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MONDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2004

This Election Is Gonna Get Messy

by Michael in New York on 10/11/2004 05:09:00 PM

Barring a landslide by one of the candidates (I mean Kerry, of course), this election is gonna get very, very messy. The latest piece of evidence? A USA Today story about those provisional ballots and what election day is going to be like.

"Provisional ballots could be the hanging chads of 2004," says Tony Sirvello, director of an association of local election administrators. "If there's a state as close as Florida was in 2000, this could have a major effect."

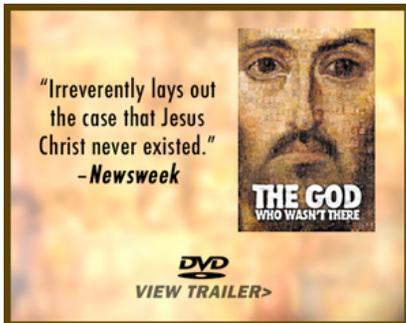
"Hundreds of thousands of voters could be affected. After the 2000 election, the Census Bureau found that nearly 3 million people didn't vote because of registration issues. Problems with registration systems cost between 1.5 million and 3 million votes, according to estimates by the CalTech-MIT Voting Technology Project. Causes included erroneous purges, recent moves by voters, clerical mistakes and database problems.

"Complicating the picture this year: a flood of newly registered voters, driven by high interest in the presidential race and intensive get-out-the-vote efforts."

Provisional ballots were one change meant to help the electoral process. After the disaster of 2000, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act, which said every state must provide a stand-by ballot for someone who isn't on the registered rolls or otherwise seems disqualified but insists they have the right to vote. They cast a provisional ballot and those are held separately until their eligibility (or lack thereof) can be verified. That's so people don't get turned away at the polls without the opportunity to cast a ballot. It doesn't mean the ballot will be counted if they can't make their case. These ballots are sure to be at the heart of post-election legal challenges.

It's unclear how people can follow up on their case or check and make sure their vote -- if valid -- was counted. This, along with the varying procedures for counting them, overseas ballots, etc. will only add to the confusion on Election Day and a delay in getting a proper tally.

I've said it before: this election will not be decided on Election Day.



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