



EXPERIENCE MATTERS

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State Secretary of State's Office strives to squelch election process rumor mill



Photo Vera Kochan

Voter drop box on Saint Mary's College campus is covered and locked in between elections

By Vera Kochan

Election procedure rumors continue to run rampant, causing the California Secretary of State, Shirley N. Weber's Office to devote some time into squelching the gossip. Titled her post "California Elections Rumor Control," the office is "committed to ensuring that elections are free, fair, safe, secure, accurate, and accessible. Misinformation, intentional or otherwise, continues to confuse voters and sow distrust in the electoral process." The following information from the SOS is in response to the most widespread rumors circulating with regards to elections and their legitimacy.

A popular rumor is that votes are being cast on behalf of dead Californians and that those votes are being counted in the primaries. In fact, state and federal law prohibits anyone from doing that. There are security measures in place to prevent this type of fraud such as signature verification

and performing information checks. The state's election officials adjust the voter registration list based on information received from the California Department of Public Health and the Social Security Administration. In short, voter records are updated regularly.

Elections held during strict COVID mandates allowed voter drop boxes to become a popular choice in voting. The circulating rumor is that drop boxes used by election officials to collect returned vote-by-mail ballots could be easily tampered with, stolen, or destroyed. In fact, drop boxes are under heavy safeguards to protect voters' returned ballots, according to the SOS. The typical drop box is made of heavy, high-grade metal, which is bolted to the ground and equipped with additional security features such as tamper-evident seals, minimal ballot insertion size, locks, and water/fireproof materials. Sometimes these boxes are placed in a public location with 24-hour video surveillance.

Another rumor is that the vote-by-mail method is being forced on voters and that the mail-in ballots are susceptible to fraud. The SOS's Office stresses that mail-in ballots provide more security to elections, not less, citing the wrongful claims that the 2020 primary general election was rigged through the use of "mules" (paid or unpaid operatives who put ballots in multiple drop boxes). In fact, when the ballot is returned, election officials verify the voter's identity. If the signature doesn't match, the envelope will not be opened, and the ballot won't be counted until the voter's identification is confirmed.

There's also a rumor that provisional ballots are only counted if there is a close race. The fact is, California law requires that any voter who claims to be registered, but can't be confirmed through the list of registered voters on the records with the county, is entitled to cast a provisional ballot. This ballot will be counted after election officials have confirmed that the individual is registered to vote in that county and hasn't already voted. Anyone who casts a provisional ballot can check its status with their county elections office.

An interesting rumor is that poll workers hand out sharpies to specific voters so their ballots will be rejected. In fact, some vote tabulating systems have more ideal or preferred instruments for marking ballots, which may be blue or black ink or sharpies. If the vote tabulating system is unable to determine the voter's selections, the tabulator is designed to sort the ballots into a separate pile for manual review. Tabulator systems are capable of reading all kinds of ink colors – even pencil.

Many voters worry that, "If I leave something blank on my ballot, my ballot will not be counted." In fact, a blank "contest" on a ballot is known as an undervote. This occurs when a voter, either intentionally or not, doesn't vote on a specific "contest." All properly marked votes on a ballot will be counted.

One rumor claims that the voting system software is not reviewed or tested before the election and can be easily manipulated by any corrupt individual.

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Moraga Community Service Day planned, Oct. 1 and 2



Save the date for Moraga's Community Service Day, scheduled to occur during the mornings and afternoons of Oct. 1 and 2 and organized by several Moraga community groups as a way for residents to help those in need within and outside the town of Moraga as well as to help local schools and beautify the community. More information to follow soon. Questions? Contact mmmcluer@aol.com.



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