




Wednesday
August 06, 2008

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Mail-outs nixed over legal questions

By **SEAN GRIFFIN**
Staff Reporter

The county won't be sending mail-outs to its 72,000 registered voters in an attempt to confirm their active or inactive status, instead election officials will study death records and address changes to do so.

On Monday the Madison County Board of Supervisors rescinded an earlier motion to spend over \$59,000 on the mail-outs, after District 4 Karl Banks questioned the legality of the plan.

Banks has voted twice against the proposed voter mail-out plan and now says it violates the National Voting Rights Act to send cards to voters that suggest purging.

The county had been on track to send mail-outs to each registered voter in the county requiring them to confirm their active status. Those who didn't reply would be investigated and if found to no longer be active (deceased, moved, etc.) they would be purged from the rolls.

Madison County was one of 24 counties in the state listed by the Mississippi Secretary of State's office that have more registered voters than eligible voters.

According to 2006 Census estimates, there are only 63,000 eligible voters in Madison County, but there are more than 72,000 registered voters.

Circuit Clerk Lee Westbrook estimates there are actually only 50,000 to 55,000 legitimate voters on the roll.

Madison County Election Commission Chairman Kakey Chaney appeared before the board Monday to offer more details on the mail-out plan, but was ultimately shot down when Banks questioned its legality.

Banks said the U.S. Justice Department does not want mass mail outs and didn't want to see cards sent to voters that suggested purging.

"It's not legal to send out a card saying you're going to purge a voter," Banks said.

Donnie Caughman, County administrator, presented information regarding the necessity of the mail-outs and possible alternate action.

The information presented resources used by the secretary of state's office that has access to updated address changes for the past 48 months and known deceased residents as compared to the State Health Department's death records. The information covered all 82 counties in the state.

The board discussed using that information to provide an alternative to the mass mail-out.

Chaney questioned the credibility of the death record system and argued that the address change information would only cover four years of resident changes. Those who moved prior to that period would thus not show up in the corrected rolls.

Board of Supervisors President Tim Johnson commented on the need to use the current resources available, even if that included not doing the mass mail-out.

"We need to use all of our resources," he said. "We want to make sure everybody has that ability to vote. We can use the information we have to clean up the rolls."

The board passed a motion to rescind their past decisions to allow the blanket plan and necessary funds.

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