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Harris County Voter Registrar, Leo Vasquez
HOUSTON VOTES & TEXANS TOGETHER PRESS BRIEFING REMARKS
August 24, 2010

First, I would like to strongly and clearly reiterate that the goal of the Harris County Tax Office's Voter Registration Department is to have every eligible citizen in Harris County registered to vote. We welcome and encourage the efforts of all interested citizens and organizations who, within the boundaries of the law, work to help register voters. My office's internal resources are limited, so we cannot accomplish our goal without the help of concerned citizens. The right to vote is sacred for Americans and we must all work together to ensure that right is not ever diminished or disenfranchised.

Unfortunately, it is my duty to share with you today that the integrity of the Voter Roll of Harris County, Texas, appears to be under an organized and systematic attack by the group operating under the name "Houston Votes." -- Houston Votes is the voter registration machine of the "Texans Together Education Fund." -- Houston Votes and Texans Together have effectively emerged as our area's new "ACORN" organization.

Evidence shows that the Houston Votes and Texans Together organization is conspiring in a pattern of falsification of government documents, suborning of perjury and a deliberate effort to over-burden our processing system with thousands of duplicate and incomplete voter registration applications. Even worse, the paid personnel of Houston Votes and Texans Together are alarming citizens with wild stories about the integrity of the voter registration database.

Allow me to briefly explain how our "Volunteer Deputy" program works for voter registration. Any qualified individual may sign up to be a volunteer deputy with our office. There is a simple form to fill out and the volunteer does not even have to be an actual resident of the county. It is strongly encouraged, although not legally required, that a volunteer deputy take a short training class which explains the basic requirements of registering to vote and how to properly complete an application. Our community outreach team performs hundreds of these trainings each year throughout the county. An instruction manual is provided to each volunteer deputy and each volunteer deputy is assigned a specific identification number. At this point, they are authorized to accept

completed voter registration applications on behalf of the Tax Office, which they are required to review for completeness and must, by law, turn in to the Tax Office within five days of receipt. Similar Volunteer Deputy programs exist in all Texas counties.

We initially took Houston Votes and Texans Together at their word when they voiced their desire to register voters in Harris County and wanted to meet to discuss how to fill out a voter registration card. On July 23rd, 2010, my office hosted a meeting with Mr. Fred Lewis, the founder and President of the non-partisan Texans Together Education Fund and lead-organizer of the non-partisan Houston Votes. He brought along one of his lead managers in the Houston Votes operation, Mr. Neil Hudelson. Our office has cooperatively supplied Mr. Lewis' organization with over 50,000 voter registration application forms and has repeatedly offered to send our community outreach team to assist in Houston Votes registration activities.

After observing consistent and repeated patterns of apparently fraudulent, or simply sloppy work, involving voter registration applications being submitted to this governmental office by Houston Votes personnel, we called for a second meeting with Mr. Lewis. On Friday, August 6th, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Hudelson again came downtown and I personally sat at the conference table in my office and reviewed with them the examples of inadequate applications being submitted by Houston Votes. Mr. Lewis agreed to fix the problems.

Unfortunately, the problems have not stopped and my office has been forced to expend countless hours and thousands of dollars of taxpayer money trying to sift through the garbage being dumped into our voter registration system under this organized effort. We have evidence indicating violations of the Texas Election Code, fraudulent and falsified documents being submitted to this governmental office and possible violations of Federal election laws.

I am here today to tell you this activity will not be tolerated in Harris County, Texas, and it will stop here and now. As the official Voter Registrar of Harris County, Texas, I am referring the following patterns of action, along with associated documentation, for investigation and possible prosecution to the Texas Secretary of State and the Harris County District Attorney. Through August 16th, examples include:

- A. 1,597 multiple applications for the same voters. This means at least two or three applications being received for the same person. For some applicants we have received 6 applications for that one individual. This category also includes evidence of fraud in the form of differing addresses or variations on dates of birth in an apparent attempt to issue multiple or separate voter

registration cards to the same individual. These multiple applications also frequently have unmatched signatures.

- B. 1,014 applications for already-registered voters; These applications have no change whatsoever from their existing records and some have apparently inconsistent signatures not matching signatures already on file.
- C. 1,133 applications where, under a warning regarding perjury, the applicant asserted he or she does not have a Texas drivers license, Texas ID card or a social security number. However, our office's research has found a TDL record for the vast majority of these applicants. We are unable to directly look up socials. Contact with a random sample of these applicants has consistently generated reports that the volunteer deputy stated it was "okay" to claim they did not have these standard forms of ID.
- D. 1,030 incomplete applications were submitted where the form was so insufficiently filled out that it will generate an automatic incomplete notice or does not even have an address where we can mail an incomplete notice, let alone a voter registration card.
- E. 325 applications for teenagers too young to register; and,
- F. 25 applications were even submitted for applicants who checked they were not U.S. Citizens.

This amounts to over 5,000 deficient voter registration applications which have inundated our office. Each of these 5,000 have been counted in only one problem category, although they often fit in multiple categories. Based on this performance pattern, and in consideration that they clearly did not fully review their applications for completeness, we will be terminating a number of individuals from the volunteer deputy program.

Through August 16th, we track over 25,000 applications submitted to our office by Houston Votes, however, this has resulted in only 7,193 apparently new voters. The questions now arise as to how many falsified applications made it through undetected and how many individuals might receive multiple voter registration cards.

Further illustrating the problems caused by these submissions can be quantified by the 3,531 notices received back from the Secretary of State's office indicating Houston Votes applications which failed verification of TDL or SSN matching. This means incorrect ID numbers were provided on over 3,500 applications. It seems logical to think that one trying to register to vote would provide accurate information. On the other hand, logic and statistical probability indicate that a volunteer deputy randomly guessing someone else's drivers license number would generate a high failure rate.

I would now like to add two more aspects of this problem, first concerning payment schemes for the Houston Votes personnel and, second, some feedback

we have been receiving from the public. I will wrap up my statement with a plea to the media and the public, followed by a quick walk-thru of the briefing packets and open this up to questions.

A payment per piece set up risks incentivizing workers for focus on quantity with a disregard of quality. If I were funding Houston Votes and Texans Together, I would be quite upset that instead of paying for six new registrations I was instead paying for the same person being registered six times. Or, worse yet, an already-registered voter being reregistered multiple times.

It is important to note, however, that this system of actions cannot be simply attributed to the work of under-paid, \$10 per hour workers standing on a street corner in 100-degree heat. Training of those workers is important, and based on results, Houston Votes is sorely lacking in their training program. In point of fact, these organized actions extend all the way to the top management of Houston Votes. Even Mr. Neil Hudelson, who I previously mentioned personally attended the meetings with Mr. Lewis here at my office, and Mr. Sean Caddle who was brought in by Houston Votes from Colorado and New Jersey to serve as their Project Director, both have turned in at least 180 of the deficient applications.

Volunteer Deputy Neil Hudelson has submitted 70 incomplete apps, 40 pre-existing voters, 7 too young, and 2 non-citizens. This is along with numerous duplicate applications for additional volume.

Volunteer Deputy Sean Caddle has submitted 23 incomplete, 37 pre-existing voters, 2 under age, and numerous duplicate applications.

Clearly, this problem permeates the Houston Votes organization from top to bottom.

We have been receiving calls from concerned citizens reporting encounters with Houston Votes personnel. They are being told stories such as there was a problem with the Tax Office computer system so that everyone needs to reapply, or that you will need a new, plastic card to vote and you will only get one if you reapply, or if you do not reapply you will be removed from the voter roll. All of these statements are completely false.

We are now asking the media and all concerned citizens and other organizations to help us get out the word that our voter roll is stable and protected. If you are already registered to vote and you have not changed your address, there is no need to re-register. However, if you have recently been convinced to fill out a new voter registration application and feel like there may have been a question as to your registration status, please go online to www.hcvoter.net or call our customer service number (713) 368-2200. Please

note that I do not want to create a mass panic with this, so if you have not filled out a recent application, odds are that you do not have to worry about your status. That said, it is always a good idea to go online to check your voter registration at least once a year just like you should check your personal credit report. And remember, if someone approaches you on the street asking you to fill out a voter registration application, be sure to ask to see their volunteer deputy number and be sure they give you a receipt. Being approached by an unauthorized person acting as a volunteer deputy can happen to anyone. The director of our voter department, himself, was approached by a not-deputized individual, clad in a Houston Votes t-shirt, with a clipboard full of blank application forms right across the street from our office. Unbelievable, yet true.

In summary, this should be of utmost concern to all citizens of Harris County and the State of Texas. This is not a Democratic, Republican, Libertarian, Tea Party, Green or Independent issue. It is a good government issue.

In trying to find a positive out of this, it is my sincere hope that this episode will bring more attention to the general public about the importance of voter registration. Hopefully this will also spur legislation on both the Federal and State levels to put more teeth into election fraud penalties. Under the Texas Election Code most of these violations are only misdemeanors, albeit hundreds of misdemeanors at a time. Submitting forged signatures to a governmental entity may be a more serious crime.

This should also not in any way be a statement about the other more established entities claimed by Houston Votes and Texans Together as being associated with them. Organizations such as the League of Women Voters, which operates with unpaid-volunteers, turns in applications with over a 99% success rate. Their work proves that voter registration can be accomplished properly and above board.

Again, if you are concerned about your voter registration status due to having encountered a Houston Votes employee, or if you have a reason to believe your registration has been altered without your authorization please contact the Harris County Tax Office's voter registration department at (713) 368-2200 or online at www.hcvoter.net.

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