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- SPORTS
- LIFESTYLES
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- COMMUNITY
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- AUTOS
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Friday, November 7, 2008 **Winston-Salem 68° Fair**

News

Early voting today extended by 4 hours

Additional time granted in response to heavy voter turnout

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Journal Photo by Jennifer Rotenizer

The line for early voting snaked through the first and second floors of the Forsyth County Government Building yesterday.

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By Wesley Young | Journal Reporter
Published: November 1, 2008

Faced with a state order to hold a meeting or face suspension, members of the Forsyth County Board of Elections voted 2-1 yesterday to extend the hours for early voting to 5 p.m. today.



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The early-voting polls were originally scheduled to close statewide at 1 p.m. today. Because of heavy voter turnout, the State Board of Elections on Thursday directed all county elections boards to hold emergency meetings to discuss extending the hours to 5 p.m.

The issue turned into a showdown between the state and the Forsyth elections board when the Forsyth board didn't meet as quickly as the state board wanted.

The Forsyth elections board had scheduled a meeting for noon today, but the state elections board demanded that it meet by noon yesterday or face suspension or removal of its members.

Two of the county's three members of the elections board fumed yesterday at the state's actions but the outcome was never in doubt: The state had said that if even one of the board's three members asked for longer hours the county would have to extend voting. Linda Sutton, one of the two Democrats on the local elections board, was known to be in favor of the longer hours before the meeting began.

Eric Elliott, the Democrat who is the chairman of the board, said that the county shouldn't change the rules in the middle of an election.

But Jerry Jordan, the only Republican on the board, surprised those at the meeting by joining Sutton for a majority vote in favor of the longer hours.

Jordan said that Bill Miller, the chairman of the local GOP, had asked him to vote in favor of the longer hours because it was in the best interests of the party.

But Jordan said he was voting for the hours also because he wanted to preserve the principle of majority rule. He called the notion that one board member can dictate policy as "draconian" and possibly illegal.

Though the local elections board voted to extend hours, it did nothing to deal with another concern that the state board brought up: the local board's failure last week to carry out a directive that voters be given a handout explaining that straight-party voting does not include a vote for the president. The board had voted 2-1 -- with Sutton dissenting -- on a motion that essentially meant that the county would not hand out the fliers.

Elliott argued in both cases that the board should not change the rules of an election once it is under way. Yesterday he said that the early-voting process had gone smoothly, with waits of no more than an hour in most cases, and with the possibility of voting on Election Day still an option for most people.

"We were very, very prepared," Elliott said. "I do not think we need to extend extra voting hours. No one in Forsyth County can say they did not have the time and opportunity to vote."

He suggested that changing the rules during an election could be seen as political, and he explained afterward that people would always wonder why a change was made.

About an hour before yesterday's meeting, members of the Winston-Salem Black Political Action Committee and representatives of other groups gathered in front of the Forsyth County Government Center to ask for longer voting hours on today.

Elliott said that the local board's meeting had been scheduled today to comply with the 48-hour notice that the law requires for special meetings. Although an emergency meeting can be held on short notice, the local board had not considered the state's directive to be an emergency, said Lori Sykes, the assistant county attorney at yesterday's meeting.

Elections officials estimated that it could cost \$10,000 for Forsyth County to keep the

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polls open until 5 p.m. today -- although anyone still in line at 5 p.m. will be able to vote, no matter how long it takes.

"I don't think this is a partisan issue because it affects all voters," Sutton said.

■ Wesley Young can be reached at 727-7369 or at wyoung@wsjournal.com.

Reader Comments

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1

Posted by (BuenaVistaMall) on 11/01/2008 at 08:48 am.

It is so wonderful that the W-S Journal is allowing the Truth to be printed. -----American politics and politicians are a sham. America is a Hell Bound War Profiteer. War is Satanic and a blasphemy to God. There is no hope for a country that blasphemes God. America and it's leaders are an abomination before God and Jesus. Following is a link to a very interesting video about George Bush, his administration, the Iraq War, et al. <http://www.ProsecutionOfBush.com/video.phphttp://BuenaVistaMall.com/Bush.htm> How many people has the United States Government murdered in the last 8 years? Some put the conservative figure of murdered men, women and children at 1 million. The United States Government is a major terrorist organization in the world. God is destroying America. His Wrath has already started with the plagues of violence, crime, disease, fires, smoke, floods, insects, droughts, tornados, hurricanes, greed, lies, stupidity, finances, poverty and all other tragic events against our country. True Christianity is Nonviolent. <http://BuenaVistaMall.com>

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Posted by (obie) on 11/01/2008 at 10:38 am.

Remember, if you or someone you know is not registered to vote, today is the last day to register and vote in person. Unregistered voters will not be able to register on Tuesday. Also, the lines will likely be shorter today. Whatever your political leanings, there are several very close races in North Carolina and Forsyth County this year. Your vote CAN make a difference. If you vote, you'll feel like you did your part for the candidates you support. If not, you're giving up the most precious right Americans have.

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