

VIEWS & VOICES

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OUR VIEW

DON'T DISCOURAGE VOTING

Get word out on polling places

Before resigning last December as Hawaii's chief elections officer, Kevin Cronin devised a plan to close 97 of the state's 242 polling places in this year's elections because of deep budget cuts. Legislators responded by providing the money to prevent such a drastic action. For reasons not made clear, the state is going ahead with Cronin's plan and, at the very least, is obligated to take major efforts to show voters where they can cast their ballots.

Asked why the funding failed to keep all polling places open, Rex Quidilla, spokesman for the Office of Elections, explained: "It is still a management issue. We just don't have the people on board to assist with all of these polling places."

Cronin said the 14 staff members on

board at the elections office 10 months ago could not do the same preparation work that 33 full- and part-time staffers had done in the 2008 elections, but the extra funding should have taken care of that shortage. The Legislature responded with \$400,000 for what Cronin said was needed to fill four vacant positions and hire 15 seasonal staff necessary for election preparations.

Instead, what followed appears to be a classic snafu, and restoring the full number of polling places is too late at this point. The alternative is to use all means necessary to show the voters who have routinely shown up at those 97 voting spots — 76 on Oahu — where they can vote in the September and November elections.

The elections office had earlier mailed yellow cards to registered voters advising them of where they should go on election day, but how many kept the cards and put them in a place they remember is questionable. Also, older voters are least likely to check the Office of Elections website to find their voting places.

Pearl Johnson, the 75-year-old president of the League of Women Voters of Hawaii, who has cast her votes for years at Pauoa Elementary School, told the Star-Advertiser's Dan Nakaso, "I know they sent me one of those yellow cards, but I have no idea where I put it."

The elections office should take some of that \$400,000 it received from legislators — unless the entire amount went down the

drain — to step up efforts to inform voters of their polling places as the Sept. 18 election approaches.

Television and radio public service spots to publicize the Office of Elections' 453-VOTE (8683) hotline as well as to promote mail-in voting would be solid options. Also worth exploring would be to enlist community social hubs such as senior citizen centers to get the word out.

Permanent absentee voting should help reverse the dismal voting turnout that has embarrassed Hawaii in the past.

Even so, public service announcements and a second mailing of the yellow cards near the election date could be crucial in achieving a decent turnout reflecting the choices of all residents wishing to vote.