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Lawyers urged to volunteer for the upcoming elections

Election supervisors are always looking for poll workers

The Bar's Communications Committee is encouraging Florida Bar members and their firms to get involved in public service during the upcoming elections.

Communications Committee Chair Richard Tanner noted lawyers are particularly well-suited to serve as poll workers.

On voting days, the supervisors of elections are among the largest employers in counties, hiring many workers to conduct the elections.

"These are the people who make democracy real," said Ion Sancho, supervisor of elections in Leon County. "They allow basic access to the voting process. They reconnect citizens with the meaning of self-government."

Tanner noted several counties, including Hillsborough, Orange, and Seminole, offer programs to recruit employees who would be released from work for election days to serve as poll workers. Employees with management/supervisory experience, customer service skills, and experience with computers and office machines are excellent candidates for the programs.

Poll workers ensure voters are in the correct precinct, issue ballots, give voting instructions, verify registrations with laptop computers, operate voting equipment, and maintain orderly flow at polling sites. Poll workers also must complete a training course and are paid for this work on election days.

"By participating in this partnership program, your organization will demonstrate a commitment to civic duty, teamwork, and support of the election process," said Buddy Johnson, supervisor of elections for Hillsborough County.

Some counties provide community organizations and businesses, like law firms, the opportunity to fully staff precincts with their own employees serving as trained poll workers and then designate the regular poll-worker compensation as a donation to a nonprofit organization.

Miami lawyer Lida R. Rodriguez-Taseff notes that the need for "top-notch poll workers who are computer literate and technologically savvy, comfortable giving and understanding complex direction,

and able to communicate with diverse members of the public” is great this year, considering 15 Florida counties will be switching from touch screen voting machines to precinct counted optical scan ballots.

The ABA Council on Racial and Ethnic Justice, ABA Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities, ABA Standing Committee on Election Law, and the Lawyers’ Committee also are seeking the pro bono assistance of lawyers, firms, bar associations, and corporate legal departments to help staff and host the national voter hotline and prepare voter education materials as part of its Election Protection project.

During the 2004 election cycle, ABA groups mobilized 25,000 trained volunteers, including 8,000 legal volunteers, to monitor polling places, educate voters, facilitate a dialogue with local and state election officials, provide legal support to poll monitors, and answer the 1-866-OUR-VOTE national voter services hotline.

Florida has two elections this year — a primary on August 26 and the general election November 4.

For more information about public service and poll worker opportunities, visit <http://www.floridabar.org/election08> for links to all 67 supervisors of election in Florida and the ABA Election Protection project.

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