to-board request might carry more weight and suggested the chair or a board member should present it officially.

- **Presentation and Support**
  - o Ensure proper representation and support during the meeting.
  - o Sam recommended that if the chair is unavailable, another board member should attend.
  - o Jason agreed to present the case and emphasized the importance of being considerate of all parties involved.

- **Fiscal Responsibility**
  - o Maintain transparency and fiscal conservatism.
  - o Jason assured that the intention is not to frivolously spend money but to be transparent and fiscally conservative.

Public Service Commission Races

- **Precinct Consolidation**
  - o No possibility to consolidate precincts temporarily.
  - o Sam confirmed with Jason that the Secretary of State's office stated precinct downsizing must be permanent.

Hiring of Ms. Butler

- **Hiring Process**
  - o Discussion on the hiring process and timeline.
  - o Jason clarified that the decision was made in an executive session, and the start date was the 13th.
  - o Sam expressed gratitude to Ms. Butler for joining and bringing her experience.

Scheduling and Bylaws

- **Next Meeting**
  - o Confirmed the next meeting for March 3rd at 5:30 PM.
  - o Sam and Jason discussed whether a motion was needed for the meeting date, concluding it was part of the bylaws.

- **Meeting Procedures**
  - o Discussion on the necessity of motions for scheduled meetings.
  - o Jason questioned the need for a motion if the meeting date is set in the bylaws.

Public Service Commission Race Deadlines
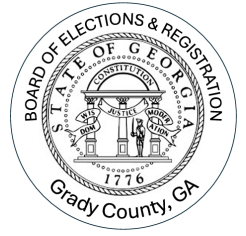
- **Voter Notification**
  - Inquiry about the next deadline for notifying voters.
  - Sam asked about the timeline for informing voters about the Public Service Commission race.
  - Jason mentioned that the Secretary of State had published the calendar, though there were inaccuracies.

Article 3 and Voter Registration Deadlines

- **Discussion on Voter Registration Deadlines**
  - Sam raised concerns about voter registration deadlines, suggesting it should be the first point of inquiry.
  - Jason explained that if changes are not made by the deadline, they are not effective. For example, if someone moves from Mitchell County and doesn't update their registration, they must vote in Mitchell County.
  - Jason mentioned the general election deadline was 30 days before the election, specifically October 7th.
  - Malinda clarified that early voting starts 17 days before the election, around May.

Election Equipment and Data Management

- **Thumb Drives and Data Security**
  - Jason discussed the need for a scanner and a flash drive for transferring election results to the Secretary of State's office.
  - Concerns were raised about the cost and security of using multiple thumb drives.
  - Sam suggested retaining information on thumb drives for future reference, while Jason proposed using a terabyte passport hard drive for storage.
  - Jason emphasized the importance of security and the potential for open records requests.

- **Budget Considerations**
  - Jason estimated the cost of thumb drives and related equipment to be $400 to $500, which would fall under election expenses.

Meeting Minutes and Approval Process

- **Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**
  - Jason noted that the minutes were sent out for review but lacked signature blocks.
  - The group discussed the process of voting on minutes during meetings to avoid double signing.
  - Jason suggested tabling the minutes until the next meeting if necessary.
  - The group agreed to vote on the minutes and sign them at the next meeting when all members are present.

- **Motion to Approve Minutes**
  - Sandy made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Sam.
  - The motion was passed with all in favor.

Bobby Gwaltney made a motion for adjournment, Kathy 2nd the motion, and unanimously agreed upon by all present.